

VOICES *of Mexico*

Obama and Mexico

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Silvia Núñez, Leonardo Curzio,
Paz Consuelo Márquez-Padilla
And Elaine Levine

The Global Recession

Articles by Monica Gambrill
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Public Security and Violence in Mexico

Articles by Luis González
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Elections: The Parties And the Media Square Off

Lorenzo Córdova

From Ancient Cities to Papadzules Visiting Mayan Culture

The Enigmatic Art Of Julio Galán

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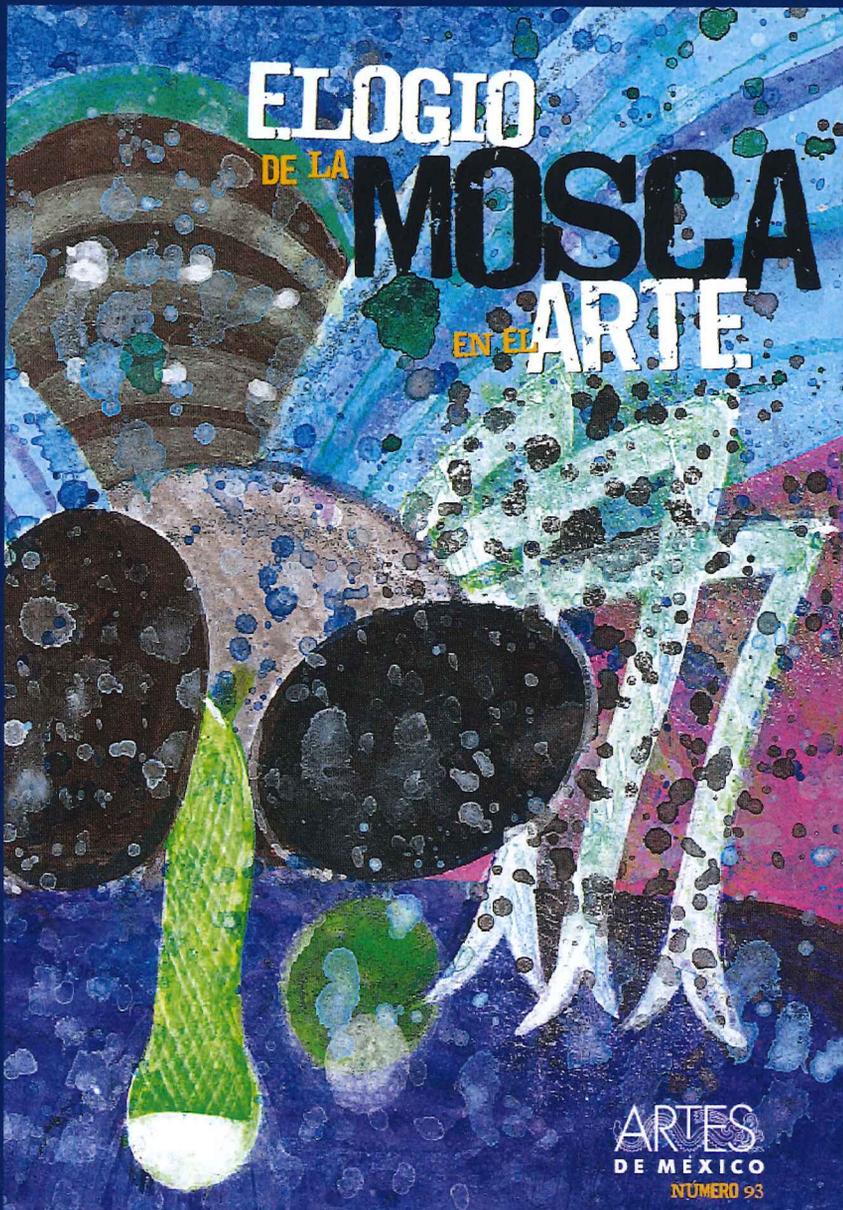
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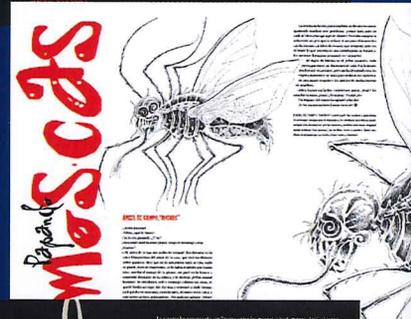
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ESTE DIMINUTO SER TORNASOLADO SE VISTE CON SUS MEJORES GALAS PARA LOS LECTORES Y LES DEMUESTRA QUE TIENE UN IMPORTANTE LUGAR EN EL ARTE Y LA LITERATURA.

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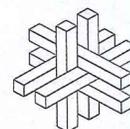
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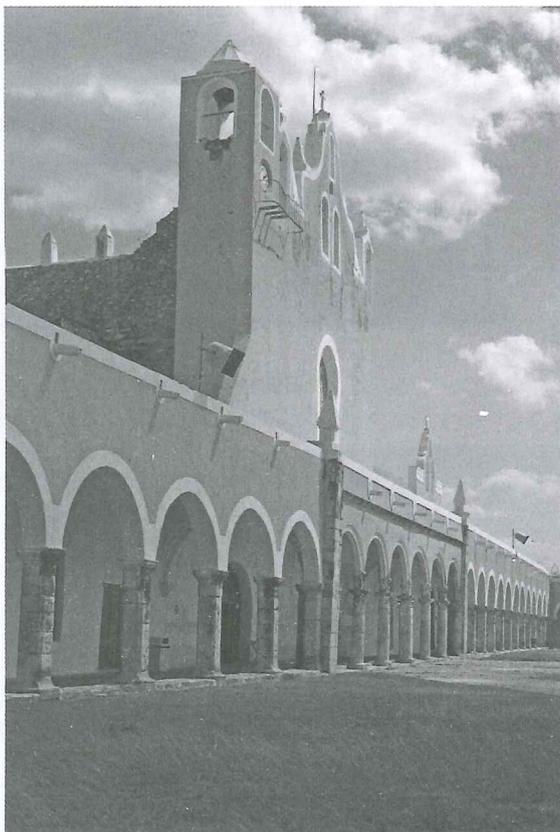
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Elsie Montiel

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Frederick Catherwood, "Archway, Governor's House, Uxmal," 53.5 cm x 36 cm, 1844. Lithograph taken from *Litografía y grabado en el México del XIX*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Telmex, 1993), p. 194.

Contents

Editorial

- 4 Our Voice

Politics

- 7 The 2009 Elections
Perspectives and Challenges
Lorenzo Córdova Vianello
- 11 Security without Rights, or
What Went Wrong with the National
Security Accord?
Luis González Placencia
- 15 Drug-Trafficking-Related Violence in Mexico
Organization and Expansion
José Arturo Yáñez Romero

Economy

- 21 The Bail-Out and the Causes
Of the Financial Crisis
Monica Gambrell
- 25 The Impact of the Global Crisis in Mexico
For Whom Does the Bell Toll?
Enrique Pino Hidalgo

Art and Culture

- 33 Puuc Style
Mayan Cities Trimmed in Stone
Adriana Velázquez Morlet
- 45 Notes on Izamal
City of Three Cultures
Luis Millet Cámara
- 51 Julio Galán
Painting as Diary
Isabel Morales Quezada

North American Issues

- 57 Obama and Mexico,
Security Forever! Why Not?
José Luis Valdés-Ugalde

60 Rethinking President Obama's
Victory and Challenges
Silvia Núñez García

63 Obama and Mexico
New Paths of Hope
Leonardo Curzio

66 The Birth of the Virtual Political Community
And the Victory of Barack Obama
Paz Consuelo Márquez-Padilla

71 President Obama
And Latinos in the U.S.
Elaine Levine

Special Section
Mexico and the World

75 Beyond Politics:
Cultural Connections among Mexico,
Romania and Poland
José Luis Valdés-Ugalde
Camelia Tigau

79 A Discreet Look at
Africa from Mexico
Louis Valentin Mballa

82 Mexico and India: Slowly Approaching
Each Other from Afar
Bernadette Vega

86 Lessons for Mexico: Chile and Brazil's
Experience with China
María José Calderón Matute

The Splendor of Mexico

89 A Glimpse of Ek' Balam
Leticia Vargas de la Peña
Víctor R. Castillo Borges

94 Dzibilchaltún
A Mayan Regional Center
Rubén Maldonado Cárdenas

99 Yucatán's *Green Gold*
Elsie Montiel

104 The Ingredients in Yucatán Cuisine
Elsie Montiel and Isabel Morales

Museums

107 The Cantón Palace
Yucatán's Regional Anthropology Museum
Blanca M. González Rodríguez

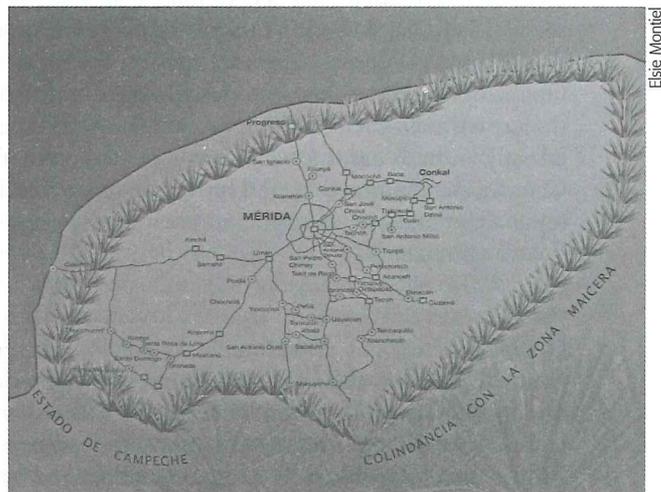
In Memoriam

113 Don Ernesto de la Torre Villar
Professor Emeritus
Ana Carolina Ibarra

Reviews

116 *La americanización de la modernidad*
Bolívar Echeverría, compiler
Julio Roldán

118 *Aquella Luz, la que estremece/*
The Light That Makes Us Tremble,
Nela Rio (Hugh Hazelton, trans.)
Claire Joysmith



Map of the henequen haciendas and the territory they covered.

OUR VOICE

Is North America still profoundly asymmetrical? Is there any intention to upgrade the trilateral association to a higher level? Does Mexico have the same possibilities as Canada of thinking about a serious relationship with the United States? To what extent is the strengthening/formalization of Mexican-Canadian relations desirable or even feasible? Are the three countries able to pursue a truly trilateral relationship that can overcome the burdens that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has established with the bilateralization of the trilateral arrangement?

The meetings between Obama and Calderon and Obama and Harper contrasted enormously. Calderón continued his crusade on the offensive; in fact, reading between the lines, he could even be termed aggressive when demanding immediate answers from Washington without a rational script as a basis. Conversely, during the second meeting, Harper talked to Obama as Americans do, independently of their personal opinions; the Canadian prime minister talked to Obama in the way Americans like the most to be approached by their neighbors and allies: proactively with a common agenda.

It should be recognized that the meeting between Calderon and Obama was a huge diplomatic achievement thanks to Tlatelolco's very good standing and work with Obama's team: meeting with the Mexican president days before the inauguration looked like the eagerly awaited opportunity to launch what could have been a fresh start for bilateral relations, and —why not?— a fresh start for a trilateral relationship that after 15 years of NAFTA has not quite come off. Apart from a crowded and almost impossible agenda, no big headlines were produced as a result. But analyzing it in retrospect, after the Obama-Harper meet, we are left with a nasty taste in our mouths because there are no signs of a change to the trilateral *status quo*. Not even in the bilateral relationship with the U.S. Wasn't Bush the problem? Weren't U.S. antiterrorist excesses the obstacle? Is the problem rooted in Mexico's limitations or the uncomfortable perception they have in the U.S. of our chaotic political process?

The conservative Canadian was able to do what the conservative Mexican could not. Harper got a public reassurance from Obama that the U.S. would not back away from its international treaty obligations. The shadows of protectionism faded slightly, and even though the "Buy American" language is still worrying the Canadian public, Obama and Harper succeeded in painting a positive picture of the bilateral relationship. That image was reinforced by the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary group that made a week-long visit to the U.S. capital to lobby for the removal of "Buy American" provisions from economic stimulus packages —now, that is proactive! The world's largest trading partners would not risk their privileged relationship. In addition, Canada suddenly became Obama's natural partner in the renewed U.S. approach to multilateral cooperation because it has the experience, the conditions and the prestige to do so. The same happened in other areas like clean energy, economic recovery and, of course, Afghanistan.

In turn, Calderón stressed U.S. responsibility regarding drug trafficking while Harper firmly told Obama that in pursuing stimulus packages only "to benefit ourselves, or to benefit ourselves, worse, at the expense of others, we will deepen the world recession, not solve it." Both articulated their concerns directly, in both cases Obama was receptive and emphatic. So, when will Mexico be able to transcend Canada, the asymmetries and history, in order to achieve its place in North America? Are we destined to remain the underdeveloped hindrance that is unprepared to embrace greater responsibilities?

* * *

Obama's victory has undoubtedly signaled a rebirth of hope in the world for achieving more just international relations and world economic development, or at least for dealing with the current severe economic recession with greater success. This would be based on more equitable, rational ideas about international geo-politics and the United States' mission than those of his predecessor. There is also hope for Mexico that we will finally be better understood by Washington *vis-à-vis* some long-term bilateral problems like the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking, border security or migratory issues. There are many indications that President Obama and his flamboyant secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, will

have a different attitude about bilateral relations, that they will not only be more understanding but also more pro-active, willing to seek and work on joint solutions and more prepared to accept their part of the responsibility for our common problems.

In this issue, several Mexican specialists on the United States reflect about Barack Obama's victory and its consequences for Mexico. In an article I contribute myself, I put on the table just how urgent it is for both governments to deal decisively with the issue of insecurity in Mexico since a failed state south of the U.S. border, incapable of controlling organized crime, would undoubtedly be a high risk for regional security and that of the United States itself. Silvia Núñez introduces the theme of the important transformation that Obama's victory means, not only in political but also in social and even cultural terms. At the same time, however, she questions whether the U.S. electorate was politically correct when, though electing an Afro-American for the first time, it also opted for a male candidate. Leonardo Curzio contributes a valuable analysis about what he considers the Obama-Clinton duo's priorities will be in relation to Mexico. He points to several areas where opportunities exist to make bilateral relations closer and advance toward a solution of the main problems affecting both nations, as is shown, says the author, by the new administration's willingness to accept its co-responsibility for issues like drug trafficking. Paz Consuelo Márquez-Padilla explains how the use of new technologies, particularly the Internet, was perhaps the main political communications factor in the Democratic win, reflecting not only a generational change, but also a very hopeful change in vision for the future of North America. Finally, Elaine Levine describes the role of Latinos in Obama's victory, delving more deeply into the expectations the Hispanic population in the United States may have about the new administration and naturally taking into account the difficult economic situation that makes it hard to imagine short-term advances in immigration policy.

Two issues concern both governments the most, but perhaps in a different order of importance. While for Obama, the first issue will be finding a way out of the economic crisis, Calderón urgently needs to deal at least somewhat effectively with organized crime and to reduce the alarming levels of public insecurity. In this issue, we look at both these topics in our "Economy" and "Politics" sections. In the former, Monica Gambrell contributes an article that clearly explains the current crisis's causes and very precisely puts forward what the governments' strategies will be—particularly those of the U.S. government—to deal with it. Obama's recent measures to save the banking system by purchasing the so-called toxic assets seem to bear out her analysis. In the same section, we publish a contribution by economist Enrique Pino, who sees in this crisis signs of the end of Western financial capitalism as we know it, showing how Mexico's extreme dependence on the U.S. economy will mean that our country will be one of the hardest hit.

The rapid deterioration of Mexican public security, the unprecedented challenge of organized crime and the drug cartels to governmental institutions and power, government strategies to fight this situation and civil society's response are all dealt with in our "Politics" section. First off, Luis González Placencia argues that the Mexican federal and state government's strategy of conceiving the solution as a "war against drug trafficking" not only prevents broadening out the vision to one that would include structural solutions, but also forces them into a terrain where they have very few possibilities for success. Arturo Yáñez looks at the government's ineffective measures centered on spectacular strikes, pursuing the big drug kingpins and the best known cartels, but neglecting the undeniable phenomenon of the proliferation of small and medium-sized criminal organizations, therefore allowing them to operate with greater impunity. There is no doubt that these two pressing problems (insecurity and the crisis) will have an impact on the results of the coming elections in Mexico, in which all the seats in the federal Chamber of Deputies will change hands. The "Politics" section also includes an article by Lorenzo Córdova, who reflects on the recent electoral reforms, particularly the total control given to the Federal Electoral Institute over political party broadcast time slots, which the big media will no longer be able to charge for. This, of course, awakened the fury of the country's big media consortia, not only because of the loss of revenue involved, but above all because of the real loss of political power it means.

Globalization does not only imply sharing crises. It also presupposes that national states will increasingly try to insert themselves into international relations networks, not only to diversify trade, but also to build alliances to foster the exchange of knowledge and technologies and encourage mutual understanding. This is all indispensable in the new information societies that will be forged in the new millennium. This is why we have included in this issue a special section that we have called "Mexico and the World" to briefly assess for the first time our country's recent cultural diplomacy. Camelia Tigau and I present a review of

the academic exchange the UNAM's Center for Research on North America has established with similar institutions of higher education in Poland and Romania in the framework of the history of Mexico's cultural relations with those two nations. Louis Valentín Mballa contributes a very interesting article about Mexico's relations with the many countries of Africa, showing how establishing closer ties has been relegated because of official priorities. Even so, progress has been made, particularly in the cultural field, such as our country's declaring an official Africa Week. Bernadette Vega deals with relations with India, which Mexico has recently been able to cultivate given both countries' membership in the G-5, a group that includes the main emerging economies. This relationship is based precisely on the quest for opportunities for exchange in the field of know-how, a terrain in which India is a paradigm of development at the dawn of this century. Finally, María José Calderón examines relations with China, the giant that in many ways has imposed its development and international trade agendas in recent years. The author compares the experiences of Brazil and Chile with China: both countries have profited from that relationship, in contrast with Mexico, which for many years has resisted seeking closer ties with the Chinese. This, Calderón argues, is because of prejudice and the resentment for China's having taken its place as the world's foremost exporter to the U.S. market despite Mexico's being its neighbor and having a free trade agreement with it.

* * *

Julio Galán is a painter who, unlike any other, combines his own internal world with the culture surrounding him. "Intimate" and "enigmatic" are probably the words that best define his work, full of surprises and symbols. We include an article by Isabel Morales about this remarkable Mexican painter in our "Art and Culture" section.

The amazing Mayan culture is undoubtedly also enigmatic. In this issue, we dedicate a significant part of our cultural sections to it. The journey starts in the Puuc region, land of very important cities like Kabá, Sayil, Labná and the spectacular Uxmal; Adriana Velasquez writes about their imposing architecture and historic importance. Leticia Vargas and Víctor Castillo lead us into the mysteries of Ek' Balam, an archaeological site famous for its majestic palace, dubbed the Acropolis, and important glyphs, which have helped advance our knowledge about the Mayan cultures thanks to their extraordinary state of preservation. The Mayan city of Dzibilchátún, as described by Rubén Maldonado, is also noteworthy for the many carved stelae found in its magnificent structures like the Temple of the Seven Dolls.

Yucatán's cultural wealth is not limited to the legacy of the ancient Mayas. What has come down to us from the colonial era is also well worth disseminating. For that reason, we include an article by Luis Millet about the magical city of Izamal, where, in addition to more vestiges of the ancient Mayan civilization, we find, built on top of them, what is probably one of the region's largest and most beautiful Catholic convents, perhaps because the Spaniards wanted to demonstrate their own ability to build monumental constructions. The nineteenth century is represented by Elsie Montiel's article about what came to be called Yucatán's "green gold," henequen. This fiber was the driving force behind the rope, twine and textile industry, the basis of the region's rapid development in the late nineteenth century, as shown by the many haciendas from that time, the source of the wealth that financed the capital city's imposing architecture. Precisely one of the most beautiful buildings from that time on Montejo Boulevard, the main avenue of Yucatán's capital, Mérida, is the Cantón Palace, today home to the Yucatán Regional Anthropology Museum, whose director, Blanca González, writes about it in our "Museum" section. And we could not leave out the splendid Yucatán cuisine, so we include an article that gives our readers a glimpse of its main ingredients.

We close this issue with an homage to one of the most prolific historians Mexican culture has ever produced, also a highly respected teacher of several generations of historians at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Historian Ana Carolina Ibarra has contributed a moving testimonial to the irreplaceable Ernesto de la Torre Villar.

José Luis Valdés-Ugalde

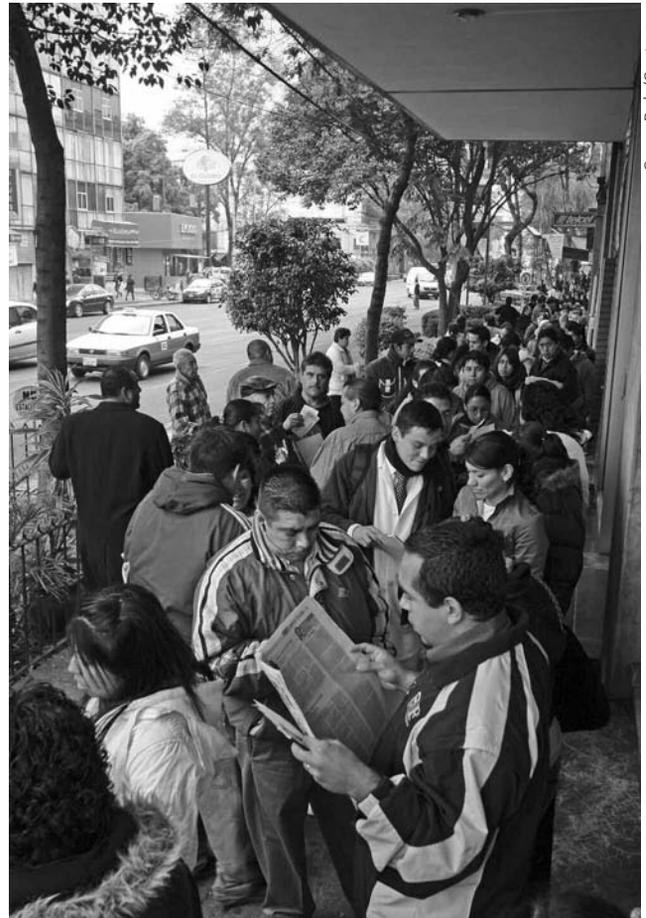
The 2009 Elections Perspectives and Challenges

Lorenzo Córdova Vianello*

FOR A START, WHAT'S AT STAKE

In this year's midterm elections, federally, only the Chamber of Deputies will be replaced. However, the votes will be very important, at least in the following ways: a) the new norms established by the 2007-2008 electoral reform will be put to the test; b) eleven states will be holding local elections at the same time as the federal elections, in three cases to elect new governors: Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí and Sonora; c) conditions surrounding these elections are extremely complex, both regarding the economy —we are in the midst of a full-blown world crisis— and public safety —we are experiencing unprecedented violence including the omnipresence of organized crime nationwide.

In this sense, the 2009 elections bring with them numerous implicit variables that make them both very delicate and crucial, and a terrain in which the country's short- and medium-term future will play out. This is the case, first of all, because the elections' successful organization and imple-



People in line to get their voter's IDs.

mentation depends on the 2007-2008 electoral reform arriving at safe harbor. This reform was a significant government effort to improve conditions for competition and the democracy of our electoral system by introducing a completely new model of political communication.¹

In the second place, they are crucial because, the results will probably largely redefine the existing balances on the country's political map, both nationally and locally.

In the third place, these midterm elections will take the temperature of the public's evaluation of the performance of one-third of state governments and the federal administration. They are a kind of cut-off point for a look back.

* Researcher at the UNAM Center for Legal Research.

In the fourth place, they are critical because probably the big problems plaguing the country will be planks of the party platforms, and they will allow the citizenry to express its opinion about the different proposals and solutions offered during the campaigns.

Finally, because given the climate of violence reigning in the country, participation in the elections indicates a preference for peaceful, democratic forms of resolving our ideological differences. In this sense, massive voter participation like we saw in 1994 is devoutly to be wished; those elections, with their clear differences, were also characterized by a climate of violence.

THE REFORM PUT TO THE TEST

Elections are the times when the institutions and rules designed to organize and govern them are put to the test; this is just as obvious as it is indisputable. The efficacy of what is designed at a legislator's desk has to be validated in its practical application. This is even more evident when, as is the case of this year's elections, many new rules are being applied that were introduced by the 2007-2008 reform.

However, the very obviousness of this statement brings to the fore the great challenge involved in the 2009 elections.

Some of the most important new provisions introduced by the reform that will be applied for the first time in this year's elections, making them an "acid test," are: the model for regulating political communication on radio and television, centering on the ban on purchasing publicity spots and the parties' use of government slots for their campaign ads; the new monitoring procedures and a reformed body to apply them; the Federal Electoral Institute's ability to implement expeditious administrative procedures to stop and sanction illicit actions by parties and candidates (including its controversial attribute of controlling negative publicity); the revised formula for public campaign funding; the regulation, control and monitoring of candidate selection inside the political parties; the redesigned structure and jurisdiction of the Electoral Tribunal.

I would emphasize that this is nothing new. At the time, the 1979, 1988, 1991, 1994 and 1997 elections were also tests of the rules introduced by the reforms that preceded them.² However, there is one big difference: this time, the opponents to these new rules are numerous and very powerful. The previous reforms never faced this kind of an adverse environment.



The 2007 constitutional reform gave the IFE yet another particularly onerous, but equally necessary, task: overseeing public radio and television time slots the parties have the right to.

Today, several large business groups and media consortia, whose interests were gravely affected by the reform, have openly stated their opposition to the new rules. They have filed several requests for injunctions against the constitutional and legislative changes; they operate and lobby against them; they manipulate information to undercut the meaning and scope of the reform; and they constantly challenge electoral authorities, disregarding their rulings and not fulfilling their own obligations. In short: they are betting on its failure.

The changes introduced in 2007 and 2008 were not only a necessary adjustment of electoral norms to the demands of the new, changing political reality—the vacuums, inconsistencies and undesired effects of the norms introduced a decade before, in 1996, had begun to be dangerously problematic—and an attempt to resolve the problems arising from the controversial 2006 presidential election.³ They were also a vindication of state sovereignty *vis-à-vis* the blackmail and conditions the big radio and television licensees were imposing on the political process.⁴ The reaction of a large part of the media licensees and their defenders to the reform and the new model of political communication shows just how much their interests have been affected by the constitutional changes of late 2007.⁵

The lessons of this year's elections will have to be reflected on and evaluated to make the necessary adjustments to legislation for future electoral processes—the 2012 elections will in many ways be more complex than this midterm election. But it is a matter for concern that this necessary revision of the norms could be used as a pretext to try to reverse the recently introduced communications model.

These are not merely the warnings of soothsayers. There is a growing part of the political class—the same part that has been reluctant to concretize the pending aspects of the legislation left over from the reform, among them the new Law of the Right to Reply—that is willing to try to smooth over the animosities sparked among broadcast media owners caused by the reform's passage, and has said straight out that the reform's content should be revised.



Today, several large business groups and media consortia, whose interests were gravely affected by the reform, have openly stated their opposition to the new electoral rules.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE

Undoubtedly the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) is the most finely honed and most accomplished public body of the entire transition to democracy in Mexico. Born in 1990, it marked a watershed in institutional design as the country's first autonomous, constitutionally established body—even though its president would be the serving minister of the interior until 1996—that was given the responsibility of organizing Mexico's elections.⁶

The idea of a government body independent of the administration that would take charge of organizing elections, an old demand of the opposition, could no longer be postponed if there was to be confidence and certainty surrounding the elections as the legitimate, democratic way of acceding to power after the ominous 1988 experience.

The IFE was thus born with a clear end: to make the elections transparent so the votes could be counted effectively. For that, clear norms, effective controls and the gradual process of putting individual citizens, and therefore the public, in charge of the electoral body all became crucial—the term “citizenization” was coined, not, as many erroneously think, to mean that the IFE decision-makers are representatives of the citizenry, but simply that they are not prisoners of the political parties and their partisan interests.

That original aim was obviously successful. Since 1994, practically no one has questioned the way federal elections have been organized.⁷

However, the substantial increase in public funding of political parties and the resulting need to monitor their finances that was included in the 1996 reform created a new set of demands on the IFE as the monitoring body. Since that time, in addition to having to organize trustworthy elections, it has had to face the challenge of auditing political parties' books and sanctioning them for any irregularities found. This was no simple task, due to their natural complexity and the many legal—and political—obstacles the IFE had to deal with. However, it successfully fulfilled its task, as is shown emblematically in the famous “Pemexgate” and “Friends of Fox” cases.⁸

As with the task it was founded to perform, its strict application of the law, without excess or faltering, has allowed the IFE to fulfill in general the complex function of monitoring party income and expenditures.

As if that were not enough, the 2007 constitutional reform gave the IFE yet another particularly onerous, but equally necessary, task, given the disruptive effect of the broadcast media during the 2006 elections. It is a task that would be very difficult to carry out: overseeing the public radio and television time slots the parties have the right to use, as well as to monitor compliance of the new norms and, if necessary, to sanction violations by parties, candidates, public officials, broadcast licensees and private citizens.⁹

The reform set the IFE, once again, a historic challenge without relieving it of the responsibilities it had already been fulfilling. Becoming the authority in charge of administering government broadcasting time slots during election processes and being responsible for monitoring compliance with the new radio and television broadcasting norms, as well as for imposing sanctions in the case of non-compliance, is added on to its mandate of organizing and carrying out the election processes and monitoring party spending and income. Its ability to fulfill this new charge will depend on whether the recipe that was successful in the past continues to be its maxim for the future: being neither rash nor fearful in the application of the law and sanctioning without excess or defect any transgression against it.

TO CONCLUDE

As we said, the 2009 elections bring with them numerous challenges. On the one hand, the political, social and economic context is complicated and even adverse; on the other hand, the complexities of implementing the renovated electoral system that came out of the last reform are acute. In this sense, for the democratic logic to prevail at the end of the day, many actors are involved, and a single one or even a few of them cannot be held responsible exclusively. The electoral authorities must face the challenges of successfully applying the new norms and contain the natural tendency toward confrontation that comes with electoral competition between parties and their candidates. The parties, for their part, must be up to the task and not turn the election into an arena for mud-slinging and affronts that will irremediably electrify the political climate. Radio and televi-

sion broadcasters must understand that the rules of the game have changed, and that, while those rules are perfectible and can be changed in the future, for the time being, they are what they are, and they will have to be followed. We citizens have the responsibility of following what happens in the electoral arena and creating a context that demands that the authorities, parties and media be up to the task the times set for them. It is the responsibility of all of us to contribute to this task. A great deal is at stake for us in this rather “unattractive midterm election”: nothing more or less than the viability of our democratic system as the peaceful way to resolve our conflicts and differences. Failure would open the door to the powers —both legal and illegal— that dangerously threaten our living together in society. ■■■

NOTES

- ¹ There are very few systematic studies of the 2007-2008 electoral reform. The most complete work on the topic is the collection of essays in Lorenzo Córdova Viannello and Pedro Salazar Ugarte, *Reforma electoral 2007. Hacia un nuevo modelo* (Mexico City: Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación, 2008).
- ² For a historical, systematic review of the various electoral reforms and their impact on the transition to democracy, see Ricardo Becerra, Pedro Salazar and José Woldenberg, *La mecánica del cambio político en México. Elecciones, partidos y reformas* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 2005).
- ³ An analysis of the 2006 elections from different perspectives can be found in Jacqueline Peschard, comp., *2 de julio. Reflexiones y alternativas* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2007).
- ⁴ About the growing power of Mexico’s media consortia, see Raúl Trejo Delarbre, *Mediocracia sin mediaciones. Prensa, televisión y elecciones* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 2001); and Raúl Trejo Delarbre, *Poderes salviajes: mediocracia sin contrapesos* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 2005).
- ⁵ See Pedro Salazar, “La reforma constitucional: una apuesta exitosa,” Lorenzo Córdova Vianello and Pedro Salazar Ugarte, op. cit.
- ⁶ About the IFE’s characteristics and the expectations it sparked when it was created, see Arturo Núñez, *La reforma electoral de 1989-1990* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994).
- ⁷ Ricardo Becerra, Pedro Salazar and José Woldenberg, op. cit., pp. 354 on.
- ⁸ These cases are reconstructed in Lorenzo Córdova and Ciro Murayama, *Elecciones, dinero y corrupción. Pemexgate y Amigos de Fox* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 2006).
- ⁹ In late January 2009, as the primaries, now explicitly regulated by electoral legislation, started getting underway, the country’s biggest television broadcasters failed to live up to their obligation to broadcast the political party spots the IFE had sent them. It was an open challenge by the television consortia to the new norms and the IFE’s authority. This sparked a series of administrative procedures against them.

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Security without Rights, or What Went Wrong with the National Security Accord?

Luis González Placencia*



Isabel Miranda de Wallace and María Elena Morera, two of the main leaders of the civic movement against crime in Mexico.

1

Mexico will remember 2008 as the most violent year of recent history. The second half of the year was particularly a showcase for situations that questioned the very capacity of the Mexican state to deal with crime and offer protection to its citizens. Emblematic cases were just the tip of the iceberg of the inefficiency, disorientation and even absence of public policies for dealing with insecurity.

In June of last year, a police operation designed for media impact at the News Divine disco ended the life of nine teenagers and three police officers, demonstrating that for the

Mexico City government, the fight against crime means repression, harassment and objectification of those it considers a security risk.¹ Only a month and a half later, the death of the son of an important businessman at the hands of his kidnapers made it clear just how blurry the dividing line is between security institutions and criminals and how easy it is for police at any level to be involved in criminal activities.² Last December, the death of the daughter of Nelson Vargas, a well-known athlete and former head of the National Sports Commission (Conade), was confirmed after an investigation, riddled with deficiencies, that had begun a year before when she was kidnapped by people working for her family. After agreeing to keep silent about this fact on the authorities' urging, in November, before the young woman's death was confirmed, her parents announced that they had already pointed the finger at the alleged kidnapers and that, despite this, the Attorney

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Successful experiences
in fighting insecurity in the world take decades,
with intermediate goals that must include
viable indicators for their evaluation.

General's Office had done nothing to detain them.³ During the September 15 Independence Day celebrations, in Morelia, Michoacán's central Melchor Ocampo Plaza, a group of suspects allegedly involved with the Gulf of Mexico drug cartel threw two grenades into the crowd, killing eight and injuring dozens. This was the first violent act perpetrated by organized crime against the civilian population.⁴

As if all this were not enough, from July to December 2008, 10 public officials with posts in federal security institutions, among them, the head of and an assistant general director of the Attorney General's Office's Anti-Organized Crime Unit (SIEDO) and the former head of the Federal Preventive Police (PFP), were arrested and charged with collaborating with drug traffickers. By the end of the year, clashes among the cartels had taken a toll of 5,376 persons executed, almost 150 percent more than in 2007, and violence continued to spread to almost every state in the country.⁵

2

In reaction to this situation, particularly given the visibility of the kidnappings victimizing nationally known figures, on August 30, 2008, a large number of people took to the streets to demonstrate their concern about the prevailing insecurity in the country. The result of that peaceful demonstration was an accord proposed to the nation committing federal, state and municipal governments, as well as the business community, the clergy, the media and civil society to 75 concrete actions.⁶ The authorities were given 100 days, until November 29, to report back on the results. In fact, frequently, that deadline was mixed up with the demand by a well-known businessman, the father of a kidnap victim murdered in early summer, in a speech before public security authorities, that they resign if they could not successfully carry out their work. "If you can't do it, resign," became the slogan of the citizens' movement for public safety.

The deadline came and went with very few reported results. In the midst of a highly publicized clash between the

Attorney General and the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of the Interior admitted that there was nothing to celebrate and that as long as there were dishonest police and public prosecutors, it would be impossible to talk about achievements in security issues. According to the figures announced at the meeting of the National Public Security Council, over those 100 days, kidnapping complaints dropped from 3.04 to 2.4 a day and 184 kidnap victims had been rescued and 795 kidnappers arrested; plus, in the previous two years, security spending had increased 85 percent.⁷ The conclusion from several different angles is that the results hoped for with such expectation were widely questioned.

What went wrong? The contents of the accord? The 100-day deadline? The government strategy and that of other sectors? Or, did organized crime simply win the war?

3

In my opinion, the answer to all these questions is a resounding yes. The deadline failed. The contents of the accord failed. The strategy has failed and, in effect, organized crime has the advantage in the war the government has launched against it.

Despite its legitimate origins, the National Security Accord suffers from problems that should be underscored. On the one hand, it is a series of actions that, despite their individually being interesting, lack the content that would make them not only necessary, but also valid and feasible. The federal branches of government and local and municipal governments are asked to commit themselves to actions that today must be part of their obligations: accountability, transparency, evaluation and policy correction. But this happens in the absence of an overall vision that points to precise ways that these actions can be taken: what kind of security institutions are compatible with democracy; what profiles are required for public servants who would carry out the actions; how should security policies be made compatible with human rights, among other things.

For their part, the other sectors of society are required, in short, to promote respect for the law. But, here, a guiding discourse that would lead to a common understanding of what should be understood as *legality* is also absent. And the problem is that the possibilities range from simple respect for the law, usually proposed in *law-and-order* models, which turn anyone simply suspected of not respecting it

into an enemy of society, all the way to a position that assumes social co-responsibility for crime, its comprehension and dealing with its root causes.

There is also the absence of a program. In addition to the need for profound thinking about the matter of criminality, the accord lacks a program for each of the actions that make it up. And this is where the question of the 100 days becomes relevant. One hundred days is a matter of rhetoric. No successful reform can be achieved in the short term, or even the medium term. Although certain actions do need to be taken immediately, the results take longer to become visible. Successful experiences in fighting insecurity in the world take decades, with intermediate goals that must include viable indicators for their evaluation and eventual correction. Today's insecurity and criminal activities are phenomena that have come together gradually, over a period of years at the center of processes involving the market and the broadcast media. Thus, disarticulating them, or at least keeping them under control, also requires years. The accord, then, is the equivalent of products that promise dramatic weight-loss in a matter of days: if they work, the secondary effects can be fatal; if they do not work, they are a useless investment, fostering frustration and even, as seems to be the case, producing severe relapses.

All this is connected to the third issue: the strategy. Or perhaps we should say the lack of a strategy. While it is true that there have been achievements in the realm of capturing important members of the criminal organizations—in fact, in 2008, seven people allegedly involved at the highest levels of drug trafficking were arrested, among them Alfredo Beltrán Leyva, Jesús “El Mayo” Zambada and Eduardo Arellano Félix—the federal government's inability to stop the violence is explained by its reticence to accept the fact that the problem of organized crime has little to do with the law and a great deal more to do with the market. Just as has been happening over the last 30 years, the capture of drug kingpins has not lessened drug trafficking, but only spurred the reshuffling of the cartels and the functioning of the drug trade.⁸ The federal government's strategy has therefore had no impact on the illicit drug market; what it has done is to generate important human rights violations. It is not by chance that the Mexican army and the Attorney General's Office continue to be the bodies most complaints are brought against before the National Human Rights Commission for abuses committed in the name of the fight against drug trafficking.



As has been happening over the last 30 years, the capture of drug kingpins has not lessened drug trafficking, but only spurred the reshuffling of the cartels.

As long as civil society, the business community, the clergy and the media's myopia about criminal activity and organized crime is not overcome, they are condemned to foster the violence they so fear. The phenomenon of criminal activity is not alien to social stratification or discrimination, class prejudice and economic, political and class opportunism. Society (the business community, the clergy, the media and social relations in general) shares a measure of co-responsibility for crime. We tend to think that locking people up is the best answer to insecurity, without thinking about how much of that insecurity has a circumstantial component, just like what happens in the sphere of work, education, health and survival in general, something which tens of millions of people are submerged in.

Finally, it must be recognized that organized crime has a noteworthy advantage over the state. The same day that the results of the 100 days were announced, 33 people were executed at different points throughout the country. What this means is that crime always takes advantage; that is its reason for being. This is why the state cannot—and should not—stoop to the same level. The logic of the war on crime has generated responses that, despite being understandable, nevertheless are primitive, intuitive, and, in most cases, even counterproductive. By turning crime policy into a *fight against crime*, the strategy limits itself to a test of strength with the criminals: reducing penal and procedural guarantees, increasing sentences, giving more powers to the police and investigative prosecutors, creating states of emergency in jails and militarization. These policies' obvious failure has increased the fear of crime and society's indignation over impunity, which in turn increase severity and vindictive feelings in society; calls from society and political parties for life sentences and the death penalty; indifference and sometimes support for mistreatment and torture of alleged criminals; and, in extreme cases, the exercise of justice at the hands of individuals. If we add to this the human rights violations during some police operations in the form of lack of due process and violence as the order of the day in jails—which, by the way, have become a job pool for organized crime—what



The logic of the war on crime has generated responses that, despite being understandable, nevertheless are primitive, intuitive, and, in most cases, even counterproductive.

clearly emerges is that today's crime policy not only does not reduce violence, but that it is even the source of new legal, institutional, structural, *de facto* violence added to that which already exists.

4

With this panorama, the priority for efficient public policy is undoubtedly the necessary reduction of levels of violence. Society and the state must join together in actions that are mutually demanding and committed to achieving this end. This is the point where security converges with democracy and the culture of rights. Reducing violence serves the objective of preserving fundamental rights, which is none other than the very objective of the constitutional rule of law.

In accordance with this view of things, the commitment implies both the state and individuals doing everything in their power to reduce the violence, or at least not doing anything to increase it. This demand presupposes transparency, accountability and the feasibility of monitoring and sanctioning both the state and individuals, in the framework and on the level on which the commitment to rights must be assumed. It is the state's duty to define the security model that guarantees fundamental rights. This means that when talking about security, it must not only refer to the risks created by criminals, but also to anything that represents a threat to fundamental rights, to property, physical safety and life, as well as to a healthy environment, a decent life, health, education and work, to basic satisfiers and to culture. In accordance with this view, it is fundamental to define the functions this model must cover, broadly speaking, to achieve the desired ends: first of all, the prevention and reduction of violence (both the violations of fundamental rights and crime, and the violations that produce and update institutional violence) as well as their investigation and punishment; in the second place, the processes implicated in the model must be legitimized; and, on a third level, efforts in planning, evaluation and accountability must be coordinated. At the same

time, it is indispensable to harmonize all the sub-systems, norms, bodies, policies and programs whose objective is to channel the model's functions toward the goals of access to, the guarantee of and the protection and defense of fundamental rights, as well as to establish the conditions needed for forging a responsible citizenry.

It is the individual's responsibility to commit him/herself to reducing inequality through responsible compliance with norms, and, if necessary, the sanctions for not following them.

A myriad of possible concrete, immediate solutions that the state and society can individually or jointly carry out fit into this framework of these general long-term but also ambitious considerations. This can begin to build societies based on solidarity that are, as a result, safer. In Mexico, conditions exist to develop approaches and proposals with a rights-based perspective that not only do not oppose security, but are in and of themselves a guarantee of security in the face of any risk threatening us. Paradoxically, the pre-condition for beginning these changes is taking the risk of focusing on crime with a broader lens, broad enough to show that the state and society are jointly responsible for the problem, which, therefore, we are jointly responsible for solving. ■■■

NOTES

¹ Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal, *Informe especial en torno a las violaciones a derechos humanos con motivo de los hechos ocurridos el 20 de junio de 2008 en la discoteca News Divine* (Mexico City: CDHDF, 2008).

² In August 2008, the body of Fernando Martí Haik, son of businessman Alejandro Martí, was discovered 53 days after he had been kidnapped by a group known as the Band of the Flower. Although some suspects have been arrested, among them former local policemen and one Federal Police agent, the case continues open and unsolved. Alejandro Martí recently announced the creation of a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting public safety.

³ Silvia Vargas Escalera, the daughter of athlete and businessman Nelson Vargas, was kidnapped in late 2007. In December 2008, the Attorney General's Office confirmed that a body found at a criminal safe-house in Mexico City's Tlalpan ward was hers.

⁴ See, among other newspaper articles, "Atentado en grito de Morelia: 3 muertos," by Rafael Rivera, *El Universal* (Mexico City) September 16, 2008, p. 1; and *Anuario 2008*, Special supplement of Mexico City's *Reforma* newspaper, January 2009, from p. 8 on.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Acuerdo Nacional por la Seguridad, la Justicia y la Legalidad, available at http://www2.scjn.gob.mx/informe2008/PDF1/CJF_ANSJL.PDF.

⁷ *Excelsior*, November 29, 2008, p. 1.

⁸ Luis González Placencia, "Criminalidad y derechos: paradojas en el contexto de la interacción contemporánea entre Estado, individuo y mercado," E. Bodegón et al., *Contornos y pliegues del derecho. Homenaje a Roberto Bergalli* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2006), pp. 371-385.

Drug-Trafficking-Related Violence in Mexico

Organization and Expansion

José Arturo Yáñez Romero*



Guadalupe Pérez/Cuartoscuro

A scene of the war against the drug cartels.

All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.

Edmund Burke

Faced with a period of unprecedented criminal violence in the country, Mexicans are stupefied to see that the state has been unable to control it. This violence, already brutal and massive, is linked to the exponential growth of small drug-dealing operations and groups of orga-

nized crime, but particularly with the expansion, strengthening and internationalization of the large criminal organizations that have curtailed society's freedoms and security with total impunity.

Because they are next door to the United States, the world's biggest drug market, Mexico's large drug cartels move about 300 tons of cocaine a year there, between 74 and 90 percent of U.S. consumption. In addition, 10 percent of Mexican cartels' cocaine sales go to Europe, the world's second largest drug consumer market.¹ This is a very lucrative business that brings in about US\$13 billion a year for the Mexican cartels and their partners in the U.S., according to John Walters, current U.S. government drug czar. This money moves through the banking and financial systems of the United

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States, Mexico and Europe. About US\$22 billion have been laundered in Mexico alone.

The best known and most powerful cartels are the Tijuana Cartel (led by the Arellano Félix brothers); the Juárez Cartel (led by the Carrillo Fuentes brothers); the Gulf Cartel (headed by Osiel Cárdenas); the Colima Cartel (controlled by the Amézcua brothers); the Zetas (former members of the military elite); the Beltrán Leyva Cartel; the Sinaloa or Pacific Cartel (led by the Zambada brothers and “Chapo” Guzmán); the Millennium Cartel (headed by the Valencia brothers); the Tepito Cartel; The Line; The Family; New People; The Bald Ones (Pelones); and the Oaxaca Cartel (led by Pedro Díaz Parada). Some of them have been operating or have had a presence for more than 30 years thanks to their network of local organizations covering from 12 to 15 states. Some traffic in and/or produce cocaine; others, amphetamines, marijuana or poppies; and still others specialize in protection services and drug-related executions (the Zetas and the Bald Ones or Pelones).

The list of cartels known by the press and officially “recognized” by the Mexican and U.S. governments is very limited and only symbolic: it comes to no more than seven, when in reality there may be as many as 130 organizations wholly devoted to drug trafficking, most operating on Mexico’s northern border, according to what former U.S. drug czar Barry McCaffrey reported in 2005.²

The main Mexican cartels have such a huge, lucrative illegal market that they have extended their business to Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala, Peru and even Australia, Italy and Spain, as well as to 230 cities in the United States, where four cartels (the now defunct “Federation”, and the Gulf, Juárez and Tijuana Cartels) have partners in local, national and multinational criminal organizations.

Despite a history of more than 60 years of big drug trafficking operations, before 2000, the four major phenomena that are now battering our country did not exist: the transnationalization of the Mexican cartels, massive homicidal violence, intensive street dealing inside Mexico and the emergence of dozens of organized crime groups.

VIOLENCE

In 2002, Mexico ranked thirteenth worldwide of the countries with the largest number of homicides.³ Nationally, the murder rate has also stayed high, but in the last eight years,

drug-related executions have particularly spiked.⁴ More than 12,000 deaths or “narco-executions” have been traced to drug-related criminal organizations.⁵

There were even several drug-related massacres in 2008: 24 dead in La Marquesa, State of Mexico; 13 in Creel, Chihuahua; 9 in Petatlán, Guerrero; 8 in Ciudad Juárez, and 9 in the city of Chihuahua, Chihuahua; 11 bodies decapitated in Mérida; 6 soldiers murdered in Monterrey; and 8 soldiers decapitated in Chilpancingo. And the list goes on. Another way of operating is to have massive “pick ups” (kidnapping people without the intent of demanding money or extortion): 24 in Sinaloa; 10 in Durango, and 10 in Jerez, Zacatecas. Perhaps the most inhuman form of homicide is decapitation; some sources say that there have already been more than 200 executions of this kind.

How can we explain the terrifying figure of 8,173 persons executed in the first two years of Felipe Calderón’s administration (2007 and 2008)? According to the federal government, drug-trafficking-related violence has grown in the country



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for two reasons: first the fight among drug traffickers for control of the supply of certain drugs (marijuana, cocaine, opiates, amphetamines, etc.); that is, to establish and maintain the monopoly of transporting the drugs from Colombia, Bolivia and Peru to the United States. The other cause would derive from the government offensive—the so-called “war” against drug trafficking—headed by the Mexican army but under civilian command.

However, with production and demand assured, the Mexican cartels and their U.S. partners are hardly affected at all by government action on either side of the border, and the real conflict is among them: they must maintain their monopolies in the face of cloning, strengthening, emergence and/or growth of other organized crime groups.

But these are only some of the causes; there is actually another determining factor. The monopolies held by about 30 cartels not only include territory, means of communication, weapons and personnel; what is also in play as part of the market is drug-related corruption. This lets them get unpuni-

ty from the spheres of municipal, state and federal governments: access to privileged information, diverting police operations, infiltration, complicity, different kinds of protection and support, etc. This has discredited government institutions and strengthened some cartels versus others.

Thus, in a stable production and consumption market, the instability caused by the violence is the best “fix” for one or two cartels with powerful, corrupt officials who give them competitive advantages *vis-à-vis* the others. The ones at a disadvantage, for their part, are trying to “level” the playing field with more extreme violence and more groups at their service to carry it out.

SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS

If a cartel is really a leadership group that economically influences several organized crime groups with their own lead-



The main Mexican cartels have such a huge, lucrative illegal market that they have extended their business to Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala, Peru and even Australia, Italy and Spain.

ers and subordinates, then a cartel makes its competitive advantage felt by giving its network of organizations more power to rule over their own field of influence.

It is precisely these organized crime groups without the status and official recognition as a cartel, considered “cells”, that are the grey, “invisible” groups of drug traffickers, even though without them, there would be no cartels. Their activities include money laundering, transport and sale of weapons, executions, kidnapping, “pick-ups,” extortion, auto theft, territorial and logistical negotiations, supplying informers, piracy, managing crops and harvests, etc. These small and medium-sized Mexican organized crime groups are the main underwater mass of the iceberg. But they are also the ones who link up, lead and employ the more than 500,000 people that the Ministry of Defense said in August 2008 are involved in the basic drug trafficking activities: farmers, truckers and other people involved in transport, distributors, look-outs, etc.⁶

These small and medium-sized organized crime groups are taking over the markets of the informal economy in the

main cities in the states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Mexico, Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas and Veracruz. For example, they have displaced the traditional leaders of street CD and DVD sales, who are executed if they refuse to comply with their conditions. They are also demanding that both established and itinerant businesses pay them a fee for the right to operate, and they also force the informal salespersons to sell the merchandise the criminals themselves sell them. It is a perfect business.

In cities like Juárez and Chihuahua, besides extortion, kidnapping and murder have been carried out by burning the businesses whose owners refuse to pay the established quota (restaurants, bars, discos). More than 20 businesses were burned down in 2008 in Ciudad Juárez alone. It is some of these small and medium-sized criminal groups that provide hit men; using mobile commando units, they use assault weapons to execute the target (picked because of betrayal, as a show of power or as a new form of negotiation), although dozens of innocent bystanders have also been killed in these operations.⁷

But not only civilians are in danger; municipal, state and federal police are also targeted in these attacks, which continue thanks to the prevailing impunity. The 831 drug-related executions of police officers between 2007 and 2008 have not been investigated, nor are their perpetrators in prison in 98 percent of the cases.⁸

THE DRUG ECONOMY

As a social phenomenon, the strength of the drug trafficking organizations does not stem exclusively from their long-standing existence—more than seven decades in our country—or from the fact that they are large networks made up of many powerful and violent groups who sell or transport illicit merchandise, but also from the fact that their survival has been linked with economic and political factors for at least the last 20 years.

The chronic formal job deficit, the average wages’ low purchasing power, the sharply polarized income levels, open unemployment in the countryside and the lack of credit for small and medium-sized producers in the countryside and small industry or commerce are one part, among others, of the economic component the drug traffickers have been able to take advantage of. Mexico’s informal economy represents one-third of the gross domestic product—according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development,

more than 50 percent of the work force is employed in the informal sector—and part of that informal economy is street sales, employing more than one million people. Itinerant street sales, together with migration to the United States, are two of the most popular alternatives for people given the insufficient number of formal jobs.⁹

In this context of an informal economy, criminal enterprises have become sources of employment for at least 200,000 peasants who work cultivating and harvesting marijuana and poppies. On the other hand, low-income or no-income families and young people have found an economic opportunity in the sale of small amounts of drugs on street corners and urban and semi-urban neighborhoods. In addition, teens and young people are hired as look-outs, hit men and armed guns at the service of the small and medium-sized groups of organized crime. In time, some of them will create their own groups. Others will become frequent consumers.

Drug dealing on the street level is an alarming and relatively recent feature of Mexican drug trafficking—emerging in the last 8 years. Its *modus operandi* is selling drugs at so-called drug-shops (homes, tenements, abandoned buildings, parks, alleys, corners, etc.). This has become a widespread criminal, social phenomenon in the country and is increasing. Although there are no proven figures, some estimates say that many cities in the country have drug-shops: for example, in the Valley of Mexico—the Mexico City metropolitan area—estimates put the number at more than 11,000; in Tijuana, more than 10,000 (although in this case, the figures include “shooting galleries” where addicts go to shoot up, thus muddying the statistic); in Tlaquepaque, Jalisco, more than 150; and in Cancún, more than 400. However, the federal government maintains that there are no more than 10,000 nationwide.

DRUG-RELATED POLITICS

The other source of strength for both the cartels and small and medium-sized organized crime groups are electoral activities, which have increased in some states like Michoacán and Tamaulipas. That is, some candidates seek out or have the services of criminal support foisted on them to coerce votes in their favor, or are given funding from illicit sources. Thus, in a kind of incipient “drug-ocracy,” some local, regional or national crime leaders become “electors” or politically influential figures, or assure their own access to legal businesses



With production and demand assured, the Mexican cartels and their U.S. partners are hardly affected at all by government action on either side of the border, and the real conflict is among them.

—with or without bidding processes— from city hall through their money laundering businesses (construction and rental businesses, distributors, etc.) in the age-old style of the Italian Mafia.

For all these reasons, the traditional complicity (money in exchange for not taking action against organized crime) between some politicians and the criminals has evolved. Today, the advance of democracy, where nobody any longer has victory assured, seems to have turned some regions of the country into opportunities for some criminals. The dispute over municipal and state government positions is more competitive than ever and, therefore, is more at risk for being infected with “dirty” money before the campaigns even start.

In addition, it should be noted that the violence perpetrated by drug traffickers and election-centered violence in rural areas of Mexico could eventually mix together in the most terrifying form: politically motivated drug-related executions.

In some rural areas, it has been discovered that another factor related to the homicide rate is the political climate. A detailed analysis of municipal election results in the 1990s indicates that in rural areas where electoral competition increased, so did the number of homicides per capita. One possible explanation is that electoral competition weakens local strongmen (*caciques*), who have wielded local power for several decades, temporarily reducing their social control. This does not mean, however, that local democracy is the cause of the violence, since alternation in office makes local authorities more legitimate in the long run, and leads to better functioning.¹⁰

CONCLUSIONS

Given the accumulation of acts of aggression against the citizenry by both common criminals (thefts, kidnappings, extortion, etc.) and organized crime, there is a perception in society that in the federal and state spheres of security and justice, a kind of administrative “kakistocracy” exists that just does not



The other source of strength for both the cartels and small and medium-sized organized crime groups are electoral activities, which have increased in some states like Michoacán and Tamaulipas.

get the promised results.¹¹ This is because, despite government actions and the large amounts of resources thrown at these tasks, neither the flow of drugs or arms, nor drug-related executions and street drug dealing decline.¹²

The public is demanding security and has held huge demonstrations to express its dissatisfaction. At the same time, drug-trafficking-related violence has transcended to the international level. The U.S. government recently labeled the Mexican cartels a danger to its domestic security, and the government of Guatemala has militarized its border with Mexico for the same reason. Meanwhile, the Mexican government thinks it is winning the battle against drug trafficking, “even though it doesn’t seem like it.” **MM**

NOTES

¹ United Nations, *Informe mundial sobre las drogas 2007* (Vienna: UN, 2007)

² It is significant that for a part of the Mexican government (the Attorney General’s Office [PGR]), the number of cartels comes to only seven, or that the federal Ministry of Public Safety (SSP) thinks there are three (April 2007), while McCaffrey thinks there are 130—he was no longer czar when he made the statement. The Mexican government uses exclusively legal criteria when it uses the term “organized crime,” according to which, paradoxically, a group of three or more persons who work in an ongoing way to commit crimes are not cartels, but “cells” of a cartel, while McCaffrey correctly used the empirical criteria. The Mexican criteria is wrong, and the proof is that, having naively thought that by arresting the leaders of three or seven organizations meant they had won the fight, they have implemented disastrous anti-crime policies; also, since the term “cells” does not exist in federal criminal legislation, the cells are pursued by the PGR only in an ancillary way. This is the mistake. These are just some of the erroneous criteria that federal officials, such as Attorney General Medina Mora and Minister of Public Safety García Luna, have applied from their different posts for the last eight years.

³ According to 2002 figures, among the 179 countries reporting, Mexico registered 10.4 violent deaths for every 100,000 inhabitants. In the Americas, only three countries surpassed this figure: Brazil took first place with 57.5; Colombia, fifth place with 31.5; and the United States, tenth place with 15.7. World Health Organization Mortality Data Bases 2004 at <http://www.who.int/healthinfo/morttables/en/index.html>. According to Mexico’s Chamber of Deputies Public Security Commission figures from early January 2007, during the term of Vicente Fox (2000-2006), more than 9,000 executions were reported, a figure that today might seem relatively small given the 5,612 drug-trafficking-related executions reported in the year 2008 alone.

⁴ Although the tendency was for homicides to drop between 2000 and 2007, it is still high or very high if we consider that only 12 countries in

the world have first-degree murder rates higher than 11 per 100,000 inhabitants. In Mexico in 2000, the indicator was 20.9 homicides of males per 100,000 inhabitants; in 2005, it was 17.2; and in 2007, it dropped to 14.9. See Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia, *Mortalidad en hombres 2000-2005* (Mexico City: SSA, 2006); and for 2007 figures, Dirección General de Información en Salud, *Diez principales causas de mortalidad en hombres* (Mexico City: SSA, 2008).

⁵ One procedure is to kidnap (“pick up”) the person, torture him and then shoot him with high caliber weapons (AK-47s or AR-15s). Another consists of two or more assassins (a commando) surprising the victim and shooting him down in the street.

⁶ The legal concept of organized crime in Mexico includes the following forms of behavior: weapons stockpiling and trafficking; traffic in human organs; traffic of minors; child pornography; operations with funds from illicit sources; illegal intervention of private communications; breaking rules of informational secrecy; falsification or alteration of currency; terrorism; kidnapping; and crimes against public health.

⁷ The Mexican government has adopted the simplistic explanation (or “moral justification”) that all the victims were involved in organized crime, saving themselves the trouble of doing their job investigating and hunting down the hit men. However, there are several probable causes of these executions, as has already been mentioned, but among them are demonstrations of power or effectiveness for the benefit of other groups, sending a message to the government, etc. So, if the federal authorities complied with the law by investigating all deaths involving weapons whose use is reserved solely to the army, they should investigate, charge, try and jail the perpetrators of the more than 17,000 executions between 2000 and 2008, regardless of whether the perpetrators and victims belong or belonged to the cartels or organized crime groups.

⁸ This unfortunate situation once again shows up the federal government’s—read Attorney General’s Office and Ministry of Public Safety—incapacity to investigate and bring to justice the murderers of their own agents. In the 2 percent of cases in which there have been arrests and charges brought against perpetrators, this has been accidental or fortuitous. The same situation prevails in the case of the more than 202 soldiers killed in operations against drug trafficking between 2000 and 2008 during the National Action Party administrations. The executions of both kinds of public servants involved dozens of cases of torture and/or decapitation.

⁹ In 2007 alone, Mexican migrants in the United States sent US\$23 billion in remittances back home.

¹⁰ See A. Villarreal, “Political Competition and Violence in Mexico: Hierarchical Social Control in Local Patronage Structures,” *American Sociological Review* 4, vol. 67 (2002), pp. 477 and 498; and Fernando Rascón, “Violencia y recursos naturales en México,” *Informe nacional sobre violencia y salud* (Mexico City: SSA, 2006).

¹¹ Italian political scientist Michelangelo Bovero is credited with creating the term “kakistocracy,” meaning government by the worst, that is, the most incapable and corrupt public servants, who are the accomplices of criminals. Just as an example: thanks to the U.S. government, the so-called Operation Clean-Up exposed some of the corrupt high-level officials in Mexico’s Attorney General’s Office and Ministry of Public Security. Each of them was getting hundreds of thousands of dollars a month in kick-backs. In several municipal and state governments, more public servants have also been prosecuted for corruption or complicity and drug-related homicides.

¹² In 2007, the national budget for Mexico’s security and justice institutions was almost US\$7 billion; for 2009, it will be US\$9 billion.

Vol. 40, núm. 156, enero - marzo, 2009

Índice

ARTÍCULOS

Relaciones fiscales intergubernamentales en México:
evolución reciente y perspectivas
HORACIO SOBARZO FIMBRES

Políticas fiscal y monetaria óptimas en una economía
pequeña y abierta
ZORAYDA CARRANCO GALLARDO
FRANCISCO VENEGAS - MARTÍNEZ

De crisis en crisis: la evolución reciente de las grandes
empresas mexicanas
CELSE GARRIDO NOGUERA
CLAUDIA ORTÍZ GUERRERO

Discriminación salarial por género en México
JORGE EDUARDO MENDOZA COTA
KARINA JAZMÍN GARCÍA BERMÚDEZ

Shenzhen, zona económica especial: bisagra de la
apertura económica y el desarrollo regional chino
JUAN GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA
JOSÉ SALVADOR MEZA LORA

Learning from the tigers- comparing innovation institutions
in rapidly developing economies with Latin America
ANIL HIRA

Dinámicas territoriales pampeanas y
microemprendimientos agrarios en sujetos vulnerables
CLARA VIRGINIA CRAVIOTTI

La cuestión de la tierra y la transición chilena al
capitalismo agrario
ANTONIO BELLISARIO KRAMM

COMENTARIOS Y DEBATES

Hay que desarrollar la teoría económica marxista
ALEJANDRO VALLE BAEZA

REVISTA DE REVISTAS

RESEÑAS

*Communicating Global Change Science to Society / An
Assessment and Case Studies*, de Holm Tiessen (ed.)
ROGER ORELLANA

*El estado de la inseguridad alimentaria en el mundo / Los
precios elevados de los alimentos y la seguridad
alimentaria: amenazas y oportunidades*, de la FAO
EMILIO ROMERO POLANCO

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The Bail-Out and the Causes Of the Financial Crisis

Monica Gambrell*



Lucas Jackson/Reuters

The new Barack Obama administration's plans to deal with today's economic crisis must be evaluated in the light of its short-, medium- and long-term causes. From that vantage point, it is possible to judge how feasible their success is.

The long-term causes go back to Ronald Reagan's administration when he broke with the Republican Party's conservative policy of not spending more than what the government took in as tax revenues. Reagan lowered taxes without a corresponding reduction in spending, and as a result accumulated a large fiscal deficit. Since that time, the Republicans have spend more than they took in and have tried to compensate for the deficits with supply-side economic measures, not only tax cuts, but also deregulating markets and other measures to stimulate consumption.

While this fiscal deficit was corrected with tax hikes during William Clinton's Democratic administration, the policy of deregulating financial markets continued. For example, the laws banning the combination of commercial banks, investment banks and insurance companies were struck from the books. The Commodity Futures Trading Commission was also forbidden from regulating the derivatives market, among other things. That was how Clinton and his economic team (Robert Rubin, Lawrence Summers and Federal Reserve System [Fed] Chairman Alan Greenspan) consolidated the financial deregulation associated with the current crisis.

The following administration, that of George W. Bush, not only continued this deregulation, but also went back to deficit spending. This way, with the two policies implemented at the same time, the total national debt accumulated to cover surplus government spending rose to US\$10,638,331,208,924.31 (10.63 trillion) by January 19,

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2009, the last day of George W. Bush's presidency.¹ This debt is said to have begun with Reaganomics because, measured in real terms, it had been kept at a constant low until 1983, when it began to skyrocket, and it was the Republican administrations that made it grow.

The U.S. population emulated that same consumption pattern, spending more than it earned, particularly starting with the George W. Bush administration. Family debt rose from US\$680 billion in 1974 to US\$14 trillion in 2008, doubling over just the last seven years, from 2001 to 2008. This was possible because, on the average, 13 credit cards had been distributed to every home. This private debt was backed up by the rise in home prices and stock market investments, which were supposedly going to guarantee payment.

On the other hand, state and municipal governments began to follow suit, spending on infrastructure and urban development without corresponding increases in taxes, fi-



**The inherent imbalance
in an international system in which some consume
while others produce is the basic cause
of the current crisis.**

nancing themselves through the sale of local government bonds guaranteed only by the expectation of future earnings.

Many of the goods consumed were imported, which also made the U.S. trade deficit shoot up. The goods account accumulated a total deficit of US\$8.07 trillion between 1980 and 2008 according to the Customs Census. While 1980 was not the first year there was a deficit, the sum of all the previous deficits had only reached US\$43.84 billion. The difference between imported and exported goods was compensated by the surpluses generated in the capital account through the sale of federal bonds abroad. The purchasers of this federal debt were in large part Asian countries like Japan, in for US\$580 billion, and China, in for US\$390 billion, by November 2007. In this way, the constant demand for dollar-denominated instruments kept the dollar over-valued and Asian currencies, except the yen, undervalued.

It can be said that this international monetary arrangement constituted, *de facto*, a new Bretton Woods in which the United States' excessive consumption was financed by excessive savings by the Asian countries. The function of the United

States in this system was to keep the demand for consumer goods high in the rest of the world, supported by an overvalued currency and easy access to credit for the population. The paradox is that consumption in the "rich" country was financed by the poor countries of Asia, which took advantage of their access to the developed market to displace the United States as the producer of manufactured goods. The inherent imbalance in an international system in which some consume while others produce is the basic cause of the current crisis.

The medium-term causes of today's crisis are circumscribed to the way in which the previous 2001 crisis was resolved, when the technology dot-com bubble burst. At first glance, it seemed like the Fed had been successful in its attempt to rapidly jumpstart economic growth by slashing the interbank rate. However, two more years had to go by before the employment situation began to improve. Finally, when employment recovered, it was because the technological bubble had been replaced by the housing bubble, and everything possible was being done to ensure that U.S. consumption would keep on expanding.

The continual and increasing reductions in the Fed's interest rate lowered the price of money so much that it led to sustained expansion of credit that was used above all in the sub-prime mortgage market, that is, mortgages offered to low-income borrowers. Traditionally, this kind of mortgage was handled by government-regulated companies, but Wall Street financial firms began to get into this business. Since they were not subject to any government regulation, these firms failed to take the most elementary precautions, like asking for proof of earnings or demanding down payments. The more the demand for houses increased, the more their prices shot up, together with the price of these firms' stock on Wall Street; and, as we have already seen, their high price served as collateral for other kinds of loans.

After this second bubble—the housing bubble—burst, it has not been as easy as the last time for the Fed to reactivate the economy because it could not reduce the interbank rate more than the 0.5 percent it was already at, and because consumers were already over-indebted. This last factor is particularly grave since consumption made up 72 percent of the U.S. economy. Retail sales have dropped dramatically because consumers have finally had to start saving. It is estimated that the tiny 0.2 percent savings rate may rise to 4.5 percent in 2009. This alone could produce a recession. Without another consumer bubble on the horizon, it has not been possible to put off the recession any longer.

The short-term causes of the current crisis are linked to the George W. Bush's inefficient implementation of his anti-crisis strategy. While mortgage companies had already begun to go belly up since the beginning of 2007, the only thing the government did at the beginning of the year was to send a tax rebate out in spring, and from there to the end of the year, just barely begin to investigate what Wall Street was doing about mortgages. In 2008, it finally acted, but in a different way with each financial institution: investing millions in preferential stocks in the first ones, nationalizing Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac; letting Merrill Lynch be sold at rock-bottom prices; letting Lehman Brothers declare bankruptcy; practically taking over operations of AIG; and committing itself to ensuring that Citigroup and Bank of America would not go under if there were a catastrophic loss.

Despite having a US\$700-billion bail-out plan available,² the Bush administration showed its confusion about what it wanted to do with the money. It said that it was to purchase toxic debt from the banks in a Mexican-Fobaproa-like bail-out, but what it actually did was to force the nine largest banks to accept government purchase of its preferential shares for US\$250 billion. The aim was to increase the banks' liquidity so they could help their debtors restructure payments and keep on loaning them money, but the bail-out was not conditioned to compliance with these goals. Thus, the mortgage crisis became a liquidity crisis and even a crisis of confidence, which has an impact on the healthy sectors of the economy and spread it to the rest of the world.

The short-term causes of the crisis have been attacked by a hail of measures launched during the first month of the Obama administration, with the whole world watching: 1) a bail-out plan for the financial system made up of a public/private fund that could reach US\$2 trillion; 2) an economic stimulus package that would commit a total of US\$787 billion in federal funds;³ 3) a US\$275-billion fund to stave off foreclosures;⁴ and 4) a budget presented to Congress for US\$3.6 trillion for fiscal year 2010.⁵ The sum total of these expenditures (US\$6.66 trillion) is too large for the markets to ignore.

Obama's financial bail-out plan is different from Bush's strategies because it does not invest in the banks, in the hopes of increasing their liquidity and reactivating their loaning activities. It is also not a guarantee against future catastrophic losses. And, as a first option, it shies away from taking over operational control or nationalization. Rather, it is a plan to purchase the banks' risky investments, wiping the red num-

bers off their books that prevent them from loaning money again. The government and private investment funds, like the hedge funds and the private-equity funds, will contribute the capital, but the decisions about what should be purchased and at what price would be made by the latter, and these private funds will be obligated to repay the government what it invested before realizing their profits (or losses).

The economic stimulus package is divided among infrastructure, social programs and tax cuts. Spending on infrastructure means building highways, bridges, transportation services and construction; networks to distribute energy, broadband access and drinking water; energy savings and alternative sources, etc. The big difference between reactivating the economy through this kind of investment and doing it by lowering interest rates, a measure oriented to consumption, should be underlined. At the same time that this plan stimulates the economy, it is a step toward a new model



The mortgage crisis became a liquidity crisis and even a crisis of confidence, which has an impact on the healthy sectors of the economy, spreading it to the rest of the world.

of economic development. Also, spending on social programs and tax cuts includes aspects that promote investment; for example, tax cuts for companies that invest in capital goods, financing for new technology development and scholarships for higher education.

The mortgage fund will offer assistance to between seven and nine million homeowners to ensure that they do not fall behind in their payments and lose their homes. Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae's rules for refinancing mortgages will be changed so homeowners can enjoy the lower interest rates available today. Government financing of mortgage companies will increase US\$200 billion to stabilize the market. In addition, another US\$75 billion will be used to reduce the absolute amount of mortgage payments under certain conditions: wherever the excessive sub-prime mortgage rates have shot up to up to 40 percent or 50 percent of owners' monthly incomes, whether because they have lost their jobs or their wages have been reduced.

While it will not be clear what changes Congress will make to the budget proposal until summer, the fact that the

original version does reflect what the president promised during his campaign will galvanize the Democrats. Energy independence, universal medical coverage and scholarships for higher education and vocational re-training will be funded by higher taxes on the oil and gas industries, multinational corporations, investment fund managing companies, and the three million people with the highest incomes in the country (plus cutbacks on some existing programs). The consistency of the promises and the proposed budget, plus its swift presentation—practically at the same time as the three plans—creates a favorable impression that might mark the end, not of the economic crisis, but of the crisis of confidence that was the short-term cause of the financial maelstrom.

The medium-term causes of the financial crisis are corrected in President Obama's bail-out and recovery plans since they are not aimed at creating new growth bubbles, but at balancing stimuli to consumption with investment and job



**Overcoming the long-term causes
of the crisis implies generating a new driving force
for the economy, one different from
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goods from Asia.**

creation. Also, it should be noted that these plans include precise guidelines for how federal agencies and the private sector should intervene in the markets. Thus, it is to be expected that in the near future the financial market will be re-regulated. The fact that some members of the new economic team are the same people who during the Clinton administration transferred governance to the financial markets might imply that they have sufficient knowledge to recover effective control of the financial market without inhibiting its ability to fulfill its primary functions.

Overcoming the long-term causes of the crisis implies generating a new driving force for the economy, one different from the old model based on importing consumer goods from Asia. Both the stimulus package and the new budget presented to Congress are oriented to stimulating productive investment in the United States to create alternative sources of energy and new green technologies. The success of this economic aim will depend on the private sector's willingness to adapt to the new kind of stimuli diametrically opposed to the ones they had been accustomed to under Reaganomics.

If it is possible to produce these new goods, they will not be fully commercially successful until they can be exported to the rest of the world.

Exporting more presupposes reducing the dollar's overvaluation, which could be achieved in two ways. One is to reduce the government's fiscal deficit so that, by issuing fewer debt instruments, the demand for the dollar *vis-à-vis* other currencies would drop. President Obama has promised to reduce this deficit by at least a third by the year 2013. The other way is to devalue the dollar, which could happen too rapidly, above all if this is caused by the sale of dollar-denominated debt instruments by other countries. Perhaps Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's first trip abroad was to Asia precisely to prevent this kind of scenario.

Changing the trade and financial relationship that has existed between the United States and Asia since World War II implies a historic change of the first magnitude. Correcting Asia's structural surplus, which has allowed it to develop industrially, not only implies a new economic development model in the United States, but in Asia as well. This will be the long-term way out of the current crisis because it involves its ultimate cause. However, the plan to restructure the international economy does not yet exist. Its implementation will require Timothy Geithner's relaxing the position of his predecessors at the Treasury Department about the US dollar/Chinese yuan exchange rate. Its success will depend on the way he situates himself in a broader negotiation that would take into account the real ability of the different countries to contribute to a new economic world order. **MM**

NOTES

¹ www.brillig.com/debt_clock.

² See the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act on line at <http://www.ustreas.gov/>

³ See the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which became law on February 17, 2009, on line at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>.

⁴ Michael A. Fletcher and Renae Merle, "75B Program Aims to Lower Mortgages, Foreclosures," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 2009, and Josh Gerstein and Craig Gordon, "Obama aiming high with housing plan," *Politico*, February 18, 2009.

⁵ The 2010 budget proposal is available on line at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/>.

The Impact of the Global Crisis in Mexico

For Whom Does the Bell Toll?

Enrique Pino Hidalgo*



Ricardo Castelan/Cuantosuro

The crisis of Wall Street is to market fundamentalism what the fall of the Berlin Wall was to communism.

JOSEPH STIGLITZ

INTRODUCTION

Mexico's trade and financial dependency on the U.S. economy is an overwhelming reality that has become even more

marked in the last 15 years given the dynamics of globalization and the rules of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). For this simple reason, the government idea of bullet-proofing the Mexican economy *vis-à-vis* the U.S. and world crisis and recession was untenable. In just a few days, Wall Street's financial collapse made its devastating repercussions felt the world over, and Mexico could not be the exception.

With the effects of plummeting consumption and credit levels in the United States, the Mexican economy's liberal model confirms its vulnerability resulting from its exaggerated addiction to the U.S. market and capital flows from its northern neighbor. Now we can observe how the repercussions of the crisis on the exchange rate, plunging oil prices,

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**Recent performance
of the main economic and financial indicators
confirm the Mexican economy's vulnerability
vis-à-vis the United States' misfortunes.**

and the drop in foreign direct investment are highly inter-related.

The global crisis's main impact can be seen in the loss of dynamism in exports and how that in turn will affect productive activity in Mexico. In 2009, the latter will lead to an open economic recession with a negative gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of between one and two percent, according to estimates of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Mexico's Finance Ministry.

The aim of this article is to examine the vulnerability of the liberal economic model adopted by authorities since the mid-1980s and their reaction to the global crisis and recession. This model is characterized by its growing gravitation toward the U.S. market and foreign capital flows. Thus, the export manufacturing sector was counted on as the dynamic factor for growth. But it was highly dependent on the import of capital and intermediary goods, and has little capacity to

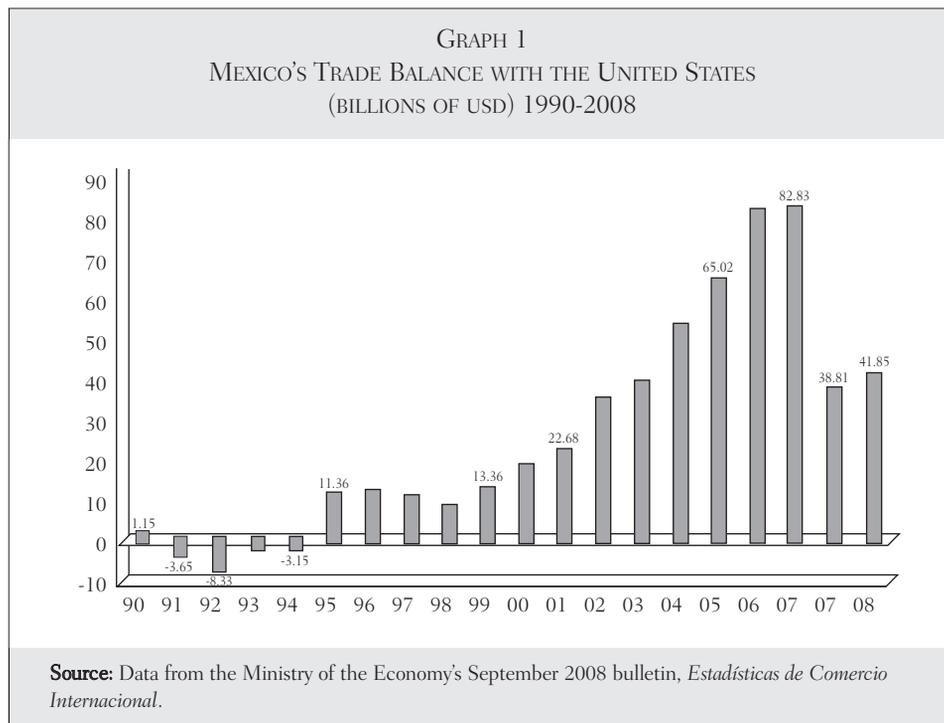
galvanize the entire economy, resulting in low or non-existent growth, the effects of which are transferred to employment and earnings.

The vulnerability of the export-manufacturing model increases with the crumbling of the U.S. economy. This fragility should lead to reorienting the model and maintaining it based on endogenous sources of growth like the domestic market itself and labor-intensive import substitution, plus the diversification of exports to markets in the Asian Pacific and Latin America (see graph 1).

**WORLD CRISIS: THE BEGINNING OF THE END
OF THE ANGLO-SAXON CAPITALIST MODEL?**

The collapse of financial markets precipitated by the high-risk mortgage crisis in the United States is probably a sign of the beginning of the end of an era: the era of savage capitalism, a form of capitalism that favors multinational and financial corporations under the tutelage of international financial agencies like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, etc.

The international financial organizations made economic liberalism and the theses of the "minimal state" a dogma that raised the market to the category of a guiding, coherent



principle of the economic process. But recent events have revealed the liberal model's incapacity to correct the failures and abuses of the agents who act freely in the markets—whether financial, labor, or any other kind.

Contravening its own discourse, the crisis of Anglo-Saxon capitalism has shown its institutional fragility in the absence of self-correcting, self-regulating mechanisms to prevent or correct imbalances, tensions and the conflicts it creates in the economy and society.

After more than two decades, this economic model has proven that it encourages the concentration of income and wealth, promotes monopolistic tendencies and fosters social and regional disparities in development. In this context, the depth of the crisis set off by Wall Street and transmitted to both the majority of industrialized countries and emerging economies has demonstrated that the Anglo-Saxon model of contemporary capitalism has probably worn itself out.

In place since the late 1970s under the name “Reaganomics,” the liberal model's breakdown shows the limits of market economies subject to institutional rules inspired in financial deregulation, free trade and hypothetically free competition. Its mode of operation has come to mean a regime of minimal—even discretionary— institutional norms for businessmen, investors, financial intermediaries, etc., with regard to trade, mergers, loans, financial transactions, etc., under the aegis of the invisible hand's supposed efficacy as the regulating, guiding principle of the economic process.

This model, attributed to differing degrees to the doctrines of Adam Smith, Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, produced economies highly influenced by international finance capital and by the multinational firms that today are facing the consequences of their failings and excesses in speculative investments, the exorbitant use of credit and murky financial transactions behind the backs of investment fund savers, among other questionable activities.

Adhering to the logic of maximizing profits, these emblematic bodies' performance corroborated the adage that private interests frequently do not coincide with the general interests of society.¹

Since the Great Depression, the U.S. government had not massively intervened in markets through purchasing the financial assets of de-capitalized, bankrupt corporations. No one would have imagined that George W. Bush would take measures like the bank bail-out, considered actions worthy of Latin American governments systematically accused of being “populist” and backward.



**Government intervention in the majority
of industrialized and developing economies was
inevitable and *de facto* meant the reestablishment
of state economic regulation. Good-bye Mr. Hayek!
Welcome back, Mr. Keynes!**

International Monetary Fund Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn, flying in the face of the proverbial anti-state wisdom on economic issues, has recognized that private money is scarce in the current environment, so government support is necessary to replenish the banking systems' capital.² Government intervention in the majority of industrialized and developing economies was inevitable and *de facto* meant the reestablishment of state economic regulation. Good-bye Mr. Hayek! Welcome back, Mr. Keynes!³

Given the breadth and depth of the world crisis, the intervention of the state and its institutions has been the only option that could create confidence and liquidity, prerequisites for reordering the economic process and a way out of the crisis. We may well be on the threshold of a new era based on a market-directed economic system, to use the expression of Asian Pacific expert institutionalist economist Robert Wade.⁴

FROM BULLET-PROOFING THE MEXICAN ECONOMY TO GOVERNMENT ANTI-CYCLICAL INTERVENTION

The drop in consumption in the United States, the main destination of Mexican exports, is affecting the country's GDP growth. Authorities have already reduced their growth projections for 2009. In early April 2008, they calculated an optimistic 4 percent a year. However, by October 2008, their prediction had dropped to 1.8 percent. Things got worse when the OECD estimates put the prediction at 0.4 percent for 2009, which practically implied stagnation for Mexico.⁵ In this freefall, by January, conservative estimates were talking about a contraction of between one and two percent of GDP.

These figures buried government optimism about the country's bullet-proofing as promoted by Finance Minister Augustin Carstens. In just a matter of days, the early October financial collapse had serious repercussions the world over, and Mexico could not stay out of it. The sequence of negative effects began on the foreign exchange market with a



No one would have imagined that George W. Bush would take actions like the bank bail-out, considered measures worthy of Latin American governments systematically accused of being “populist.”

series of speculative attacks against the peso, leading to an almost-40-percent devaluation and an instability that put the dollar exchange rate at nearly 15 pesos. Meanwhile, the drop in world demand for oil caused the price of Mexico’s mix to plummet to under US\$40 a barrel.

The Mexican economy’s difficulties continued with the almost 11-percent annual decline in remittances from Mexican workers living in the United States, and reduced foreign currency income because of slowed tourism from abroad. The multi-million-dollar losses by Mexico’s largest companies listed on the stock market and a 30-percent drop in foreign direct investment must not be left out of this mix (see graph 2).

Recent performance of the main economic and financial indicators confirm the Mexican economy’s vulnerability *vis-à-vis* the United States’ misfortunes. Now we can clearly see how these repercussions are highly interrelated on three levels:

THE FOREIGN EXCHANGE MARKET AND THE PESO DEVALUATION

Speculative attacks against Mexico’s currency continue to create severe instability in the foreign exchange market, forcing the Central Bank to abandon its non-interventionist prescriptions and assume an active regulating role. To defend the “Mexican super-peso,” authorities implemented a program of auctioning off dollars and directing intervening with sales to financial intermediaries.

These actions target increasing the supply of dollars in order to put the brakes on the deterioration of the exchange rate. Nevertheless, government intervention has not been effective if we consider that at the end of the first week of February, the dollar was tickling the underside of 15 pesos, having reached its historic high *vis-à-vis* the peso (14.719 pesos/dollar on February 4), when the average only eight months ago was 10.34 pesos to the dollar. So, by the end of January, the accumulated amount of dollars injected into

the market (a minimum of US\$400 million a day) was already over US\$20 billion. But even that did not avert the abrupt drop of the peso *vis-à-vis* the greenback.

Given the climate of a lack of confidence, investors dealt harsh blows to the Mexican peso. Some companies, like the Comercial Mexicana retail chain, took out big international loans (US\$2 billion), and others like the multinational Cementos Mexicanos (Cemex) demanded enormous quantities of dollars to cover their peso investments and their loans taken out with foreign creditors in dollars.

The failed defense of the peso implied that the central bank’s international reserves dropped to under US\$81 billion. Despite the fact that by the end of January, they had increased to US\$83.63 billion, speculative attacks will probably deplete this amount again.⁶ In this climate of exchange rate instability and distrust of Mexico’s currency, the devaluation of the peso devastated one of liberal stabilization’s most respected macro-economic fundamentals.

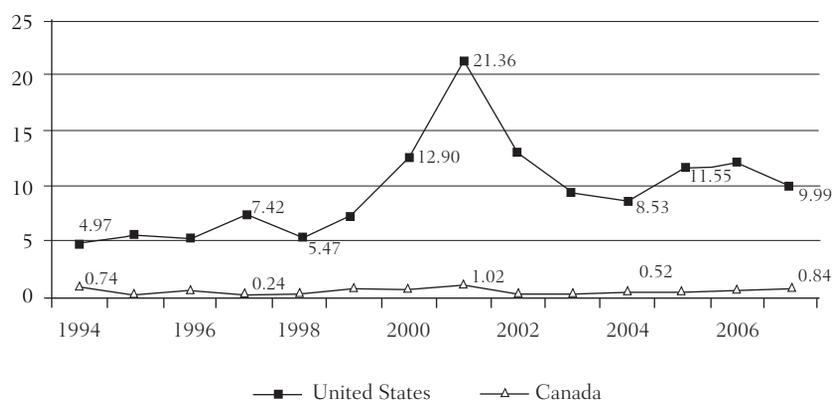
FROM A SLOWING OF THE PRODUCTIVE SECTOR TO AN OPEN RECESSION

Low growth expectations confirm the contagion from the strictly financial sector to the real economy: that is, to output, employment, investments and consumption. For Mexico, contraction of sales in the United States has caused a drop in manufacturing production and exports, mainly in the auto industry. According to National Statistics and Geography Institute (INEGI) figures, industrial production has dropped 1.6 percent; manufactures, 2.1 percent; and construction, 1.9 percent. By the end of 2009, industry as a whole will be the most affected, with a drop of 3.82 percent.⁷

This contraction is even stronger in specific sectors like auto, which is highly dependent on the U.S. market, and to a lesser degree, on the Canadian market. The drop in demand for automobiles in the United States has already meant that by February, seven and a half months of temporary technical lock-outs and unspecified numbers of permanent lay-offs have accumulated in the strategic automobile clusters in Coahuila, Querétaro and Guanajuato where Chrysler, Ford and General Motors operate. To this string of work stoppages have to be added the massive lay-offs at the Volkswagen plant in Puebla and the Nissan plant.

In the face of overwhelming evidence, Bank of Mexico Governor Guillermo Ortiz had to recognize that the prospects

GRAPH 2
FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT IN MEXICO 1994-2007
(BILLIONS OF USD)



Source: Data from the Ministry of the Economy's Foreign Investment Office.

for Mexico in 2009 are “disheartening.” He also accepted that the central bank’s direct intervention in the foreign exchange and financial markets was due to “the financial tsunami that suddenly hit the emerging markets” that, in his opinion, had been the hope for the world market not going into a recession. In short, the Mexican economy is going through an economic deceleration with a GDP growth rate that is dropping from about 2 percent for 2008 to a probable average of minus 2 percent for 2009, signaling a profound recession in the country.

OIL PRICES DROP AND PUBLIC FINANCES WEAKEN

The decline of the world oil market linked to lower demand because of the international recession led to a drop in oil and gas prices, dragging down the price of Mexican crude, which in late November sank to US\$34 a barrel. This price contrasts with the average US\$70/barrel projected by the Mexican Congress when it passed its 2009 budget.

These zigzags in crude prices were usually reason for significant cutbacks in government revenue projections, forcing the government to cut expenditures and investments. However, the administration’s anti-crisis policy called for the use of two fundamental tools to significantly diminish the impact on the budget of the drop in oil revenues.

The first one was Congress’s authorization to finance deficit spending to the tune of 1.8 percent of GDP. This

measure is quite a ways from the orthodox spending policy based on balancing the budget and zero deficits that predominated over the last 20 years. The second measure is the Finance Ministry buying fuel hedges to protect itself from future price drops below US\$70. This assures a US\$9.555 billion payout, complemented by the Mex\$55-billion Oil Earnings Stabilization Fund.

EMERGENCY ECONOMIC PLAN IN THE FACE OF THE CRISIS

Given the impact of the crisis, the country’s authorities have changed their economic strategy. President Calderón proposed a mildly Keynesian, anti-cyclical economic plan aimed at countering the effects of the international recession through government spending and investments. The Program to Foster Growth and Employment includes a series of structural and momentary measures aimed at responding to the recession.



With the effects of plummeting consumption and credit levels in the United States, the Mexican economy’s liberal model confirms its vulnerability resulting from its exaggerated addiction to the U.S. market

According to official estimates, the program would entail higher fuel subsidies, making financing available for priority sectors, and support for infrastructure projects for a total of Mex\$255.3 billion, or about US\$19 billion. The authorities said that the resources involved represent one percent of GDP.

In early January, authorities announced a second plan called the National Accord for Family Finances and Employment, specifically directed at saving jobs through 20-odd measures organized around five axes: support for employment, for family finances, competitiveness, small and medium-sized companies, and investment in infrastructure. In each of these categories, it puts forward actions to support temporary employment programs; a 10-percent reduction in the price of LP gas and electricity for industry; or to make 20 percent of government purchases from small and medium-sized companies and have Nacional Financiera and the Mexican Foreign Trade Bank (Bancomext) increase their number of loans by 20 percent.

Several sectors of the business community have criticized this second plan. The powerful Business Coordinating Council (CCE) stated that the amounts involved in the anti-cyclical plan are “minimum and deceptive,” because, according to the Private Sector Studies Center, they barely represent 0.5 percent of GDP, while in other countries, 10 to 12 times the resources in relative terms have been used for this kind of plan.

Without underestimating the multiplication effect this amount of government spending will have on income and employment, some doubts have been raised about whether it is enough to reactivate the economy. One of the first criticisms of the plan involves the fact that the development banking system is not aiming to strengthen and finance small and medium-sized companies, but rather large corporations: government favorites like Cemex, with enormous debts acquired during their cycle of international expansion, and the Comercial Mexicana chain of grocery stores.

The scarcity and high cost of credit for companies at the hands of the commercial banking system is also a barrier for overcoming economic stagnation. Recent hikes in interest rates for consumer credit —on average, more than 70 percent a year— have once again brought up the question of the role of the foreign-controlled commercial banks. In effect, financing costs with active rates of over 20 percent a year confirm that the banking sector’s performance does not favor investment in production, but that its business depends



The vulnerability of the export-manufacturing model increases with the crumbling of the U.S. economy. This should lead to its reorientation based on endogenous growth sources like the domestic market itself.

more on consumer credit, mortgages and the high unregulated commissions they charge for their services.

President Calderón’s plan suggests a timid transition from a neo-liberal policy to a different, Keynesian policy based on government spending and aggregate demand. This suggests that the conservative economists in charge of government strategy want to change the “script” without really sharing a Keynesian approach for fighting the crisis. Despite everything, they believe in price and exchange rate stability and “healthy finances” more than in growth and employment. They are suffering from chronic change-resistant fundamentalism.

The magnitude, scope and simultaneity of the crisis has thrown into relief just how urgent it is that the state and civil society organizations head up a renewed institutionality. This process will depend on the orientation governments opt for and society’s ability to put forward public policies that are not limited to saving the big banks and the corporations, but that direct their efforts at rescuing the most vulnerable sectors of the population. **MM**

NOTES

¹ Masahiko Auki, Hyung-Ki Kim and Masahiro Okuno-Fujiwara, *El papel del gobierno en el desarrollo económico del Asia Oriental. Análisis institucional comparado* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000).

² *El Economista* (Mexico City), January 22, 2009, p. 13.

³ Héctor Guillén, *La contrarrevolución neoliberal en México* (Mexico City: Era, 1997).

⁴ Robert Wade, *Governing the Market: Economic Theory and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialization* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

⁵ OCDE, *Panorama Económico* (Mexico City), November 24, 2008.

⁶ Banco de México, “Saldos y flujos de activos internacionales al 30 de enero de 2009,” <http://www.banxico.org.mx>.

⁷ “Estimaciones Grupo Financiero IXE,” *El Economista* (Mexico City), January 5, 2009.

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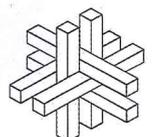
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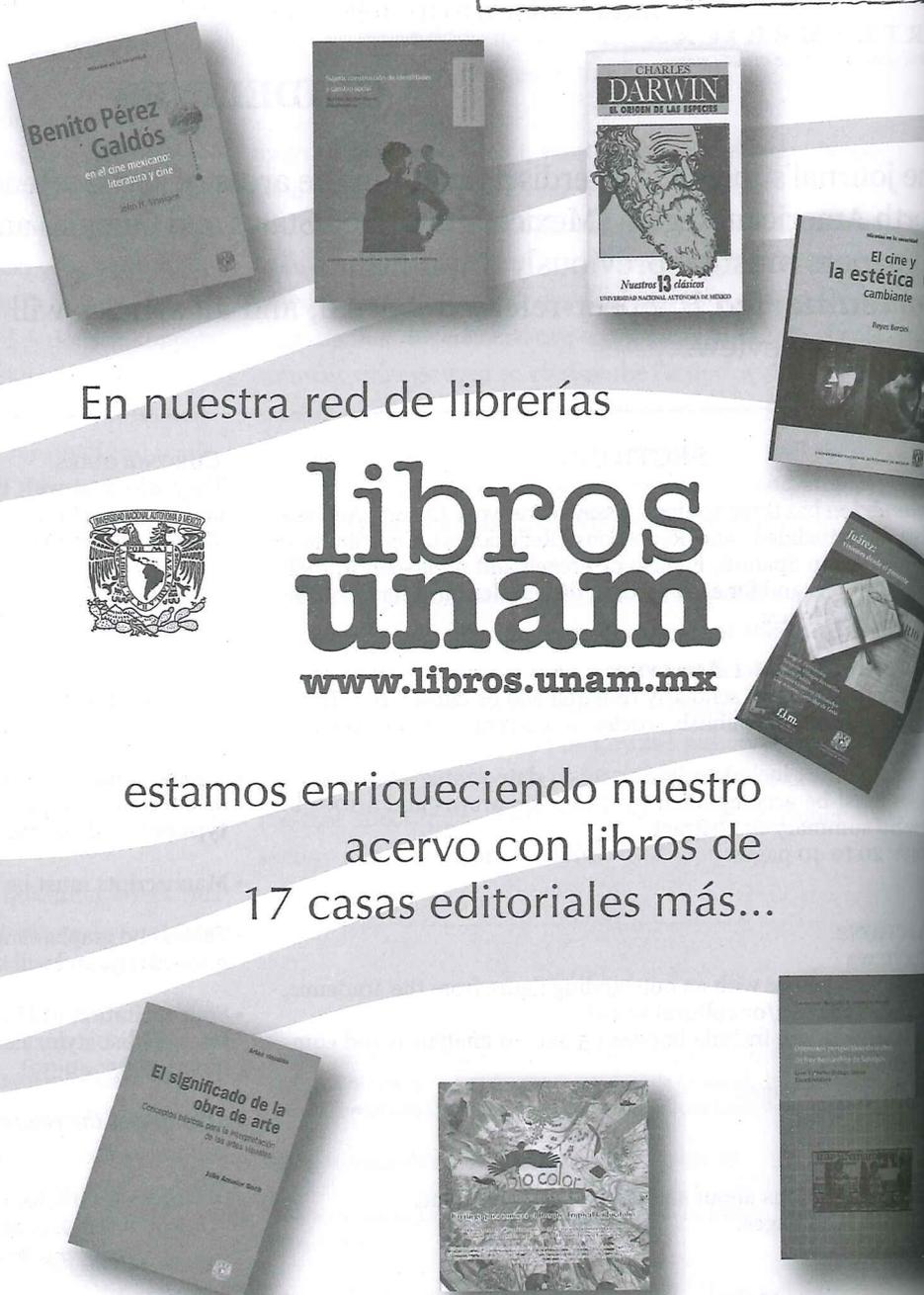
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Puuc Style Mayan Cities Trimmed in Stone

Adriana Velázquez Morlet*





View of the Governor's Palace façade, Uxmal's architectural gem.

Photos previous page: Frederick Catherwood's drawings of Uxmal, Kabah and Labná taken from the book *Litografía y grabado en el México del XIX*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Telmex, 1993), pp. 191, 198, 199; Catherwood's drawing of Sayil taken from *Las ciudades perdidas de los Mayas* (Mexico City: Artes de Mexico-Instituto de Cultura de Yucatán, 1999), p. 173.

When you think of the Yucatán Peninsula, it is hard to conger up a mountainous region. But, one of the archaeologically richest areas of the western part of the states of Yucatán and Campeche is precisely the small mountainous Puuc area. In Mayan, the name means "hill," and the region covers the mountain range called the Sierrita de Ticul (Ticul Mountains), reaching from the town of Maxcanú to the town of Peto, and from the Uitz Hills to the south in the direction of Campeche, forming a kind of inverted "v."

The Ticul Mountains are covered with intensely red, highly fertile soil. The Uitz Hills in the Bolonchén district are much flatter, with good soil interspersed with fields of flagstone and flood lands. In this small mountain area, the Mayas built a great system of settlements of similar size, almost equidistant from each other, creating a network of

* Archaeologist and director of the Quintana Roo National Institute of Anthropology and History Center.

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cities that were very close politically, economically and socially. Among the most important sites in this area are Uxmal, Kabah and Oxkintok. By contrast, in the Uitz Hills further south, topography and soil characteristics created a less concentrated settlement pattern where Sayil and Labná are prominent.

The Puuc style makes repeated use of a series of architectural elements outstanding because of their technical perfection. In contrast with buildings in other Mayan regions, Puuc buildings were made with a solid nucleus of stone and plaster, covered by well-cut, worked stone that is purely ornamental, not structural; that is, if they are taken off, the building would remain standing.

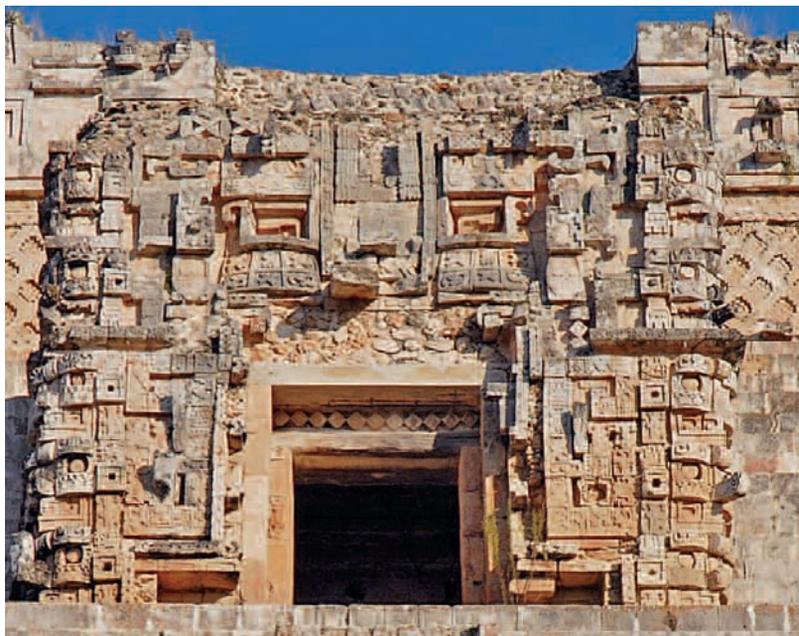
The exteriors have smooth walls, sometimes decorated with columns on the bottom and friezes on the top including great masks of the god Chaac, as well as round molding and small drums alternating with perfectly executed stone mosaics depicting houses, serpents, sculptures and other decorations. The size and complexity of these buildings vary; some are small and isolated with only a couple of rooms; others are enormous, with two or three floors and almost 100 rooms, facing great plazas. These buildings may have been residences for medium- and high-level functionaries; the

largest ones may also have been used for administrative purposes.

Their building system was so efficient that many of the constructions have survived intact, making it easy even today to imagine a richly robed Mayan noble followed by his or her servants. Probably the celebrated travelers Stephens and Catherwood, who visited the region in 1843, came to similar conclusions, because, when they arrived at Macobá, in the southern Puuc, they found a building so well preserved that they were convinced that the site continued to be inhabited.

THE EXPLORERS OF THE PUUC

When Diego de Landa and Antonio de Ciudad Real came to the recently colonized Yucatán, one of the first regions they visited in 1588 was the Puuc, particularly Uxmal, where they wondered at its magnificent constructions. A short time later, Diego López de Cogolludo visited the same city and named the Governor's Palace and the Nuns' Quadrangle, thinking that they had functions similar to those of European buildings.



Rubén Vázquez

The entrance at the top of the Soothsayer's Temple.



Building on the Nuns' Quadrangle, Uxmal.

The Puuc was abandoned for many years until Baron Frederick Waldeck traveled through the area in 1834 and later made it known to the world. Later, John Stephens and Frederick Catherwood came through and for the first time made precise illustrations and descriptions of the site, formally initiating Mayan archaeology. After this visit, the Caste War put a stop to all visits to the area until the 1920s, when José Reygadas, Juan Martínez and Eduardo Martínez, among others, made detailed descriptions of the most outstanding places.

In 1922, Governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto headed up a great political project in which strengthening the Yucatán identity based on its Mayan roots played a fundamental role. Among many other actions, he built the highway to Uxmal and fostered its conservation. To make it known to the world, he invited the *New York Times* to send a correspondent to report on the region's archaeological sites; the paper sent Alma Reed, who, incidentally, became the love of the governor's life.

Since then, many researchers have worked on the sites in this area, among them Tatiana Proskouriakoff, Harry Pollock, Ignacio Marquina and, more recently, Ramón Carrasco, Sylvianne Boucher, Antonio Benavides, Jeremy Sabloff, Michael Smyth, Lourdes Toscano and José Huchim. All of them have done many different research projects underlining the enormous architectural and historical value of the Puuc Mayans.

At their peak, the Puuc cities produced an architectural style that we would not hesitate to call spectacular, because of its technical perfection and exquisite artistry.



Detail of the House of the Doves, Uxmal.



Elsie Montiel



Elsie Montiel

THE REGION'S HISTORY

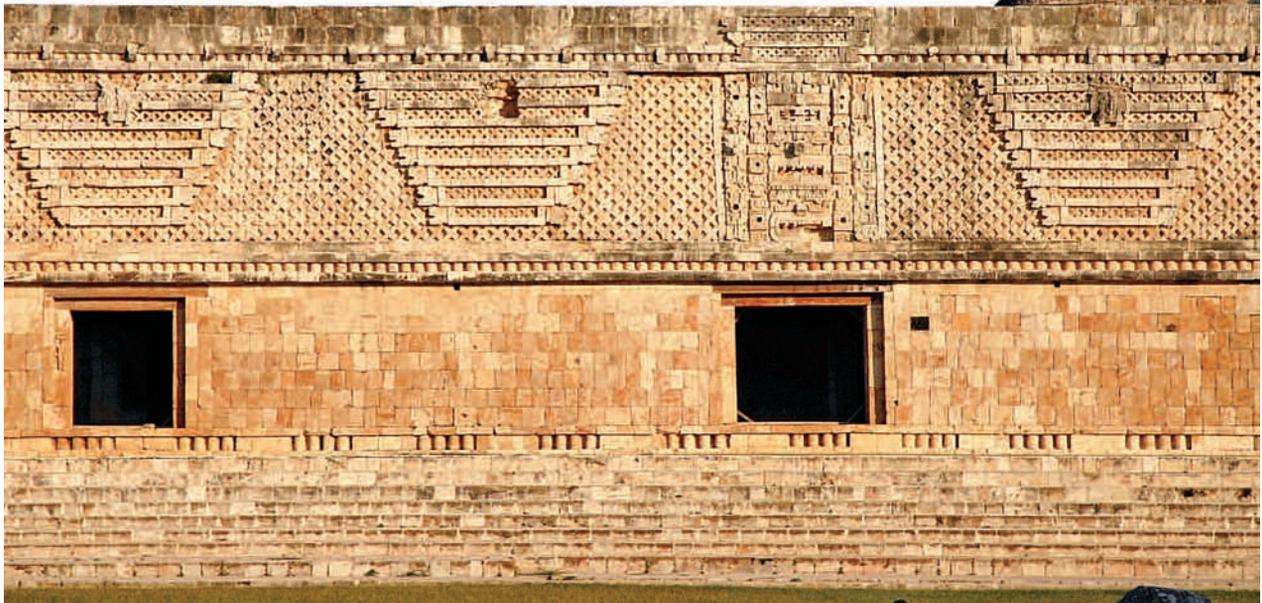
Little is known about the first inhabitants of the Puuc. The oldest evidence, dating from 7000 B.C., is of nomad hunter and gatherer camps. By 3000 B.C., there were small villages dedicated to corn cultivation, which the inhabitants complemented with gathering other plants and capturing local wildlife. The only finds from later centuries are a relief with Olmec touches, found in the Loltún cave, and isolated pottery and flint fragments, leaving much to investigate about the period.

The Puuc style developed and was perfected over a period of about 700 years, between A.D. 300 and A.D. 1000. Five stages in its development have been identified: the oldest is known as early Oxkintok, which includes rough, simply decorated walls with roof combs. In the sixth century the region's population grew rapidly, spurring the construction

of more complex cities whose building style is called proto-Puuc. This was of better quality, sometimes on pyramid basements, but still simply decorated. The most representative constructions in this style can be found at Oxkintok, Kupaloma, Xkalumkin and X'corralché.

Starting in A.D. 700, the Puuc became more powerful, and building techniques were perfected because it was important to create appropriate spaces for the rising ruling dynasties. This variety is called early Puuc, and its buildings combined the previous styles with more specialized elements like columns in porticos and decoration with geometric and human figures.

More than 100 buildings in this style have been uncovered in sites like Xculoc, Xkalumkin, Kabah and Uxmal, which was just emerging as an important city. They started the tra-



Rubén Vázquez

Uxmal boasts the best examples of the classical Puuc style.



dition of erecting monumental archways at the beginning of the white ways (*sacbe'ob*) connecting the region's many cities and soon turning into a broad network of roadways that facilitated contact among communities that may have been part of a single political system.

Around A.D. 850, the Puuc cities were at their peak, producing an architectural style that we would not hesitate to call spectacular, not only because of its technical perfection, but also its exquisite artistry. The Mayan architects achieved several variants of this style. The simplest, called *junquillo*, included only decorations with round stone molding (*junquillo*) and small drums along the tops of the façades. In the mosaic style, the decorations were made in mosaic frets and window lattices alternating with large masks, rose windows and round molding. The materials used in these buildings are highly specialized and masterfully and individually carved.

In Uxmal, the constructions are so perfect that specialists have given the style its own name, called late Uxmal, which defines some of the Mayan world's most refined architectural creations: palaces with extremely high vaults, vaulted passageways and decorations representing fantastic animals, gods and human figures.



Elsie Montiel

Detail of the masks of Chaac covering the Codz Pop, Kabah.



The Codz Pop building at Kabah.

THE PUUC CITIES

The Puuc's more than 7,500 square kilometers contain more than 100 ancient cities of different sizes and levels of architectural importance. The most noteworthy are Kabah, Sayil, Labná and, of course, Uxmal, the region's archaeological gem.

Kabah ("harsh rule")

This city is the second largest in the region and home to one of the most beautiful Puuc buildings: the Codz Pop ("rolled-up mat"), outstanding for its giant baroque Chaac masks, depicting the big-nosed god of rain, which in some parts of the building were placed floor-to-ceiling, creating a



Kabah's Great Palace.



Elsie Montiel

Labná's Arch, an icon of the region.

veritable sculptural complex. Also worth a visit at this site is the Great Palace and the arch at the beginning of a great *sacbé* that joins the city with Nohpat and Uxmal to the north.

Sayil ("place of ants")

Near Kabah is Sayil, nestled in a small, rich, agricultural valley. Perhaps for this reason, it was very large, reaching 10,000 inhabitants at its height around the eighth century. In Sayil is one of the largest Puuc constructions: the palace, with its three levels and 99 rooms, which were probably used both for living and administration. Here, the visitor should also see the Look-out, a beautiful building in the proto-Puuc style, erected on a basement and crowned by a very well preserved roof comb.

Labná ("old house")

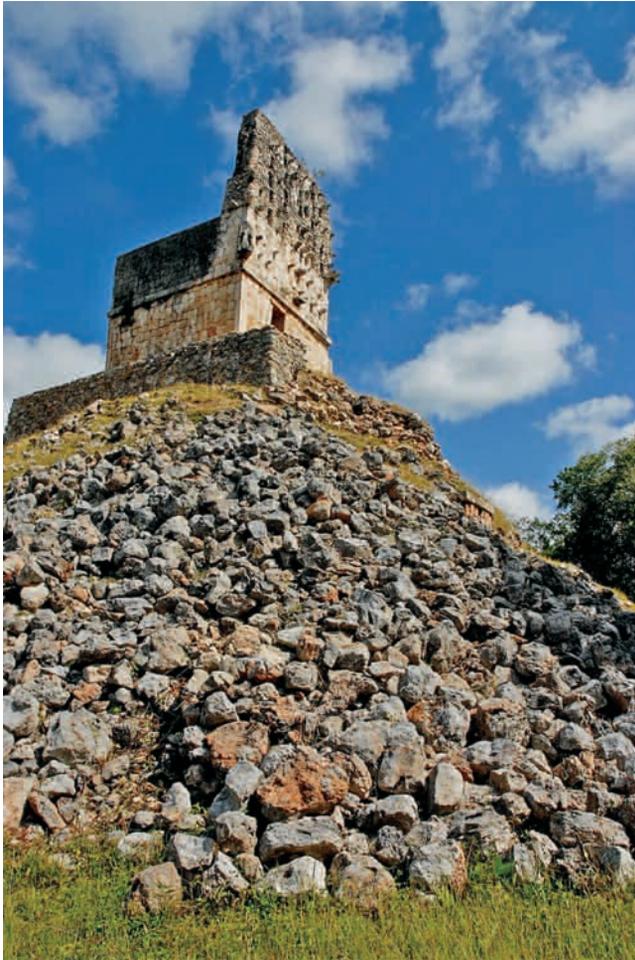
A short distance away in the Uitz region is another small city boasting notable buildings like the Look-out (sharing not only the name with the one in Sayil, but also similar traits) and the palace, a great construction built on a wide platform, which is very interesting because it combines elements from different Puuc architectural phases. The two buildings are connected by a *sacbé* which must have been used for sacred processions and socio-political activities.

Labná's decorated arch with its exquisite stone mosaics has become an icon in the region.



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Detail of Labná's Arch stone mosaics.



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The Look-out at Labná.



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Detail at the bottom of the Palace, Labná.

Labná also has an arch decorated with stylized giant masks and exquisite stone mosaics that have become iconic to the region and are reproduced in many other places. Only four kilometers away is Xlapak where the visitor can see beautiful examples of Puuc mosaic architecture.

Uxmal ("three-times built")

This city is exceptional not only for its size and because it is surrounded by a defensive wall, but for the beauty of its constructions, a sample of the mastery of the site's architects.

Perhaps the best known building in Uxmal is the Soothsayer's Temple, according to legend, built by a little person in a single night. It stands on a great basement and its façade is decorated with stone mosaics. The Nuns' Quadrangle, with its great patio and surrounding constructions, confused



Rubén Vázquez

Labná's Palace combines elements of different Puuc styles.



by Spanish chroniclers with a convent, is one of the best examples of the most classical Puuc style given its decoration with great masks of Chaac, replicas of Mayan houses, sculptures and serpents. Also of enormous interest are the Ball Game Court, the House of the Tortoises, the House of the Doves, the arch that marks the beginning of the *sacbé* to Kabah and the Pyramid of the Old Woman.

But undoubtedly the architectural jewel in Uxmal's crown is the Governor's Palace, considered by many to be the pinnacle of Mayan architectural achievement due to its perfect proportions, stone filigree decorations and even its astronomical implications linked to the planet Venus. It may have been the residence of the great ruler Chan Chaac, who in approximately the tenth century turned the city into the only rival of the mighty Chichén Itzá, at that time a powerful political center.



Detail of the façade of the Palace, Sayil.

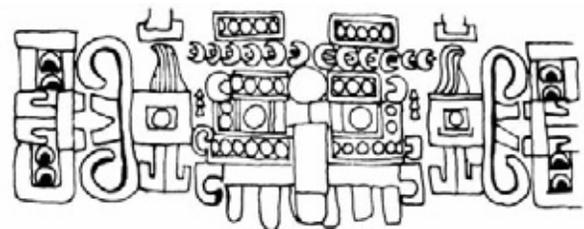
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Sayil's Palace, one of the largest Puuc constructions.

The palace in Sayil is one of the largest Puuc constructions with three levels and 99 rooms, probably used both for living and administration.



The Puuc region still holds many secrets; some of its beautiful cities are barely beginning to be explored. Every time there are new finds, it becomes clearer and clearer that this is one of the regions where the Mayas most strikingly expressed their religion and political activities, reflected in marvelous art. Without a doubt, this is a legacy to be proud of. **MM**



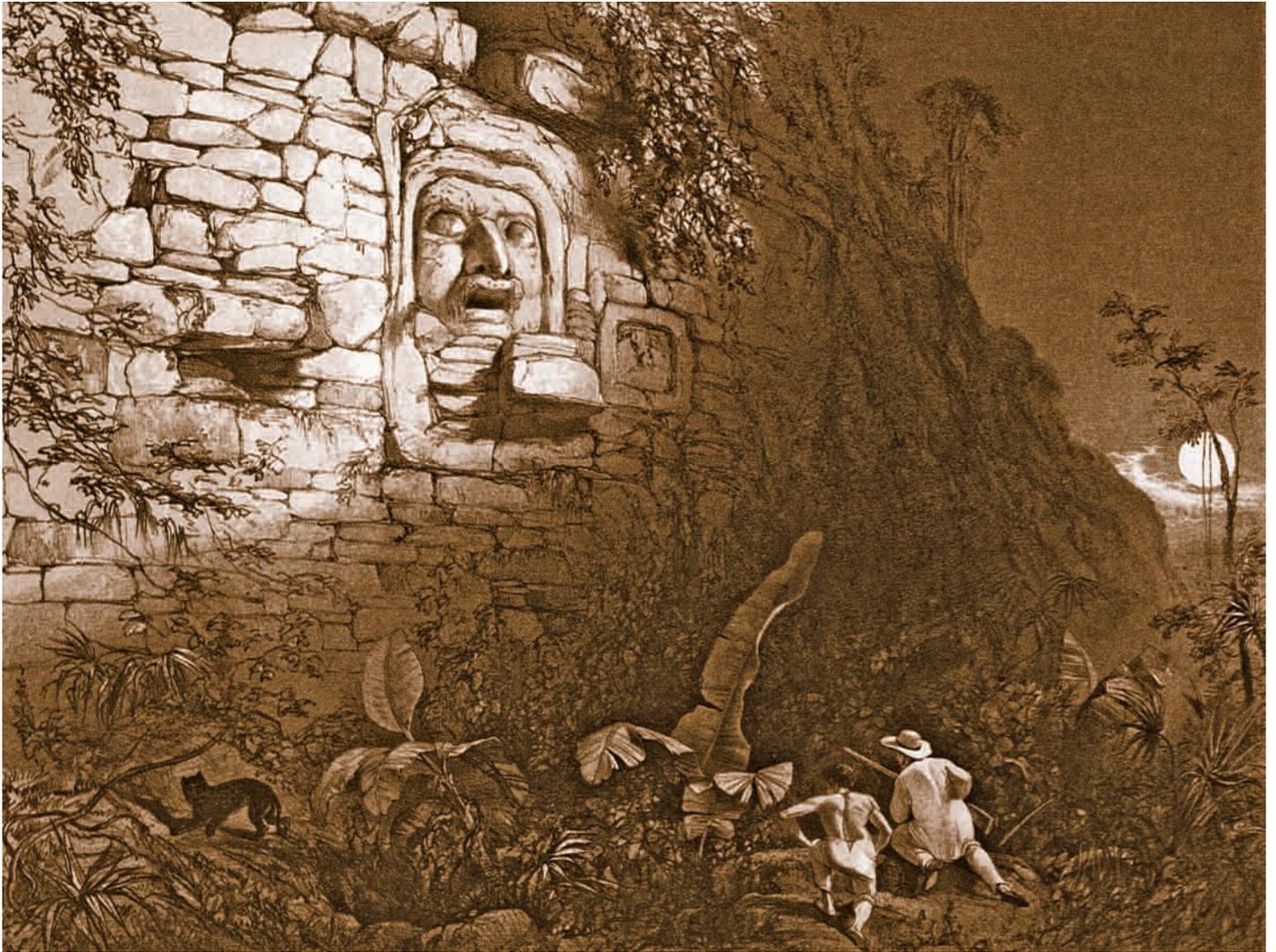
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Detail of the façade of the Palace, Sayil.



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Side view of the Soothsayer's Temple.



Notes on *Izamal* City of Three Cultures

Luis Millet Cámara*

HISTORY OF THE SITE

The remains of the ancient city of Izamal go beyond the limits of the modern town. The site has been continually inhabited for more than 2500 years, from the mid-pre-classical era, between 700 and 450 B.C., until today. To preserve the cultural vestiges of this long, continuous occupation, Yucatán natives have called Izamal “the city of three cultures.”

The greatest activity during pre-Hispanic times took place in the early and late classical periods, when the most important buildings and the extensive network of roads or *sacbé*s were built, certainly reflecting the city’s political and economic importance.

The central part of the ancient city, although severely affected by the passage of time, still preserves many remains of the imposing buildings that were distributed around its great plazas. The biggest faced north to south and was 300 meters long and 200 meters wide. On each side were two tem-



Friar Diego de Landa.

The convent was founded in 1549, thanks to the efforts of Friar Diego de Landa; construction was directed by the distinguished architect, Friar Juan de Mérida.

* Archaeologist at the Yucatán National Institute of Anthropology and History Center.

Photo previous page: Frederick Catherwood’s sketch of the giant stucco mask found in a Kabul building in 1842. The mask has since disappeared. Taken from *Litografía y grabado en el México del XIX*, vol. I (Mexico City: Telmex, 1993), p. 206.

ples called Kabul and Itzamatul, dedicated to the wise deity and benefactor Itzamná. On the northern side was a building known as Kinich Kak Moo, dedicated to the god of the sun.

Chronicles mention the existence of four roads or *sacbé*s pointing in the four directions of the compass, but archae-



Photos by Elsie Montiel



The Franciscan monastery built on the basement of the P'ap'hol-chaak, the highest building of what was the pre-Hispanic city.

ological research has only uncovered two of them: the one leading west that ends at the Aké site is the longest (32 kilometers), and is 12 meters wide and almost a full meter above ground level. Although shorter, the road facing south that ends near the modern town of Kantunil, is no less a great work of engineering.

Izamal must have been in frank decline during the early post-classical period, which must have had an impact on the growing presence of the Itzaes in the region. The books of Chilam Balam mention that Izamal was conquered by this group that hailed from Chichén Itzá, probably around the final classical period (A.D. 800-1000). By the time of the Spanish conquest, the main buildings must have been abandoned, although we know that around the central area there were still small villages subject to the local strongman or *cacique*, Ah Kin Chel.

The Franciscan monastery that is today a symbol of the city was built on the basement located on the south side of the great plaza. Most certainly picking Izamal to build it was related to its legendary fame as a sanctuary for one of the main Mayan gods. During the entire colonial period and even up

until today, this monastery has been a focus for religious pilgrimages in the Yucatán peninsula because of its famous image of Our Lady of Izamal. The city still preserves many dwellings from the colonial period and the nineteenth century; the custom is to paint them yellow, giving the city its distinctive look.

BUILDINGS AND LEGENDS

Kinich Kak Moo. This is the largest building on the site and in the entire Yucatán peninsula: an enormous, 200-meter-wide, 34-meter-high square. It has a large terrace with rounded corners surrounding the entire building. Atop the terrace is a wall with a slight talud that held up an enormous molding in the front, some of which has been preserved, particularly next to the stairways. It has six large stairways: two on each of the east and west sides, one on the north side and the main stairway on the south side. The latter uses large rocks as stepping stones. On this platform is a temple with graded bodies built between A.D. 1000 and A.D. 1200, while the great base-



The monastery's atrium is surrounded by a series of extraordinary arches.

ment was raised around the year A.D. 500. Diego de Landa's sixteenth-century description of the building corresponds very precisely to the vestiges found during the excavations.

According to ancient tradition, this building was dedicated to the sun, a god who came down every day in the form of a fire macaw to pick up his offerings. It is also said that when Itzamná died, his body was divided up and buried in different parts of the site and that the Kinich Kak Moo was built over the place where his heart was laid to rest.

On the eastern side of the basement is the entryway to a small cave that tradition says is the ancient place of worship where a twin sister of the monastery's virgin lives. Each year for the December 8 festivities, mysteriously, the Virgin of the Cave takes the place of her sister in the monastery, and the pilgrims visit and pray both there and on top of the pre-Hispanic building.

El Itzamatul. This building is on the east side of what was the great plaza of Izamal. Recent excavations show that there were at least three stages to its construction; the oldest is a one-story, nearly square, 21-meter-high building. The basement has terraced, talud-style walls; recessed, rounded corners; and a stairway on each side. The top constructions no longer exist. In the last stage, this building was immersed in a large platform

more than 100 meters on each side, of which only the eastern side has been relatively well preserved. The oldest stage of construction is from the same period as the basement of Kinich Kak Moo, dating it around the year A.D. 500.

El Kabul. This was another building dedicated to Itzamná on the west side of the old plaza and, apparently, it was the starting point for the *sacbé* that united Izamal with Ake. It has an enormous basement with two structures on top; it was particularly noteworthy for its giant stucco mask which the English sketch-artist Frederick Catherwood drew in 1842. In 1886, French explorer Désiré Charnay did some archaeological work in this building and found other stucco pieces. He also illustrated his work with an engraving of an enormous mask found to one side of the main stairway; unfortunately all these sculptures have disappeared over time.

El Habuc. This group of constructions to the south of the ancient plaza has a basement measuring almost 90 meters on each side and four meters in height; on top of it are some buildings forming a quadrangle. Archaeological evidence indicates that it may have been built between A.D. 250 and A.D. 400, making it one of the city's oldest constructions. On the west side is a building with a megalithic-stone stairway leading to a series

of rooms with walls made of stones of the same size, illustrating the engineering capabilities of that time.

Chaltunha. This building in the middle of a highly populated residential area has a large basement measuring 60 meters on each side and three meters in height. On top is a temple of terraced bodies and platforms.

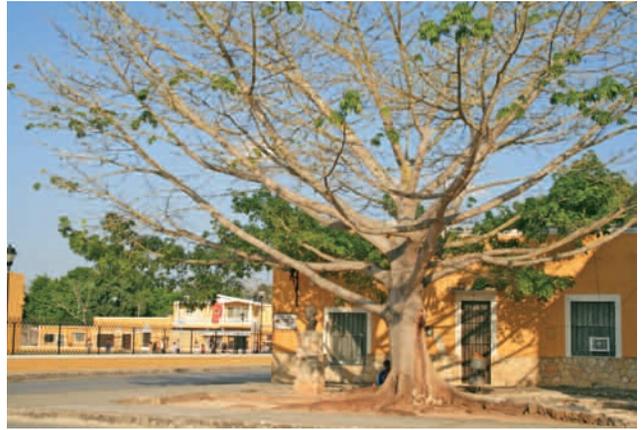
El Conejo. The vestiges of this structure are located to the east of Izamal. Pillage has left its different stages of construction exposed; the large stones in the walls of the oldest part of the building are of particular interest.

The Franciscan Monastery. On the south side of the great plaza was the P'ap'hol-cháak. According to the chronicles, this was the highest building in the pre-Hispanic city. Today, only some parts of the old walls from that time are visible. The Franciscans took advantage of the fact that this basement was surrounded by several plazas to build one of the most important monasteries in the Yucatán peninsula there, giving the lay-out of the colonial city its very own flavor and great presence to the building itself.



View of the Kinich Kak Moo from the back of the monastery.

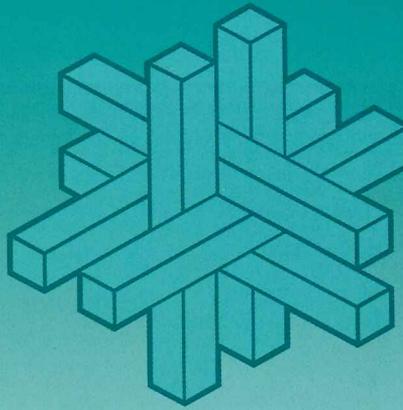
During the colonial period and even up until today, this monastery has been a focus for religious pilgrimages because of the fame of its image of Our Lady of Izamal.



Founded in 1549, construction work began very rapidly thanks to the efforts of Friar Diego de Landa and directed by the distinguished architect Friar Juan de Mérida. By 1562, most of the building had been finished. Three broad ramps led to a vast atrium with a *posa* chapel in each of its four corners and with access to the church, the “Indian” chapel (also known as an open chapel), the convent with its high and low cloisters and a large orchard and vegetable garden irrigated by a well.

The church boasts a simple Renaissance door, but the rest of its façade was changed at the end of the colonial period and the old “Indian” chapel was transformed into the Third Order Chapel. Valuable mural paintings were recently restored, outstanding among which are the ones on the doorway and the baptismal font.

The beautifully proportioned nave ends in a chancel covered with vaults carved with bows and ribbons, which contains the altar of the Immaculate Conception, a much-revered sculpture that according to tradition was brought by Friar Diego de Landa from Guatemala. In the seventeenth century, two long portals were added, uniting the *posa* chapels and the Virgin’s chamber, noteworthy because of their great arches and the two buttresses supporting them. The atrium’s extraordinary series of arches, the church’s classical proportions and the beautiful view that can be taken in from the high Virgin’s chamber make this a must for visitors to this stunning city. **MM**

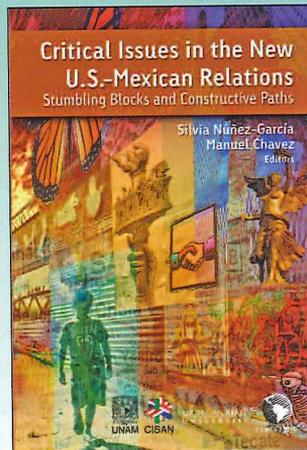


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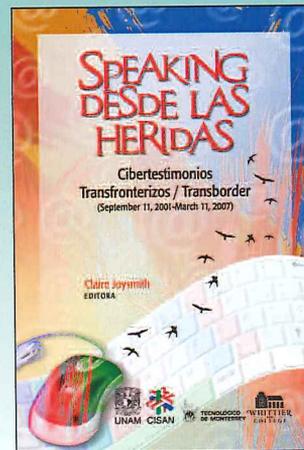
p u b l i c a t i o n s

**Critical Issues in the New U.S.-Mexico Relations
Stumbling Blocks and Constructive Paths**

Silvia Núñez-García and Manuel Chávez, editors



This work's multidisciplinary approach provides a broad spectrum of analysis: it not only deals with issues that have caused frequent tension on the bilateral agenda such as migration and the economic impact of maquiladora plants, but also other, more recent topics. Among these are national security, the adjustments the international situation demands of both countries' foreign policy and the role of the mass media. It also covers contemporary issues like the emergence of new transnational actors and the regulation of genetically modified organisms.

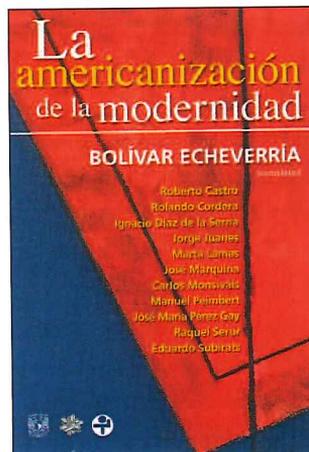


**Speaking desde las heridas
Cibertestimonios
Transfronterizos / Transborder
September 11,
2001-March 11, 2007**
Claire JoySmith, editor

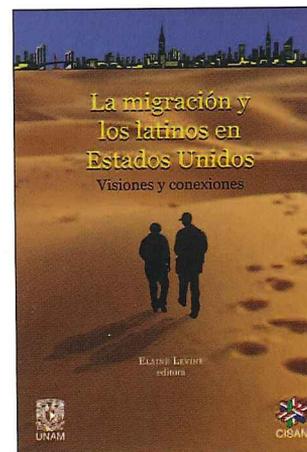
After the 9/11 attacks came turmoil and desolation, and later, reflection. This book takes a critical, creative, razor-sharp, profound look at the results of the latter. It offers the reader reflections and retrospectives distilled over a period of five to six years, using the very malleable, unpredictable discursive method of testimonies.

La americanización de la modernidad

Bolívar Echeverría, compiler



This book brings the reader articles dealing with something both the general public and academic circles are very concerned about: a certain "distress" about what seems to be the unsustainable nature of the way people live today. The kind of civilization that creates this distress is "capitalist modernity," in its specific form of "Americanization."



La migración y los latinos en Estados Unidos.

Visiones y conexiones
Elaine Levine, editor

This book answers questions on a topic we know very little about: what happens to migrants once they cross the border? What are their lives like? What is their work like? What problems do they face? What are their options and plans for the future? A many-sided vision that examines the vicissitudes of their journey and the conditions of their stay there as well as of their possible return. Outstanding academics from both Mexico and the United States with extensive experience in fieldwork and information from original sources make it an undeniable contribution.

For further information contact

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Julio Galán

Painting as Diary

Isabel Morales Quezada*



Piano without a Pianist, 130 cm x 190 cm, 2000, private collection (oil on canvas).

*I see myself for a moment in a mirror.
I have several, and one of them screams as soon
as I stand in front of it.
The storm gets angrier. A coffer full
(emeralds, diamonds, rubies... more diamonds).
Can it be mine?
JULIO GALÁN*

Julio Galán once said “painting is writing in my diary.” Yes, Galán wrote by painting; he created a universe for himself and had no hesitations about showing it on his canvases. Contrasts are an integral part of that universe; the artist seems to open himself up completely to the eyes of the viewer, but he is so frank that most of the time it is incomprehensible. His works reflect his private world to such a

* Staff writer.

Galan's works reflect his private world to such a degree that we can barely perceive in them the infinite mystery of his mind.

degree that we can barely perceive in them the infinite mystery of his mind.

Everything brings us back to him. There is no escape... one after another, his works show us the painter's passions and obsessions, to the point of chaos: a thousand different faces, disguised, masked. But they are all him! The viewer encounters a personality that advertises itself through art. This is the overriding fact of the series of paintings and videos in the exhibition "Thinking of You," on display from July to November 2008 at Mexico City's Old San Ildefonso College.

Polemics and authenticity are two central characteristics of Galán's work. Although it seems disguised, transformed, in almost all his paintings, the constant but also different repetition of his face, his body and even a particular expression, like the gaze that can be guessed at behind the expressive eyes of a horse, is at bottom the expression of his thinking. Galán's words invade each of his works and echo there:

Sometimes I try to please people so they'll stop asking me silly questions, but I'm tired of them saying that I am always disguising myself and posturing. I'm just the same when I'm alone; at night sometimes I disguise myself a hundred times, and then I do fashion shows for my dolls...I even seem complicated to myself. I create labyrinths, jumbles, clues and obstacles with my clothing and my painting. I know that I don't



Untitled (*Death*), 190 cm x 130 cm, 2003, private collection (oil on canvas).

look the same from one portrait to another, from one day to another, from one moment to another, from one way of painting to another, but ever since I was five years old, I've always been this way to survive. And finally, I don't want people to be able to pin me down: I like that mystery.



Portrait of *María Elisa-Romo* 130.2 cm x 188.9 cm, 2001, Mauricio Jasso Collection (oil, acrylic and mixed techniques on canvas).

The labyrinths, obstacles and jumbles Galán is referring to are also transmitted to the viewer. He appears on the scene most of the time; we know he is the protagonist of the story; and yet, little by little, the details of the canvas reveal a combination of dissimilar, contrasting elements that force us to stop and penetrate a labyrinthine, confused, enigmatic space.

It is his life that is the enigma, both its stages and the feelings that always went with him. In Galán's case, childhood, youth and maturity overlap; they do not seem to follow each other chronologically, but rather to live together freely, and this shows in his work. His paintings are a kind of tiny Aleph, as Borges described him in his

story, where it is not the universe and the world where we all live that is portrayed, but the world Galán lived in. This is why before trying to describe his work, perhaps I should say, like Borges in his story, “What my eyes saw was simultaneous: what I transcribed, was successive, because language is like that. However, I will be able to pick up some of it.”

Galán is aware of the world around him and he adapts it for himself. Although his creations revolve around his personality and image, he never stops including references to the culture where he developed, particularly religious culture. With these references that could be considered alien to the space he inhabited —the space of his dolls, disguises and make-up— he appears, and paints himself or adds symbols of his personality to appropriate some images. Carlos Monsiváis uses the figure of Narcissus to explain Galán’s tendency to find himself in other images:

Galán... is a passionate devotee of self-portraits, those *ad lib* modifications of Narcissus’s pool. He (Narcissus) ceaselessly

looks at his own face to see if his reflection has arrived, not so much because he is in love with himself —which perhaps he is— but because he wants to capture his alternate image and recompose it, decorate it and make it suffer or force it to adore the original. To innovate the reflection: subvert the origin.

The artist recreates the image of the Last Supper including himself in it, painting in a Christ child with his own face peeking out from the childish features, painting the adult Jesus Christ but dressing him in clothing like Galán’s. The artist’s face transformed in other images reveals his proximity to Catholicism and at the same time the distance he puts between that and his own doctrine.

Some of his works are inspired in *ex-votos*, or tin devotional folk paintings, done to thank the Virgin Mary or some saint for a miracle that saved the life of the painter or cured some disease as had been fervently prayed for, and that generally describe in a drawing or painting the scene of the miracle. Once again, the mischievous child Galán uses some

His paintings are a kind of tiny Aleph, where it is not the universe and the world where we all live that is portrayed, but the world Galán lived in.



Portrait of Elizabeth, 190 cm x 260 cm, 2000, private collection (oil and collage on canvas).



I Want to Die, 132 cm x 187 cm, 1985, private collection (oil on canvas).

of these elements to create his own “miracles”: the bright, contrasting colors and even the wear on the tin that they are painted on, which he depicts by scratching the paint on the canvas.

Although apparently the priority is the need to communicate his interior life, Galán also seeks to establish his connections to Mexico. His *I Want to Die* depicts the Mexican flag and the national crest behind his arm; then, the crest is replaced by his initials (JG) in other works. The colors of the flag remain, but Galán reaffirms his individuality by preferring his name: he is his own homeland.

Animals are also a recurring motif, almost always caricatured or included as though they were only disguises behind which the painter can hide or peek over. In one of his canvases, Galán appears as an adult accompanied by a bear similar to the one we would find in any children’s story, and in another, he is hidden under a gorilla suit, betrayed only by his eyes. The birds that top his head in some of his paintings decorate him but are also the bearers of his feelings—one of them is weeping—and the words that accompany him allude to immortality: “Death will die when it goes on to eternal life.”

Although his creations revolve around his personality and image, he never stops including references to the culture where he developed, particularly religious culture.

Galán’s personality is reaffirmed in every painting and the photographs gathered for the San Ildefonso show complete our attempt to understand the artist by introducing us to the experience that his work inevitably brings us. The use of certain materials stuck on the canvases as a collage, like costume jewelry stones, colored feathers, ribbons and belts, allude to the fantasy of his own taste in clothing, shown in the photographs of him wearing the same outfits he is wearing in his paintings.

The photographs, the painter’s words, the videos and the testimonies from people who knew him, reveal the indissoluble link between Galán’s personal life and his painting. His great friend Guillermo Sepúlveda wrote:

His world, saturated with objects that continually moved from place to place created stage-like environments with extrava-

gant mixtures of European antiques, porcelain, crystal, mirrors, furniture, Mexican objects and traditionally outfitted cowboy *charros*, fake pre-Columbian fragments, plastic toys, stuffed, mounted animals, religious items; stamps, different representations of Christ and the Christ child, saints, and, as a centerpiece, an enormous collection of hundreds of dolls, each with its own name; these were really the legitimate inhabitants of the house.

This is the description of the artist's home and studio, but it could well be the description of one of his works, or at least a list of items depicted in one of them. Galán also represents a world of contrasts: fantasy and reality, angst and serenity, childhood and maturity, the interior universe and the external world. He transmits all this to his viewers, sometimes simultaneously, though in a fragmented, difficult-to-understand way.

Francesco Pellizzi, another of Galán's friends and a critic of his work, explains: "What we have before us are traces



Untitled (*Vase*), 190 cm x 130 cm, 2003, private collection (oil on canvas).



Untitled (*Mexican Charro Cowboy*), 2001, private collection (oil on canvas).

of barely communicable 'states of being.'" The artist expresses himself, but it is not his intention to build logical or comprehensible accounts for the viewer. He does not seem to be interested in being understood, either in his life or in his work as an artist. There are no explanations in his painting, and yet, there are constants that make it possible to get a glimpse at the complexity he embodied.

Subversion prevails, both in the composition of his canvases and in the materials he uses, and, above all, in the way in which this relates to a personality completely without shame. The religious elements and the presence of a childhood governed by a sense of play mixed with love for his parents, particularly for his mother, exist side-by-side with the feelings of anxiety and happiness—almost euphoria—that always existed inside him.

The viewer will always find in Galán an artist who has no hesitation about showing his contradictions, his origins and his memories, his manias and obsessions: his way of life. The mysteries found along the way are not always decipherable but are proof of the freedom of expression he never renounced. **MM**



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Year 3, number 2

ENSAYOS / ESSAYS

The Institutions of NAFTA
Greg Anderson

Track 2 Innovation Agents in North America: The View from Mexico
Camelia Nicoleta Tigau

ANÁLISIS DE ACTUALIDAD / CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

El excepcionalismo estadounidense y los derechos humanos: los retos de Obama tras el desastre de George W. Bush
Ariadna Estévez López

Amor de lejos: la emigración de México a Estados Unidos
Samuel Schmidt

CONTRIBUCIÓN ESPECIAL / SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION

Las patentes reales a sir Humphrey Gilbert y sir Walter Raleigh

REFLEXIONES / REFLECTIONS

ENTREVISTA / INTERVIEW

El feminismo en América del Norte: la perspectiva de una activista / intelectual mexicana. Entrevista con Marta Lamas
por José Luis Valdés Ugalde, Nattie Golubov e Ignacio Díaz de la Serna

NOTAS CRÍTICAS / CRITICAL NOTES

Altermundismo: ¿sociedad civil global o nuevo movimiento antisistémico?
Víctor Batta Fonseca

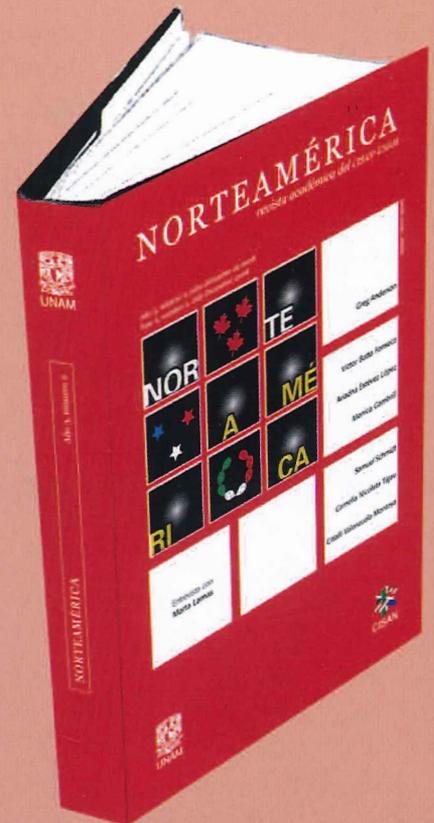
Causas y remedios de la crisis financiera
Monica Gambrill

APUNTES BIBLIOGRÁFICOS / BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

La migración México-Estados Unidos
Citlalli Valenzuela Montoya

CRONOLOGÍA / CHRONOLOGY

Cronología de América del Norte (enero-junio de 2008)
Argentino F. Mendoza Chan y Socorro García González



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Obama and Mexico, Security Forever! Why Not?

José Luis Valdés-Ugalde*



Jim Young/Reuters

Mexico is having a very hard time trying to deal with its insecurity problems, and President Obama will certainly find it difficult to deal with the serious security threats coming out of Mexico. We can accept the fact that the current administration has taken on what may be the most titanic task in the history of the Mexican state in its fight against the scourge of organized crime. However, faced with the historic danger that the impunity and complicity of those formerly and currently responsible for lending a blind eye to the aims, actions and instincts of the lowest individuals and organizations in the country has put us in, now the state is forced to race against time to show that its sovereignty has not failed, and that as a result, we can, as a nation, aspire to be taken seriously as a partner on the bilateral agenda and in the global arena. The question is not yet whether we are a failed state or not, but if ours is a success-

ful or failed national project. We have before us evidence that in Mexico a viable, sustainable national project has not finished solidifying. Despite their very possible exaggeration, and even the blunders of recent U.S. government reports—see, among others, the Justice Department’s National Drug Intelligence Center’s National Drug Threat Assessment and the CRS Report for Congress: Mexico’s Drug Cartels—they tell us that the prevailing perception among both the U.S. public and decision-makers is that Mexico has gone off the rails in many of the vital areas of national life. And as a result, our mutual security is in danger.

And this is precisely what may reduce the maneuvering room of any well-intentioned politician in Washington who wants to support some kind of way out of the Mexican mess—which is also the United States’ mess. Mexico matters, and it matters even more because its situation represents a real threat to U.S. and Canadian security. And it is here that we find a paradoxical contrast if we consider the recent US\$100-million reduction in the financial assistance provided by the Merida Initiative. Thus, if the Obama administra-

* Director of the UNAM Center for Research on North America (CISAN).



The prevailing perception among both the U.S. public and decision-makers is that Mexico has gone off the rails in many of the vital areas of national life. And as a result, our mutual security is in danger.

tion wants to preserve its national security perimeter—not to mention managing border security—it will have to ask itself with no dissimulation whatsoever to what extent Mexico is a risk for U.S. security. It will have to urgently take both the domestic and external measures needed to prevent a greater escalation of the organized crime threat. These measures cover everything including detecting and dealing with what 2007 estimates put at more than 35 million people who use illicit drugs or abuse medications. Also it will have to confront at home the violent crime plaguing the big U.S. cities, perpetrated by bands of criminals, many of whose members are representatives of the Mexican cartels. And of course a clever strategy will be needed to fight the possession and trafficking of high-powered weapons. There is no need to say that in light of the aforementioned reduction of funds, any initiative has to be optimized on all fronts, including the financial front. Thus the Mérida Initiative's less than US\$1.4 billion offers a poor financial and political solution if we just compare it to the US\$11 billion the United States spends monthly on its failed war in Iraq.

The Mexican government, for its part, far from hunkering down into a defensive, paranoid position as seems to be happening, will have to truly accept the gravity of our crisis and begin to vigorously attack and punish the complicity and corruption of mayors, governors, police and other local authorities on a national level, but mainly on a regional level, which is where the cartels' power breeds. This includes thinking seriously and responsibly about founding a strong, professionalized national police system. Together with this, it is also necessary, of course, to accept the urgency of seriously and thoroughly cleaning up the state institutions today penetrated by the cartels. All this demands that Mexico have an efficient political intelligence unit, since today it has not been proven that the enormous budget that has been earmarked for it is justified. Lastly—and this is truly a towering task awaiting the Mexican state—our government must propose a security and integration agenda debated nationally and as a result of a national consensus that, while its own, must be constructed jointly with and with reference to the United

States, and must be profoundly multidimensional. In that sense, it is very probable that the Merida Initiative has already been surpassed by current events, as can be seen in the aforementioned Washington reports. I think that this will be the only way of responding to the narrative and cutting off in practice the U.S. government's regrettable conclusion—not so very far from our reality—that says, "Any descent by Mexico into chaos would demand an American response based on the serious implications for homeland security alone."¹ It is Obama's task to inform Calderón very soon to exactly which response they are referring.

Now, the Mexican government may not have heard about this yet, but the Obama administration may well be waiting to act toward Mexico until the latter comes up with its own constructive, comprehensive, relatively serious agenda that makes sense and bypasses the usual Mexican lamentations. We cannot deny in this area the luxuries Mexico has given itself every time it has a chance to reshuffle its bilateral agenda with Washington. Now is when it must be done. Los Pinos and Tlatelolco need to invert their priorities and move ahead of Obama in proposing a coherent bilateral framework of cooperation to exert pressure on the new president for him to act in a coordinated way to deal with this grim common problem.² It is no exaggeration to argue that the urgent need for an efficient response is the result of what is perhaps the greatest crisis in public life since the Mexican Revolution.

It should also be mentioned that this urgent situation becomes even more pressing when we see how differently Canada and the United States figure out their common positions on common problems. At the end of his short visit to Ottawa last February 19, President Obama and Prime Minister Harper held a joint news conference which showed a clear empathy between the two leaders. It was significant how fast their reflexes were when they talked about the future of their societies in the framework of their belonging to NAFTA: with few mentions of Mexico, both were pleased to have so many points in common. For example, the Canadian government emphasized that "more than 7 million American jobs directly depend on trade with Canada."³ Also noteworthy was Harper's strong statement that "threats to the United States are threats to Canada. There is no such thing as a threat to the national security of the United States which does not represent a direct threat to this country."⁴ That is, they posed the defense of security as a common issue intimately linked to their different domestic situations, and they looked to the future in an affirmative way, proposing viable

solutions to each other. If the U.S. and Canada apparently forgot about Mexico in their stands on security, perhaps they should be reminded that Mexico is central to the equation for guaranteeing regional security.

This visit makes us reformulate the questions we have always asked of Mexico in the context of the fact that the bilateralization of the trilateral relationship occurs especially at moments of crisis, and that Canada takes better advantage of it in its relationship with the United States: is this the result of Mexico's passiveness because of its inability to explain its viability as a credible participant in the dialogue? Or, on the contrary, is it Ottawa's opportune handling of its relative advantages in its relationship with Washington when it realizes Mexico's weakness and uses it in its favor? Or, finally, is it just evidence of the continuation of the overall asymmetry that has characterized the three partners' relationship?

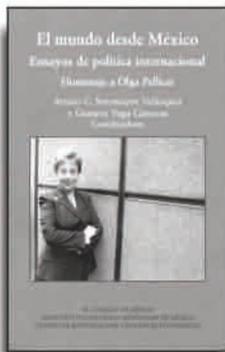
In any case, it would seem that we cannot save ourselves from the periodic curse of bilateralism when Mexico needs it least, but also when it is most difficult to defend the trilat-

eral character of the North American Free Trade Agreement using convincing arguments. If this is going to be the eternal fate of our trade partnership with the United States and Canada, Obama probably does not need to review NAFTA and marginalize Mexico to third place, strengthening his alliance with Canada. **MM**

NOTES

- ¹ United States Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment. Challenges and Implications for the Future Joint Force*, available on line at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2008/joe2008_ifcom.pdf.
- ² Los Pinos is the name of the Mexican president's official residence and offices, and Tlatelolco is the area where Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Relations has its offices. [Editor's Note.]
- ³ "Obama tackles thorny economic, military issues in Canada trip," *CNN International*, February 19, 2009, available on line at <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/02/19/obama.canada/?iref=hpmostpop>.
- ⁴ "Harper reassures U.S. over border security," *Toronto Star*, February 19, 2009, on line, available at <http://www.thestar.com/News/Canada/article/590482>.

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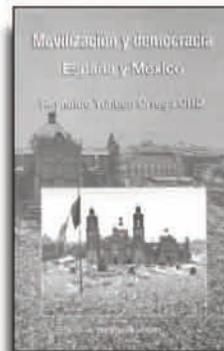
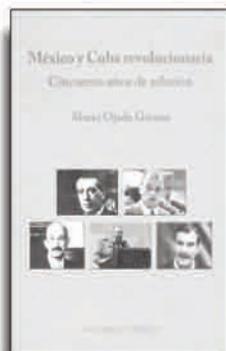


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Rethinking President Obama's Victory and Challenges

Silvia Núñez García*



Jason Reed/Reuters

From the shadows into the light.
From euphoria to a forced landing.

President Barack Obama's resounding victory has already resolved two questions that nourished the United States' unprecedented electoral process: What happened? And why did it happen? These questions were answered by a kaleidoscope of voices led by a broad spectrum of academics, politicians and public opinion-makers, including everyone from the most famous editorialists to talk show celebrities.

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However, this article has the aim of taking this reflection about this historical cycle even further, seeking an explanation of the "hows" of these events; the underpinnings of the forms, considering them a valid intellectual concern because they are part of the analysis of the new administration's prospects.

One means for exploring possible answers is looking at the foundational idea of "frontier" that accompanied the origins of the United States as a nation, sketched by historian Frederick Jackson Turner in the nineteenth century, and still current today.¹ The "frontier" constituted as a civilizing framework, understood as a discontinuous, moving line that gives rise to new identities that demonstrate people's changing views on their culture. It is useful for filling in an analysis of the

recent electoral process when the United States once again reinvented itself. In that process, racial, gender, social class and generational frontiers moved and intersected, including not only prominent political actors, but also ordinary citizens who voted in unprecedented numbers.

The frontiers of race and gender stand out particularly, represented by two figures, Barack Obama and Sarah Palin, since they speak to social minorities' mobility from the periphery to position themselves at the heart of the political debate.² Palin's case merits a separate analysis since the stereotype as a legitimate gender frontier prevailed, disqualifying her as a vice presidential candidate.

Despite the fact that a woman positioned herself in the major leagues of U.S. politics during this campaign, the "politically correct" factor favored Obama's racial identity, black/male; while the criticisms ratcheted up against Palin, white/woman, without any mediation about their "incorrect" content.

THE ELECTION

Despite the long, intense electoral process—more than 20 months—with the most funds raised in the history of the United States—almost US\$1 billion—the pessimistic predictions of it wearing out the electorate were proven wrong. Proof of that are the record number of people who registered to vote and then actually turned out to cast their ballots.

Having had the opportunity to participate as a direct observer of the elections, I saw that part of "American exceptionalism" is that citizens have an entire gamut of options for making their will felt at the ballot box: voting in person, ahead of time or absentee voting, as well as assisted voting to guarantee that the differently abled can exercise their right to vote. There is even something called a provisional vote that allows a citizen to vote even if they do not appear on the registered voters' rolls; these votes are counted after an electoral official investigates the voter's identity.

Even recognizing that electoral norms are specific to each of the 50 states, the versatility for guaranteeing the right to universal suffrage is an admirable parameter that should be considered for countries like Mexico.

The campaigns of John McCain and Barack Obama went in entirely different directions. McCain was incapable of forcing the Republicans to be self-critical, reiterating the idea of "Country First" with no new content, a reflection of a country that emerged from its vertically-narrated history. Obama,



Despite the fact that a woman positioned herself in the major leagues of U.S. politics during this campaign, the "politically correct" factor favored Obama's racial identity: black male.

on the other hand, must reflect on the more than 58 million Americans (46 percent) who did not vote for him.

This number will be one of the challenges that will accompany him during his administration, together with all the others that arise from the grave economic crisis's effects on most Americans' lives, which the new president has offered to gradually deal with. To avoid the spread of the crisis, his bail-out plan includes, among other things, fiscal incentives; increased unemployment benefits; and special protection for small and medium-sized businesses and state and municipal governments. So, the caliber of the short-, medium-, and long-range challenges will involve actions that practically make them politically risky investments for Barack Obama.

In this context, his decision-making capability and firmness of character, together with putting together an efficient, harmonious and highly qualified cabinet, will have to be key pieces in exercising good government. Given that the new president remained very close to people throughout his campaign, his strategy for maintaining that closeness remains to be seen, given the magnitude of the problems he is going to have to deal with in office.

VICTORY AND ITS CONNOTATION

Obama won, setting an undeniable precedent for his country. We can say that the circumstances surrounding his personal history, political career and campaign are distinctive: he is the concretization of the "self-made man" and the result of the relationship between blacks and whites, in addition to being a firm promoter of the potential for partnerships among communities and the construction of social capital. All this makes him the ideal person for a nation whose exceptionalism is confirmed by his arrival in the presidency, making him the most influential person in the world.

Regardless of this, there are still variables to be analyzed in an interdisciplinary framework that would allow us to elucidate the Obama phenomenon. Among these are the participation of the fourth estate (the mass media), the impact of new

technologies on bringing together the Internet-based social networks (Youtube/Facebook) and the study of the interactions among different levels of discourse (image and body language, which ended up identifying each of the two candidates).

There was particular interest in the content of Obama's official web page *vis-à-vis* his campaign strategy, since it showed the scrupulous identification of particular networks of potential voters including more than 20 categories like workers, Latinos, Republicans, rural residents, senior citizens, small business owners, Arab-Americans, the disabled, sports enthusiasts, etc.

One part of it, "Kids for Obama," targeted children 12 and under, using the argument that it was "a great way to introduce [kids] to politics," inviting them to join the Democratic candidate's campaign—a move that would have been seriously controversial in Mexican elections. Among the activities promoted for children were Obama "T-shirt Thursdays"; asking children to accompany an adult to vote on election day and to tell that adult that a vote for Obama was a vote for them; or writing letters to local newspapers explaining why Obama should be president.

In conclusion, in the dialectic of history, the failed presidency headed by a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant ended up being the main thing that gave rise to the first Afro-American president of the United States. The elections that swept Barack Obama into office were a demonstration of participatory democracy sustained in an inclusive, transparent, highly competitive process.

Moving ahead now from hope to the consolidation of a political leadership will require filling the ideas with substance. If Obama managed to transmit in his campaign that,

among other things, U.S. democracy can be transformed into a system of more horizontal relations to keep the Washington bureaucrats or the Wall Street speculators at bay, it is now the charismatic leader's turn to become a leader who develops, that is, one who listens, weighs and analyzes to give his public policy proposals effective content. This will in turn have an impact on the scale of values, attitudes and beliefs that are what will really make it possible to change the face of the United States, based on inclusion, social justice and the promotion of peace and tolerance.

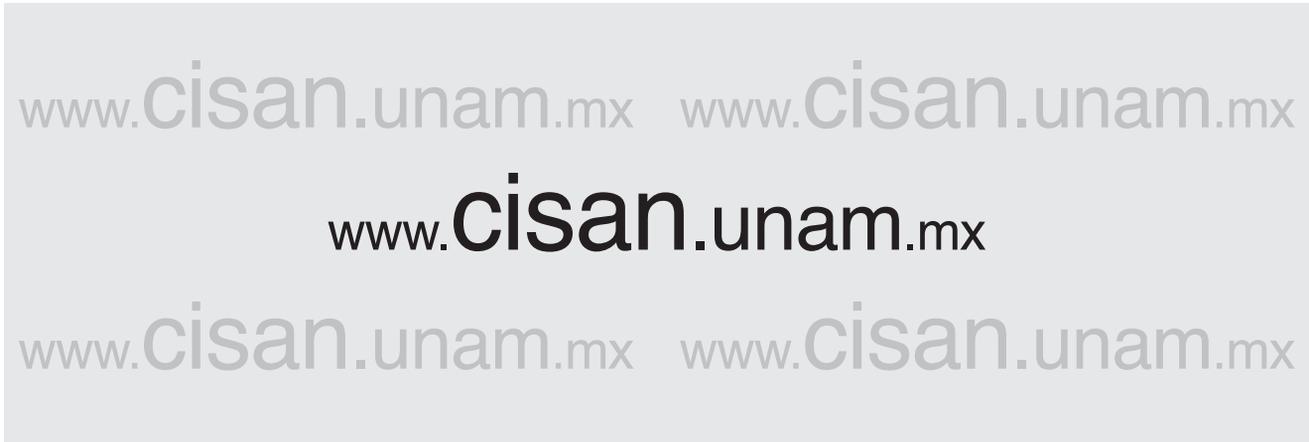
The transcendental nature of this historic moment lies in the recognition of the victory of the American people themselves, who demonstrated great civic commitment reflected in respect for their institutions. Obama has become a phenomenon, paradoxically favored by the negative trends in society and the economy that are eroding politics, closely identified with corruption in the public eye.

Bailing out politics, which requires new democratic vitality as well as social realignment, will create the foundations for the United States' beginning a new cycle. However, only in the future will we be able to analyze whether the nation has really left behind what Noam Chomsky years ago called the de-politization of its socio-political consensus. **MM**

NOTES

¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, Chapter 1 (Charleston, sc: BiblioBazaar, 2008). Originally published in 1920.

² This is why I am omitting Hillary Clinton, who has a long political career behind her.



Obama and Mexico New Paths of Hope

Leonardo Curzio*

Lamy Downing/Reuters



On November 4, 2008, in Obama's acceptance speech in Chicago, he said something that moved his fellow citizens and the world: the American dream was in danger, and the response of a majority was that, regardless of racial, socio-economic and gender differences, the United States was betting on giving that dream new impetus and on providing world leadership.

The social base that gave him the victory had opened up a space for hope. The majority of practically all social groups except white Protestants supported the Democratic candidate. Hispanics, who had favored Senator Clinton more in the primaries, finally voted for the first Afro-American with serious possibilities of winning.¹

Outside the United States, Obama has sparked hope among many that the world can change for the better, and

Mexico is no exception. The climate of hope that his win has created is inversely proportionate to the profound disappointment that George W. Bush's Republican administration created for Mexico's democratic governments. The political experience of alternation in power after so many years of Institutional Revolutionary Party administrations was literally ignored by the Republican government as an opportunity to reduce the traditional mistrust between the two countries. In addition, the region's economy has suffered a great deal because of Bush's strategic decisions.

Obama has taken on the immediate task of working on reactivating the economy, and to do that he has called on the most brilliant minds of economic science under the leadership of Paul Volcker. His international policy will be led by former Senator Hillary Clinton. The two together guarantee that there will be no spectacular changes, but a return to the general lines of the William Clinton administration.

Initially, the economic package Obama proposes includes the possibility of creating 2.5 million jobs and putting "Main Street" at the center of his concerns. He has committed US\$7.5 billion, of which US\$1.7 billion would be directly loaned out by the government; US\$2.8 billion would be invested directly—for a country that does not believe very much in state intervention in the economy, this is a lot of money; and US\$3.1 billion will be collateral for the financial system to get moving. An enormous effort. If divided among U.S. citizens, the total proposed until now would be enough to give a US\$25,000 check to every inhabitant (including children) or pay off half the mortgages in the country.

If the economic recovery plan is effective, the United States could become the driving force for the world economy, while simultaneously restoring its multilateral leadership. At the same time, the regional integration model and particularly the relationship with Mexico are issues that have still not been clearly outlined.

Mexico was not a point of interest in the U.S. 2008 electoral debate. Mention of Mexico was only marginal in the presidential campaign debates. During the primaries, then-presi-

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The new U.S. president has said that the high consumption levels of illicit drugs in the United States have caused a grave security problem in Mexico. The principle of co-responsibility cannot be avoided.

dential hopeful Barack Obama's foreign policy platform planks stated that in the case of Latin America—from Mexico to Argentina—the United States had failed to deal with concerns about migration, equity and economic growth.² That's it.

The president of the United States' life and political experience makes him unfamiliar with Latin American issues, particularly Mexican ones. His knowledge of Spanish is extraordinarily superficial: despite saying he studied it in his first years of school, he is incapable of stringing three phrases together. He is also not known to have traveled to the region for personal or work reasons or for tourism. A high-level Mexican diplomat who twice had access to Mr. Obama commented that he is not a man especially concerned with Mexican issues. However, he has shown great interest in deepening the relationship and has formulated the right questions for generally improving relations between the two countries. In an oft-quoted interview done during the campaign and published in the Chilean daily *El Mercurio*, Obama stated that Mexico would become a priority of his administration. He said that it was very important to strengthen ties to the Mexican government in a way that the Bush administration had not, to discover what was needed on the other side of the border to promote economic development and job creation. He emphasized that more jobs in Mexico meant fewer undocumented migrants crossing into the United States.

In 2008, more than 5,000 people died in Mexico as a result of the war among the drug cartels. Obama knows it and thinks that consumption in the United States is also part of the problem. He stated that he would not legalize marijuana, but that he did think that the amount of drugs in the United States has to be reduced.³

Actually, regardless of any knowledge of or even interest in Mexico Obama may personally have, it is clear that he will inevitably have to deal with four issues. The first is making an initial gesture about the kind of relationship he wants to establish with the Felipe Calderón administration. There are already some indicators about this: the Mexican president had a first telephone conversation with Obama in which he congratulated him for his win, and Obama expressed his condolences

for the death of Juan Camilo Mouriño in an airplane accident. By unfortunate coincidence, the two events took place on November 4, 2008. Obama was on his way to the big party in Chicago, and Calderón was attending the funeral of his closest collaborator. Ironies of fate. In the first days of January, Felipe Calderón was the only head of state in the world to personally meet with the president-elect, just a few days before the inauguration.

In the coming weeks, the new president's gestures will be especially important for initially taking the temperature of the relationship. It does not look like we are going to see a torrid beginning, like the one which began with the start-up of the Bush and Fox administrations, which, it should be said in passing, came to very little at the end of the day, since relations with Mexico were abandoned or relegated to the back burner. Nevertheless, Obama has said that Mexico is a foreign policy imperative that the Republican government did not handle properly.

Mexico is a priority for economic reasons in two ways. Its economy depends greatly on its capacity to export to the United States and the latter's competitiveness depends on the complementariness that Mexico's economic structure offers it. For Mexico, the U.S. economy's revival is crucial. Until now, President Barack Obama has unveiled an ambitious economic program which, as mentioned above, includes an important injection of resources that should have both direct and indirect effects on the Mexican economy's performance.

I think it is highly improbable, for purely pragmatic reasons as well as based on the evaluation of the careers of the members of the economic cabinet, that an instrument like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) will be revised after 14 years in place and which, with its pros and cons, has become the flagship model for hemispheric integration that the United States offers the world. Denouncing or reopening such an important trade agreement with a country considered an ally on security issues would in fact be equivalent to saying that the integration strategy it has been offering the world since the collapse of communism and that was particularly strongly supported by William Clinton is a failure. It would be like recognizing that there is no specifically North American integration model—which is probably true, but which brings up a basic question: If the basis for integration is not free trade, what would be the crosscutting issue that links the United States with the countries in the region?

The millions of dollars traded annually between the two countries could find themselves in a conceptual *cul-de-sac*.

Mexico has free trade agreements with Europe and Japan, to mention only two regions, and, in the remote eventuality that the North American market were reconfigured, Mexico should reorient its traditional functioning targeting North America, with a grave cost for many actors and sectors of the economy. It goes without saying that U.S. investments in Mexico would meet with incalculable obstacles of their own government's making. Therefore, it is very unlikely that the treaty's main tenets will be revised. If a review is considered, we can also imagine a progressive agenda that includes improvements in the ecological and labor spheres of the region.

A Mexican economy with severe growth problems will have more and more difficulty creating jobs. In fact, sources of employment are likely to be dismantled, and therefore migratory pressure will escalate in a scenario in which U.S. labor markets are incapable of absorbing new workers. It is also probable that this will at the same time create tensions internally and along the border with Mexico, and in general in bilateral relations. With such a complicated agenda outside the region, with burning issues like Iraq and Afghanistan, it does not seem a good idea to set off a conflict on the United States' southern border.

During his campaign, the new president proposed that he would deal with the immigration issue relatively quickly. He has the political capital and an important number of legislators to take on a reform of the immigration system that the previous administration was unable to process. If the reform goes through, we will probably find that former Arizona Governor, now Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano will provide the guidelines. Based on Napolitano's performance in Arizona, we should expect a combination of rigorous security measures—we must not forget that she stationed the National Guard along the border with Mexico—and a very pragmatic vision that includes the needs of labor markets and assumes as a given the fact that millions of undocumented migrants already live almost permanently in the United States, which means that mass expulsions would be a factor for instability and seriously wear down bilateral relations.

With regard to security, the relationship is also dominated by difficult-to-ignore issues. It is highly probable that both Felipe Calderón and Barack Obama will decide to deactivate the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP). However, the central issues it includes will continue to be the axes of the relationship. In this same context, the two countries' cooperation in securing the North American security

perimeter is unavoidable as long as the terrorist threat continues to exist. Thus, all the cooperation and convergence that has been achieved in recent years to guarantee levels of aeronautical security and against the entry of potentially dangerous foreign nationals to the region must be maintained.

The level of convergence for guaranteeing border operations and citizen identification systems is a trend that has been consolidating in recent years and would be very impractical to reverse. It is also clear that cooperation around bio-security policies and disaster relief is of interest to both countries, regardless of the sympathies of the two presidents or of the priority Mexico may have on President Obama's new international agenda.

In relation to the fight against drugs, it would be very difficult to change the bilateral accord expressed in the Mérida Initiative in the short term. The U.S. president has said that the high consumption levels of illicit drugs in the United States have caused a grave security problem in Mexico. The principle of co-responsibility cannot be avoided, making it perfectly feasible that the Democratic administration will emphasize a great deal more than its Republican predecessors the need to prevent human rights violations as a pretext for starting an all-out war against organized crime.

It is also to be expected that Obama will start to formulate a series of precise observations about some policies of border states that cooperate at the negotiating table, but allow their police and security forces to maintain links with organized crime. We may well hear increasingly critical comments about the links between the political class and organized crime in Mexico.

The relationship between the two countries has so many points and there are so many shared interests that it is difficult to imagine important changes. It is in the two governments' interests, for practical reasons and given their respective domestic situations, to build up the economy and improve the region's general competitiveness, reduce drug consumption and levels of violence (in the case of Mexico) and ensure that another terrorist attack cannot strike the region again. ■■■

NOTES

¹ Enrique Alduncin, "¿Quién puso a un afroamericano en la Presidencia?", *Este País* 213, December 2008.

² Barack Obama, "Renewing American Leadership," *Foreign Affairs* (July-August 2007), p. 11.

³ See http://grupotransicion.com.mx/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=398&Itemid=27&lang=es.

The Birth of the Virtual Political Community and the Victory of Barack Obama

Paz Consuelo Márquez-Padilla*



www.my_barackobama.com

Barack Obama's victory brought hope and change to the United States. This was no miracle, but the result of hard, creative, imaginative work by the president's advisors, who rode the wave of Internet.

This process began from the time of the Democratic primaries, which were very aggressive, fraught with attacks and counter-attacks between nomination seekers. The situation was by no means an easy one, with a young, relatively nationally-unknown senator from Chicago facing the prominent

senator from New York, Hillary Clinton, undoubtedly known and recognized throughout the country. She obviously had acquired great stature as first lady, the wife of one of the most popular presidents the United States ever had, due to his achievements like a 2.3-percent growth in employment, a US\$230-billion fiscal surplus, and an economy that grew constantly, averaging 3.7 percent a year.¹ Success is very catching, particularly by people close to you.

However, we cannot deny that Hillary has proven herself to be a very intelligent woman who knew how to temper that extremely ambitious, temperamental personality she revealed when she moved into the White House. She also became

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more of a negotiator and less contentious. To these two factors (the Clinton halo and her great abilities) should be added the Democratic Party political machinery, which in the main backed her candidacy. Everything seemed to point to Hillary Rodham Clinton becoming the Democratic nominee, but suddenly, things began to turn around, and the nominee turned out to be Obama. Everyone knows the end of the story: Obama was inaugurated January 20.

I want to answer several questions in this article: Why was Obama able to position himself as the Democratic candidate despite his clear disadvantages *vis-à-vis* such a strong rival? Why did Obama beat the Republican candidate? And, will it make a big difference for Mexico that John McCain did not win?

I will start by answering the second question. Although the answer may well seem too obvious to many today, it was not so clear only a few months ago, when uncertainty reigned and almost no one was placing any bets.

U.S. political and electoral analysts have a golden rule: "Americans vote with their pocketbooks." This logically means that if the economy is growing, they will very probably vote for the party in office. People also have to *perceive* it as a period of growth, since, if the party in office does not know how to transmit to the citizenry a feeling of recovery or hope for a better future, people will probably not vote for it, either.

In the recent elections, the economic indicators predicted an economic slowdown in the best of cases, that has turned into a full-blown recession. President Bush followed the canons of economic liberalism to the letter: the invisible hand of the market had to be allowed to ensure economic development all by itself. The financial deregulation Alan Greenspan began would undoubtedly result in unstoppable growth for the U.S. economy. Several years of economic boom seemed to confirm the hypothesis; however, what was really happening was that many financial irregularities were being permitted that ended up creating castles in the air. They fabricated a fictional economy. The norms, institutions and checks and balances that serve to regulate savage capitalism became diluted, leaving behind only its bitterest face.

On the one hand, top executives' inflated salaries (including the so-called "golden parachutes" or multi-million-dollar severance pay packages) created perverse initiatives to raise profits at the cost of the future. On the other hand, over-lending, without really checking out borrowers' ability to pay,



Race was not a disadvantage for Obama even among white workers, who had seemed more resistant to the idea of being governed by an Afro-American president.

as well as loans linked to other loans and speculative earnings, turned that invisible hand, which was supposed to balance everything out, into a hand immobilized by arthritis responsible for enormous social disparities and banking and business crises. The fictional economy collapsed, starting with the stock market and reaching into the heart of production. So, despite the fact that the United States is immersed in a war that has dragged on for a long time, the main point of interest in the campaigns was the domestic economy, with its US\$482-billion fiscal deficit, 6.5 percent unemployment and negative growth rate of -1 percent.²

If all the economic indicators pointed to a recession, why was there any doubt at all that the new president would not be a Republican? Because the Democratic candidate, Obama, was an Afro-American. In the U.S. presidential elections, although nobody said it openly or recognized it politically, race was a factor for the first time. It was no longer a matter of one candidate of color among many white contenders, but someone who became the Democratic Party hopeful with real possibilities of becoming president. As Mark Danner said, "The radicalism of Barack Obama lies not in his policies but in his face."³

Analysts began to worry that there could be a "curtain effect" (also known as the "Bradley effect"), which is when people interviewed lie to pollsters and, in the solitude of the polling booth, without risking other people's moral judgment, they succumb to racist sentiments. This means that even though people consider it politically correct to vote for a candidate of color and express that opinion to pollsters (which was clearly the case in the pre-vote polls), when it came time to vote, behind the curtain, they might vote for John McCain just because he was white. Fortunately, behind the curtain, people were swept away by the idea of change. Of a change not only of President Bush's policies and the Republicans, but the big change that meant that an Afro-American would occupy the White House. Race was not a disadvantage for Obama even among white workers, who had seemed more resistant to the idea of being governed by an Afro-American president.⁴

The election outcome undoubtedly expresses great maturity on the part of U.S. society, and is one of those actions that should be recognized and admired by humanity. There are some kinds of progress that make us all proud, and this is one of them. Even though it should be obvious that an intelligent, educated man, concerned for the less privileged, with an interesting proposal, should have a chance of winning regardless of the color of his skin, many centuries had to go by and many generations had to fight so something like that could happen.

The economy stopped growing; thousands of jobs were lost; the recession came to stay; and Americans once again voted with their pocketbooks. And as they did, they also provided a respite and sowed a seed of hope not only for the United States, but for the world as a whole, given the very critical state of the global economy.

Now, let us return to the first question: Why did Obama win the primaries and become the Democratic candidate? We have to recognize that his victory is a fundamental change in U.S. society. The elections were not won in the broadcast media; a television commentator's support or media visibility were not the determining factors. This time, the Internet played a fundamental role, creating a new phenomenon that requires further explanation. After the November 4 victory, computer "geniuses" will always be necessary in elections, not just something extra and fun, but an essential part of the central strategy.

Obama used social technology to win the Democratic Party primaries and surpass the powerful Hillary Clinton. Through his Internet network, he made himself known to thousands of people little by little and got them to join his campaign. His web site was constantly clogged with a multitude of supporters who visited it every day and found there a message that attracted them, that echoed their own feelings and thoughts; a multitude that began to create a surprising virtual reality. Through the blog his advisors designed, he managed to create a network that surpassed all their expectations: www.my_barackobama.com, better known as "my BO," was the door to a new world in elections, which significantly helped campaign finances by raising, for example, the astounding sum of US\$55 million in just one month. Constant meetings were held all over the country to raise money. The goal was not so much to get big donations from a few people but small contributions from millions of supporters, for which Internet was a fundamental tool.

Obama's team managed to create an army of volunteers for the campaign war. They managed to handle and dominate



www.my_barackobama.com, better known as "my BO," was the door to a new world in elections and significantly helped campaign finances by raising, for example, the astounding sum of US\$55 million in just one month.

the news and the data, and they were easily able to figure out how to take a persuasive message and capture the imagination of the undecided by setting up a data base about them.

Without a doubt, during the primaries, before the open signs of the crisis became visible, it seemed that the motto of these elections was going to be, as David Talbot said, "This Year It Was the Network, Stupid," and not the economy. The cyber-magicians understood that people feel more comfortable with the new technologies today, and that they were not just something for a tiny elite or a few academics, but that they were a phenomenon that turns our societies upside down and redefines them.

Other candidates also used the Internet, but Obama put it at the center of his campaign.⁵ He called in one of the Facebook founders as a member of his advisory team and put him in charge of the project. On the other hand, Obama's experience in a nongovernmental organization that works in a low-income community served to help him create the most advanced online collective through an extraordinary political machine. Obama's ideas were uploaded onto Internet and then spread by visitors to his site. His speeches aired on YouTube with millions of hits. His campaign army made thousands of calls to people who had logged onto the site, thereby reinforcing the network, making it more effective and building on that politically. There is no doubt that they made marvelous use of this tool.

The Clintons, for their part, had the backing of the party machine, which they headed up. Comparing, then, 48 percent of Obama's campaign contributions were under US\$200 each, while only 33 percent of the Clintons' were. Although the Clintons also used the web, they did not do it with Obama's ingenuity or intensity. McCain's Internet campaign, on the other hand, was a disaster; they really could not get their networks up and running and the sites were badly designed and unattractive. Perhaps in this strategy more than in any other, the difference between the 72-year-old Republican candidate and the 47-year-old Democrat was noticeable.

Obama will very probably continue to use electronic networks to get the support he needs for his policies from Con-

gress. The president will have to work in line with what he promised, since he has always presented himself as a different kind of politician, and he must not forget the Internet-based social networks he built. That is the only way he will be able to keep the constituencies that supported him and begin, starting now, to consolidate them for his eventual reelection. It is true that he will enjoy the support of a Congress completely dominated by the Democrats, but that is no reason for him to be able to forget that, given the crisis conditions and the tough decisions he will have to make, he will also need support from that new virtual social organization, turning it into a real grassroots organization embedded in the Internet networks.

Why did Obama win? Because he was able to ride the crest of one of this era's most spectacular inventions, steering down the information superhighway like a Formula 1 driver: really relaxed, "really cool," like everything he does. He was able to speak to hundreds of thousands of apparently apathetic young people who believed in him, found out about him, got to know him, respected him and decided to mobilize to make a difference. Sixty-six percent of people under 30 threw their support to the Democratic Party.⁶ However, even though young people participated more than in the previous elections, they did not come out in the same numbers as in 1992, when Bill Clinton defeated George Bush, Sr.⁷

It is important to note several of the important changes that took place during this last election. Enormous numbers of voters—almost one-third of all those registered—decided to cast their ballots by mail before November 4. Several states that rarely throw their support to the Democrats did this time: among them, Colorado (which in the past had only been won by Clinton) and Virginia (which in the past had been won by Johnson). Obviously, Obama got 95 percent of the votes in the black community, and, above all, he sparked a big mobilization by black community members in states like Georgia, Missouri and Nevada. Undoubtedly, there were also important changes among young, Hispanic and university students and faculties, who distanced themselves from the Republican Party. Only 32 percent of voters from those groups described



Obama has to work in line with what he promised, since he has always presented himself as a different kind of politician, and he must not forget the Internet-based social networks he built.

themselves as Republicans, as opposed to 40 percent who said they were Democrats; four years ago, the proportions of supporters for the two parties among those population groups were identical.⁸ Twenty-eight percent classified themselves as independents, and of these, 52 percent voted for Obama.⁹

The support from Latinos was surprising, since initially they had aligned themselves with Hillary Clinton. But on election day, they came out for Barack Obama, who got 60 percent of their votes. Their vote was crucial. In 2004, only 50 percent of Hispanics supported Democrat John Kerry.¹⁰ Fifty-six percent of women voters cast their ballots for the Democratic candidate, as did 78 percent of Jews and 54 percent of Catholics; but 54 percent of Protestants and 74 percent of evangelical Christians chose McCain—picking Sarah Palin as his running mate helped out with this last group. Seventy-three percent of people who earn less than US\$15,000 a year voted for Obama, as did 55 percent of those earning between US\$30,000 and US\$50,000, while 51 percent of those earning between US\$100,000 and US\$150,000 preferred McCain.¹¹

One particularly important issue for Mexico is U.S. foreign policy, where we may see a change. It will not be immediate or complete, but at least there is some hope. If McCain had been voted in as president, Mexico particularly would have been given special treatment since he is very familiar with our country and has been part of important bilateral negotiations. However, his foreign policy advisors like Randy Scheunemann, Robert Kagan, William Kristol, James Woolsey, John Bolton and Max Boot, are considered neo-conservatives. Therefore, the militarist strategy this group set up when it was in power during George W. Bush's presidency would have tended to consolidate despite its clear failure. The neocon vision of preventive attacks on possible enemies to avoid potential strikes has upped the number of open enemies and driven away allies. Not in vain does Joseph Nye remind us how important soft power is in diplomacy and of the need to build alliances, maintain friends and use multilateral bodies.

We can think that the Barack Obama-Hillary Clinton duo will opt above all for negotiation and forging consensus through soft power, without renouncing military might. Pulling out of Iraq is no simple task, and must be done gradually if they are to avoid creating more instability than already exists. In the case of Mexico, I think that its proximity and the Clintons' knowledge of our country may be fundamental factors



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for establishing good relations, a possibility that would not necessarily come about by itself on urging from President Obama, who is a protectionist—he has already mentioned renegotiating NAFTA—and will tend to concentrate more on the domestic agenda. He most certainly will not forget to take into consideration that globalization requires countries to come up with joint strategies to solve problems that know no borders.

Former President Bush's legacy to the new occupant of the White House is, frankly, a disaster. And not only for the United States, given that a profound recession is looming in many countries of the world. In addition, several of its old allies have distanced themselves from the United States. For all of these reasons, today more than ever a world leader is needed who can throw off the parochial vision like the one neoconservatism proposes and understand the call for seeking joint solutions, not only for the good of the international community, but for the good of the United States itself. A grand strategy is required for devising a design for peace in the twenty-first century.¹²

On the other hand, we must not forget that since the last elections, and even since the 2000 elections, clearly, the United States is a divided society. While the 9/11 terrorist attacks managed to unite the population in times of crisis, in 2008, disregarding Republican attempts to impose the message of the need to take a hard line in times of war, voters opted for a change. But it would be a mistake for President Obama to think that he should govern only for the more liberal segments of society. He has to get the support and awaken the enthusiasm of the entire population to be able to start up the machinery he needs for economic recovery. Barack Obama got 52 percent of the popular vote. He did not get the vote of the majority of the white population, although no other Democrat has either since Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964.¹³ His term of office will not be easy, but for now, he has the support not only of a large part of the U.S. population, but also of most of the world's population. We all hope that his performance is up to what the times demand. **NM**

NOTES

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President Obama And Latinos in the U.S.

Elaine Levine*

In spring 2006 when millions of Latinos took to the streets in major cities throughout the U.S. to protest against the punitive measures toward undocumented immigrants and their families contained in bill HR-4437 approved by the House of Representatives in December 2005, one of the most popular slogans shouted over and over in Spanish was “*Hoy marchamos, mañana votamos*” (Today we march, tomorrow we vote). The 61-percent voter turnout in the 2008 presidential election was the highest in the past 40 years. Even though voter participation rose in general, “Latinos increased their share of the national vote to 9 percent from 8 percent in 2004 according to the national exit poll.”¹

While Latinos’ political clout is a force to be reckoned with, especially in states where they make up a sizeable proportion of the population —such as California, Texas, New Mexico, Florida, Arizona and Colorado— their importance as voters nationwide is significantly less than the 15 percent they represent in terms of the U.S. population. There are many voting-age Latinos who were unable to vote because they are not U.S. citizens, either because they have not been in the U.S. long enough to qualify for citizenship, or for some reason they have not yet decided to become U.S. citizens, or because their status in the country is irregular or undocumented.



Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

In response to the massive demonstrations in 2006, several Latino community organizations and media companies joined together in an unprecedented campaign “to incorporate Latinos as full participants in the American political process.”² They launched what was described as “a comprehensive civic engagement strategy” using the slogan “*Ya es hora*,” which translates to “now is the time” (curiously enough this phrase, in English, frequently resonated in Obama’s speeches and rallies as well). The stated objective was to remove barriers that have prevented Latinos from becoming full participants in U.S. democracy. Thus far, the campaign has been organized around two main objectives or phases. The first phase (*Ya es hora ¡Ciudadanía!*) was aimed at encouraging and “assisting eligible legal permanent residents apply for U.S. citizenship.” It contributed significantly to 1.4 million Latinos applying for U.S. citizenship in 2007. The second phase (*Ya es hora ¡Ve y Vota!*) focused on registering and mobilizing Latinos to vote in the 2008 presidential elections. Judging from the aforementioned increase in the Latino vote in 2008, it appears to have been quite successful.

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Furthermore, Latinos voted overwhelmingly, by a margin of 2-to-1, for Barack Obama. “Obama carried the Latino vote by sizeable margins in all states with large Latino populations. His biggest breakthrough came in Florida, where he won 57 percent of the Latino vote in a state where Latinos have historically supported Republican presidential candidates.”³ His margin among Latino voters was even larger in other states: 78 percent in New Jersey, 76 percent in Nevada, 74 percent in California, 72 percent in Illinois, 69 percent in New Mexico, and 63 percent in Texas.⁴ Obama won heavily among both male and female Latino voters (with margins of 64 and 68 percent respectively) and especially among young Latinos (76 percent) as was the case nationwide for younger voters.

It should be pointed out, however, that Obama was not the favorite among Latinos early on in 2008, when they voted for Senator Hillary Clinton by a margin of nearly 2-to-1 in the Democratic primaries. According to Pew Hispanic Center experts, “No other major demographic voting group in the country swung so heavily to Obama as Latinos between the primaries and the general election.”⁵ At the same time another shift took place in terms of the issues. In the early months of 2008, during the debates among each party’s candidates for the nomination, immigration reform was a widely discussed topic, but later in the year it was barely mentioned in the debates between the two final contenders.

The faltering U.S. economy came to the fore as the number one concern overshadowing practically everything else. With unemployment on the rise and no end to further layoffs in sight, it is highly unlikely that the new president, or anyone in Congress, will be proposing measures to increase guest worker programs and/or to allow currently undocumented workers to remain in the U.S. and continue working there, with some sort of legally recognized status. Thus, although both presidential hopefuls had at one time pledged that they would overhaul the immigration system during their first year in office, there is not much likelihood that this issue will be dealt with at all during the new administration’s first year. In fact, immigration reform is something that may not even be acted upon during President Obama’s first term in office—he may or may not have a second term—depending on how quickly his economic recovery measures can be implemented and how effective they prove to be.

The official unemployment rate rose to 7.2 percent in December 2008, the highest since 1993. This official rate, however, seems to tell only part of the story. There is an



Obama has referred to the current immigration system as dysfunctional and broken. He favors increased border security and voted for additional fencing along the border.

alternate measure of unemployment that includes “part-time workers who want full-time work” and “anyone who has looked for work in the last year.” That rate rose to 12.5 percent in November, the highest reported since such calculations began in 1994.⁶ Nevertheless, even this more realistic figure may not tell the complete story since there are many discouraged workers who do not have a job and are not looking for one because they are convinced that they will not find work that pays anywhere near as well as the last job they had. Needless to say, these discouraged workers and many of the recently unemployed are not competing for the types of low-skilled, low-paying jobs held by most undocumented immigrants—who have also been severely affected by growing unemployment—but their rising numbers will not provide a favorable climate for immigration reform.

A few Latinos have been named to prominent positions in the Obama administration. Cecilia Muñoz, senior vice president for the National Council of La Raza’s Office of Research, Advocacy, and Legislation, has been designated as the director of intergovernmental affairs. Two Latinos were chosen as cabinet members: Ken Salazar as secretary of the interior and Hilda Solis as secretary of labor. Bill Richardson, governor of New Mexico, whom many Latinos had hoped might be appointed secretary of state, was originally selected to be secretary of commerce but later declined the nomination because of a pending investigation into whether his administration gave lucrative contracts to a political donor. Latinos and Latino organizations are hoping that still more Latinos will gradually be appointed to positions in the Obama administration. The new president and his advisors and staff face many daunting challenges as they take the reins of government.

Even before taking office, President Obama put his economic team to work on engineering an “Economic Recovery Plan” which he described as “a two-year, nationwide effort to jumpstart job creation in America and lay the foundation for a strong and growing economy.”⁷ When announcing this initiative, he also warned, as he has on various occasions since then, that things will probably get worse before



With unemployment on the rise and no end to further layoffs in sight, it is highly unlikely that the new president will be proposing measures to allow currently undocumented workers to remain in the U.S.

they begin to get better. A couple of weeks later, in early December, Obama for America Campaign Manager David Plouffe launched a call over the Internet for people throughout the U.S. to either host or attend a “Change is Coming House Meeting” in their neighborhood on December 13 and 14 to discuss and make suggestions about the best ways for the country to move forward. The key areas or issues mentioned in the message were the economy, energy and health care. Obviously any and all subjects should be open for discussion in meetings of this sort. However, given the urgency of other matters at this time, it is probably safe to say that immigration reform will not get much attention for the next several months.

Meanwhile, concern is mounting in Mexico over all the economic problems it will have to confront in the coming months. Economic growth will no doubt be seriously impacted by the recession in the U.S. —because the Mexican economy has become even more vulnerable to fluctuations in the U.S. business cycle since NAFTA was signed— in addition to all of the endogenous economic difficulties. As communities and families prepared to receive migrant workers returning home for the holiday season, doubts arose as to how many of them might be returning home for good because they had lost their jobs in the U.S. In 2008, the flow of remittances declined for the first time in many years and the number of those leaving the country to seek work north of the border also seems to have dropped somewhat. This is obviously not because things have gotten better in Mexico; it just shows that viable job opportunities in the U.S. are disappearing as well right now. As things get worse before getting better, those most affected by the economic downturn will be lower-income families and households, many of which are Latino.

Obama’s position on immigration reform stems from a recognition that the number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. has risen tremendously since 2000 and that those seeking legal entry to the U.S. have to wait far too long for their applications to be processed.⁸ He has referred to the current immigration system as dysfunctional and broken.

He favors increased border security and voted for additional fencing along the border. He advocates “cracking down on employers who hire undocumented immigrants.” Furthermore he believes that “Immigration raids are ineffective... and have placed all the burdens of a broken system onto immigrant families.” Thus far Obama seems to be committed to supporting a system that would somehow allow “undocumented immigrants who are in good standing to pay a fine, learn English, and go to the back of the line for the opportunity to become citizens,” which implicitly means they would not be deported nor have to leave the country voluntarily. He has also advocated putting “greater emphasis on keeping immigrant families together.”

However, none of this is likely to happen early on in the Obama presidency. Interestingly enough, Obama has also stated the belief that the U.S. needs “to do more to promote economic development in Mexico” in order to decrease the flow of undocumented immigrants.⁹ This, of course, is another discussion that will have to be postponed until the U.S. economy turns around. It would also be heartening if the Mexican government would seriously confront the fact that it needs “to do more to promote economic development in Mexico” in order to stem the flow of undocumented emigrants to the U.S. That might eventually provide a better basis for dealing with the degree of *de facto* labor market integration that has already taken place between Mexico and the United States, and which will no doubt continue in the future, one way or another, as soon as the U.S. economy begins to grow again. ■■■

NOTES

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Adriana Chiroleu

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Alma Herrera M y Emilio Aguilar R.

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Crisis y coyuntura económica: propuestas desde la educación superior.

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Beyond Politics: Cultural Connections Among Mexico, Romania and Poland

José Luis Valdés-Ugalde*

Camelia Tigau**



How can cultural diplomacy make a difference in Mexico's relations with Eastern Europe? Culture, understood in the broad sense of education, arts and science, may open channels of dialogue where economics and politics have failed or, at least, been insufficient. This new tendency in Mexican foreign relations has been generally favored by two types of circumstances: first, the political change from single-party societies, common to Mexico and all the Eastern European countries; second, the

opening of new diplomatic channels in globalization, based on image creation and international public relations.

THE CULTURAL PATH

People consider themselves different from each other because of their cultures; in this sense, culture is an effective and unique diplomatic tool to establish channels for dialogue and connect societies. Culture can work as a form of public diplomacy to promote national interests abroad. A wide variety of tools such as the media, cinema, books, shows, newsletters,

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Zamek Krolewski Castle, Poland.

conferences, educational cooperation and student exchange, to name just a few, can be used to approach people. Getting to know other cultures makes a more humane perception, sympathy and friendship among people possible. All these make cultural diplomacy a must.

Seen from the cultural point of view, scientific diplomacy is a step forward toward an open concept of the circulation of science and knowledge. Compared to political cooperation, scientific collaboration may be more stable, as scientists do not depend on reelection: they can afford to make long-term plans.

From this perspective, the recent agreement between the CISAN and two Eastern European institutions (the Faculty of Political Science in Bucharest, Romania, and the Institute

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The recent agreement between the CISAN and two Eastern European institutions re-launched academic diplomacy and demonstrated a relative decentralization of Mexican foreign policy.

of American Studies and Polish Diaspora in Krakow, Poland) re-launched academic diplomacy and demonstrated a relative decentralization of Mexican foreign policy.¹ Even though the cultural backgrounds of cooperation are quite different, these agreements have a common analytical denominator that situates culture in its rightful place: at the foundation of international relations.

COMPARATIVE BACKGROUND

Mexico's relations with Eastern Europe began toward the end of the nineteenth century and were formalized in the first quarter of the twentieth. Individuals citizens of both Poland and Romania, Karol Bieniewski and Doctor Ilarie Draghicescu, respectively, participated in the Mexican Revolution.

After the fall of communism and the two countries' entry into the European Union, Mexico has increased its cultural exchange and dialogue with both. While economic relations have not been completely satisfactory, there has been a reasonable amount of cultural exchange. A series of consultation mechanisms at the political and parliamentary levels have been established and bi- or trilateral cooperation in international organizations is particularly strong. Mutual visits have intensified since 2000 at a presidential and parliamentary level. A quick look at the history of links between Mexico with Romania and Poland offers a varied background for comparison (see table 1).

TABLE 1
DATA ON MEXICAN RELATIONS WITH ROMANIA AND POLAND

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Romania</i>	<i>Poland</i>
First diplomatic contacts	1880	1921
Start of official relations	1935-1936	1928-1929
Relations during World War II	Suspended 1941-1973	Continuous
Language/cultural background	Latin-Celtic	Slavic
Estimated number of residents in Mexico	300-400	3,000



Relations between Mexico and Poland are marked by cultural differences, but this does not necessarily mean that understanding between the Mexican and Polish people is hindered.

Romania is the only Latin country in Eastern Europe, surrounded by Slavic- and Hungarian-Finnish-speaking countries. It actually preserved its territory due to the language unity of its three provinces, during the centuries under Turkish, Russian or Austro-Hungarian influence. The Latin spirituality and other similarities with Mexico, such as a surprising resemblance in crafts, speak to a certain common cultural perspective of the world.

By comparison, relations between Mexico and Poland are marked by cultural differences, which does not necessarily mean that understanding between the Mexican and Polish people is hindered. On the contrary, there are almost ten times as many Polish residents in Mexico as Romanians. According to data from the Embassy of Poland, there are around 3,000 Poles living in Mexico. An estimate of the Jewish community in Mexico shows that around 15,000 of its total 50,000 members came from Poland, particularly during World War II.

MEXICO'S IMAGE IN ROMANIA

Compared to relations with Poland, public knowledge of Mexico in Romania goes back to the sixteenth century. At that time, Romanian readers were informed about the pre-Columbian world and its fascinating civilizations. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a series of manuscripts on pre-Columbian priests and cultures circulated in Romania. The capital of this world, Mexico City, was described as “a city built on a big island, in the middle of a lake, this being the biggest fortress of the New World. Many bridges facilitated communication and on the lake, where thousands of wooden boats circulated.”²

A paradisiacal view of this wonderful city was shown to the Romanian public, a Latin society under the Ottoman Empire at the time. The manuscripts, which may still be found in the Library of the Romanian Academy, describe the trips of Christopher Columbus, the conquest of Mexico by Hernán Cortés, and several other events in the hemisphere, such as the conquest of the Incan Empire.



Neamt Monastery, Romania.

In the seventeenth century, maize was introduced to the Romanian territories, which soon became a power in its cultivation, turning into the world's seventh largest producer. In the nineteenth century, further information on Mexico was introduced by journals such as *Albina Romaneasca* (The Romanian Bee) with articles on Mexican crafts; the same journal also published a translation of the work “Mexico and the Mexicans” by Madame Calderón de la Barca, as well as a scientific work on the discovery of the Cacahuamilpa Caverns.

During Mexico's war against French intervention, several Romanian soldiers participated with the French army sent by Napoleon to help Maximilian. A Romanian doctor, Ilarie Mitrea, was in charge of the organization of the sanitary services of several imperial guards. Once in a prison in the hands of Benito Juárez's troops, he treated and cured several Mexican soldiers. In 1867, he finally passed over to the Mexican side and started working on Mexico's east coast as a health inspector.

In 1935, Professor Dimitrie Draghicescu was named extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador of Romania in Mexico, so that July 20, 1935 may be considered the date official relations between Romania and Mexico were established. One year later, Mexico sent Vicente Veloz González to Romania as extraordinary and plenipotentiary minister. Bilateral relations were suspended in 1941, when Romania took the side of the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis in World War II. Re-



The new agreements between Mexico and Eastern European educational and cultural institutions create a new setting for cooperation, almost unknown before the 1990s.

lations were finally reestablished in 1973, but suspended again from 1989 to 1995 when Mexico closed its diplomatic mission in Bucharest for budget reasons. At present, embassies in both countries center their activities on cultural diplomacy.

MEXICAN SUPPORT FOR THE POLISH PEOPLE

Relations between Mexico and Poland were built in a context of historical asymmetry. In the nineteenth century, while Mexico was still a colony, the Polish state was already being created. Afterwards, when Mexico had become independent, Poland found itself under foreign occupation. When the Mexican Revolution was over, Mexico and Poland coincided on a more symmetrical historical path, as both entered into a process of economic reconstruction.

Poland's first political contact with Mexico was in 1921 by the Prince Albert Radziwill, who at that time was the honorary chancellor of the Polish legation in Washington. Over the next two years, both countries showed great interest in formalizing diplomatic and consular relations.

During the Nazi occupation of Poland, Mexico showed great sympathy and support for the Polish people. At the end of 1942, a camp for 1,500 Polish refugees—half of them children—was established in Santa Rosa, Guanajuato, and inaugurated by the president of the Council of Ministries of the Republic of Poland, General Wladyslaw Sikorski. Most of these refugees remained in Mexico for good. A second wave of Polish immigrants—this time smaller—arrived in Mexico during the communist period.

In 1945, Mexico was the first Latin American country to recognize the Provisional Government of National Union of Poland. In the following years, mutual formal visits of official delegations and commercial and artistic groups took place. In 1960, both countries upgraded their diplomatic representations to embassies. Consequently, in the 1970s and 1980s, officials from both governments established permanent contact and opened new channels for cooperation by signing several agreements, mostly of a cultural and educational nature.

After the fall of communism, relations have moved into a new stage, more open and based on similarities between the democratic political systems of Poland and Mexico. Many visits have been paid, including the participation of Polish President Alexander Kwasniewski at the third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean which took place on May 28, 2004 in the city of Guadalajara.

At present, there is an important amount of economic and political exchange between the two countries, as well as notable cooperation inside international organizations, fundamentally the UN, based on similar perspectives and ideologies.

TOWARD A NEW DIPLOMACY

Since the fall of communism, relations between Mexico and the Eastern European countries changed substantially due to market openings and access to the European Union. While economic relations were left to intermediation by the European Union, cultural relations were left decentralized subject to each country's creativity and choice. Therefore, the new agreements between Mexico and Eastern European educational and cultural institutions create a new setting for cooperation, almost unknown before the 1990s due to the communist systems' closed borders. With the new communications technologies, academic exchange enjoys enormous opportunities that may always become marvelous projects of mutual understanding not only for the three countries dealt with here, but for the world as an immensely varied cultural mix. **MM**

NOTES

¹ The two memoranda of understanding include clauses for short studies, teaching, consulting visits; scientific meetings, seminars, courses; exchange of scientific information, reports and publications; exchange of undergraduate, master's and doctoral students; and joint study programs, among others.

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A Discreet Look at Africa from Mexico

Louis Valentin Mballa*



Today, Africa's integration into the international system looks like a series of ambiguous mechanisms, plagued by the incoherence, contradictory objectives and unclear spaces in which African international relations—as some call them—play out. This forceful statement can be backed up by the observation that, for several actors in the international community, Africa continues to be the unknown, and is considered at times to be a single sovereign state seeking to make its way out of isolation.

Also, post-independence Africa—the end of the 1950s to the early 1960s—was marked by the design of new kinds of relationships between African countries and the former metropolises. These relations were first forged among individual governments and, later on, broadened out to regional groups.

For example, for Africa, today the European Union is a very important economic and political reference point because it is its first trade partner and the destination of 51 percent of the continent's exports. For a long time, the United States considered Africa to be a group of small, poor, authoritarian states unimportant in the international scene; since the end of George Bush, Sr.'s administration, the U.S. committed itself to democratizing Africa. Equally, in broad strokes, African-Asian relations, led by China's African policy, currently focuses on three main areas of cooperation: political solidarity, economic cooperation and socio-cultural relations.

This article will not attempt to deal with the very ambiguous topic of the historical links between Mexico and Africa that go all the way back to the painful experience of slavery,

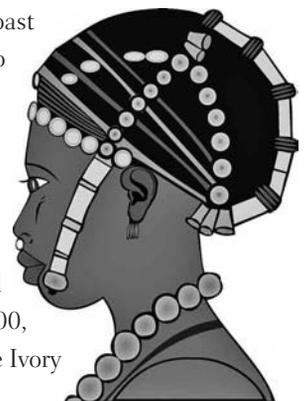
which brought so many Africans to Mexican shores through the port of Veracruz. Rather, we are interested here in looking at the more formal, structured relations between Mexico and Africa.

AFRICA IN SEARCH OF MEXICO

It is important to remember that the first African country to establish formal relations with Mexico was Ethiopia in the 1930s and 1940s. In the framework of these diplomatic relations, a certain number of young Ethiopians had the opportunity to study medicine in Mexico under the auspices of cultural cooperation agreements.

When most of the African countries achieved independence in the late 1950s and 1960s, relations between them and Mexico became clearer. In this period, the African countries' priority was to achieve increasing international recognition of their new political status and existence. Egypt and Algeria each established embassies in Mexico. Financial difficulties forced the rest of them to maintain relations with Mexico through their diplomatic missions in Washington or Cuba.

Later, Gabon, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast opened embassies in Mexico, but unfortunately, for political-economic reasons, they lasted no more than three years. In that framework, students from the Ivory Coast and Nigeria began coming to Mexico for their education. In the early 1980s, first the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and then Morocco established embassies in Mexico. In 1994, after the abolition of apartheid, it was South Africa's turn. In 1997, Angola also opened its own embassy; in the first half of 2000, Nigeria followed suit; and in 2008, the Ivory Coast did the same.



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In the last two years, Angola, Egypt, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania have approached Mexico to find out about its experience in implementing social development policies and the fight against poverty. To date, Egypt and South Africa are carrying out studies to implement models similar to Mexico's internationally recognized Opportunities Program.

In 2008, Mexico received visits from high-level officials and delegations of businesspersons from Angola, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Libya, Morocco, Nigeria, Namibia, Ivory Coast and South Africa, among others. These visits' objectives were to analyze forms of cooperation in the fields of trade and the economy, energy, infrastructure, health, the fight against poverty, human resource training and sports.

MEXICO'S MEASURED STEPS TOWARD AFRICA

First of all, it is important to mention that Luis Echeverría was the first Mexican president to stand on African soil. His visit included Tanzania, Ethiopia, Egypt and Senegal. In every country, Echeverría, together with local leaders like Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, made the proposal to begin multi-sectoral cooperation with Africa. Thus, at the end of his term in 1976, the Mexican government awarded a considerable number of African students scholarships to study at universities and technical colleges so they could participate in their countries' development.

To reformulate African-Mexican relations, President Ernesto Zedillo's National Development Plan (1995-2000) proposed that "in relation to Africa, Mexico needs to contribute with its presence to international cooperation with that continent and renew its traditional links, including reopening diplomatic missions."¹ The aim was precisely to reformulate an increasingly structured framework for relations between Africa and Mexico.

However, as Hilda Varela mentions in her article "Crónica de una política inexistente: las relaciones entre México



Three years ago, Mexico also declared an "Africa Week" in the month of May, during which the great wealth of African culture is exhibited in the country.

y África, 1994-2000" (Chronicle of a Non-Existent Policy: Relations between Mexico and Africa, 1994-2000), those relations have turned out to be marked by low-profile, discontinuous diplomatic activity, since Mexico has deliberately and persistently avoided getting involved in Africa. Instead, it has opted for passiveness, though taking advantages of some political moments—that would not involve any great political commitment—to act on the African continent.²

Given the lack of a structured framework of Mexican relations with Africa over recent administrations, those with the power to design strategic foreign policy guidelines have constantly clashed with a few Ministry of Foreign Relations officials who do not share that acritical view.

TOWARD A NEW ORIENTATION FOR MEXICO'S AFRICAN POLICY

Today, to broaden, diversify and deepen Mexico's political, economic and cooperative relations with African institutions and countries, Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Relations is implementing a series of measures aimed at opening new spaces for political action using both bilateral and multilateral mechanisms for dialogue. It is also seeking to strengthen trade links, foster investment and promote mutual understanding.

As a part of this new strategy, Mexico attended the ordinary sessions of the Executive Council of Ministers of the African Union, the regional body in which Mexico has been an observer since 2005.

In precisely this same vein, in March 2007, Mexico reopened its embassy in Ethiopia, the country where the





Despite Mexico's new way of seeing Africa, we can say that it still has a long way to go to efficiently examine the enormous multidimensional opportunities the African continent offers.

African Union is headquartered. Simultaneously and for the first time, Mexico presented its credentials to the governments of Angola, Djibouti, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia.³ This new policy will make it possible to increase political contacts with different countries on the African continent and increase trade opportunities and multi-sectoral cooperation. Honorary consulates have also recently been established in Botswana and Sudan as new ways to promote Mexico's interest in Africa.

To strengthen political and cooperative ties, recently there have been meetings to establish "mechanisms for consultation on issues of mutual interest" with Algeria, Egypt and South Africa; a letter of intent on health issues has been signed with Tanzania; important environmental cooperation agreements have been signed with Kenya and South Africa as has an agreement for the First Work Program 2008-2009 Regarding Water Resources with Morocco. Along these same lines, Mexico signed a memorandum of understanding between its diplomatic academies and those of Algeria, and established mechanisms for consultation on issues of mutual interest with Ethiopia, Kenya and Rwanda as a legal framework to foster a more solid political dialogue and identify concrete opportunities for cultural, academic, scientific and technical cooperation.

Three years ago, Mexico also declared an "Africa Week" in the month of May, during which the great wealth of African culture is exhibited in the country. During the last two Africa Weeks, a Mexico-African Countries Technical Cooperation Fair was held for the first time,⁴ as well as a Trade Opportunities Seminar with the participation of Mexico's honorary consuls in Africa. In this framework, the Mexico-United Nations Population Fund Trust Fund was created to foster Mexico's technical cooperation with Africa around issues of population and development strategies, sexual and reproductive health, gender and institutional skills building.

To close the 2008 Africa Week, Mexico's Senate and Ministry of Foreign Relations organized a seminar entitled "Africa and Mexico: Shared Past, Present and Future." The sem-

inar's objective was to show the shared culture and history of Africa and Mexico and to analyze Africa's political, economic and socio-cultural situation. Outstanding participants included several Mexican officials and almost the entire African Diaspora in Mexico.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Despite Mexico's new way of seeing Africa, we can say that with its fewer than five embassies in a continent of 54 countries, it still has a long way to go to efficiently examine the enormous multidimensional opportunities the African continent offers. The African countries, for their part, would also gain from looking increasingly to Mexico. Meanwhile, Mexico continues to ignore several African countries, and we end by asking ourselves if Hilda Varela's statement that Mexico's African policy is "neither good nor bad, but simply is not foreign policy" is correct or not. In the meantime, relations between Mexico and Africa could increase if they have mutual interest, which they actually do, but which is not acted upon very much. **MM**



NOTES

¹ Poder Ejecutivo Federal, *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 1995-2000* (Mexico City: SHCP, n/d), p. 14.

² Hilda Varela, "Crónica de una política inexistente: las relaciones entre México y África, 1994-2000," *Foro Internacional* 166, vol. XLI, published by El Colegio de México (October-December 2001), pp. 912-930.

³ Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, *Avanzan las relaciones de México con África, Medio Oriente y Asia Central*, press release, January 3, 2008.

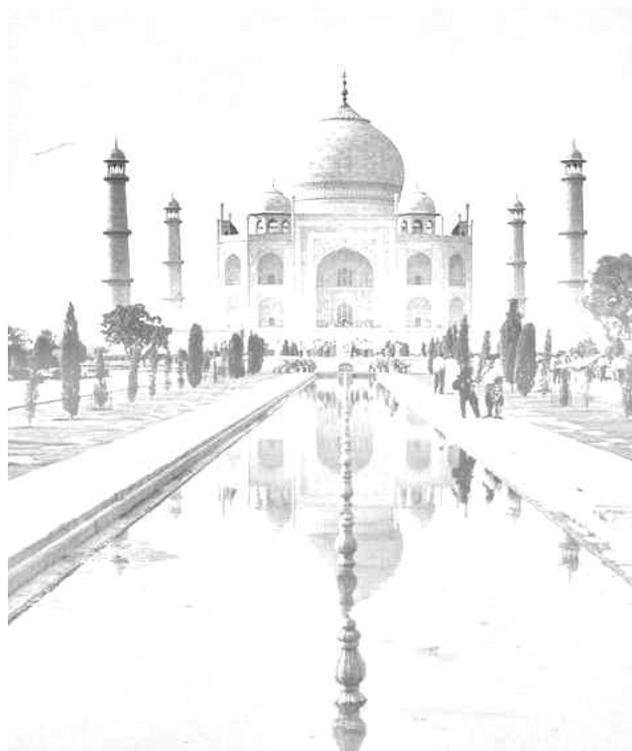
⁴ This fair was held for the first time from May 20 to 25, 2007 at Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Relations building. It was a space in which the Mexican government could build closer ties for cooperation with the African countries, fostering dialogue in areas such as science and technology, encouraging the exchange of knowledge, experiences and innovations, and strengthening national capabilities to the benefit of our countries.

Mexico and India: Slowly Approaching Each Other from Afar

Bernadette Vega*

India, “the elephant that became a tiger,”¹ is not as far as it seems, and Mexico has finally started to shorten the distance. This results from Mexico’s reconfiguring its foreign policy to diversify its relations and boost its multilateral activism. As a member of G-5 (China, Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa), Mexico has plenty of room to spread its wings and exert its potential as a medium-sized power, emerging economy and regional leader, but only if it assumes the role and responsibilities that this entails. To this end, forging a profound, strong relationship with the rest of the members of this particular group is crucial, urgent and internationally favorable, in the sense that the stronger the constructive engagement among these “Outreach Five” (O-5) and the powerful countries, the louder will be the demand to deal with the problems their populations face.²

The G-5 is the appropriate framework for analyzing a bilateral relationship between India and Mexico that can no longer be disregarded. By no means is this group totally harmonious or sensitive to each of its fellow members. While South Africa is struggling to show it belongs to the group, India and China have been competing for the label of “next super-power,” and Brazil and Mexico are immersed in their own discrete wrestling match for regional leadership — a race that Brazil is comfortably leading. It should be recognized that China and Brazil have made the most of their international status as bridges and leaders. However, there is important evidence demonstrating that Mexico is not performing as expected or even as possible: “Mexico is near the bottom of the political hierarchy of the O-5 countries and might fear that speaking out on global issues would highlight this fact to the world, potentially jeopardizing its membership in the club.”³



AN OVERLOOKED RELATIONSHIP?

Mexico and India are historically bonded and tied together through multilateralism. Actually, Mexico was one of the first countries to recognize India’s independence (the first in Latin America) and establish diplomatic relations; in multilateral forums, they have had coinciding points of view during the North-South dialogue, in the non-alignment movement and in the G-77. Even after the end of the Cold War, Mexico and India have continued to cooperate within multilateral spaces such as the G-5, G-8, G-15, G-20, the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, finding common ground on energy security, education, financing for development and, especially, on the agenda for development during the Doha Round negotiations. Conversely, the divergence is evident around some fundamental issues like the reform of the United Nations Security Council and Indian nuclear policy. In these areas, India has resonated with Brazil and the U.S., respectively, leading to the strengthening of those bilater-

* Research Assistant at CISAN.



As a member of G-5 (China, Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa), Mexico has plenty of room to spread its wings and exert its potential as a medium-sized power.

al relations to a level of privileged partnership, as Condoleezza Rice described it.

Indian and Mexican diplomats have agreed that the bilateral relationship has been relatively neglected in recent years. Before Felipe Calderón, the last Mexican president to visit India was Miguel de la Madrid in January 1985, and the last Indian prime minister to come to Mexico was Rajiv Gandhi in 1986: 20 years of neglect and delay. Among Mexico's regional foreign policy priorities, China and Japan have been at the top of the list when planning its involvement in the Asian bloc. Just as happened with Japan, the terms of the relationship with India require modernizing: the international context is not the same one that allowed cooperation during the Cold War within the non-aligned movement, and certainly, Mexico and India do not share the same leverage and responsibilities in the current international order that they did 20 years ago.

The fundamental reason for such a slow and delayed rapprochement is mutual ignorance. We do not know each other. For a large part of India's urban population, Mexico is still another star in the American flag; it just does not appear on the Indian world map; and Octavio Paz, Mexico's ambassador to India in the 1960s, as the only reference to Mexico is not enough. On the other hand, in Mexico there is no clear idea about Indian-ness and its multiple realities. The geographical distance looks shorter if we compare it to the huge lack of mutual cultural understanding that increases the East-West sensibility gap. To what extent do we understand the coexistence of different and conflictive religious views? Is there a remote attempt to understand the complexity of the subcontinent's domestic dynamics? How widespread are Gandhism, Amartya Sen's approach to development or the literature and poetry by Rabindranath Tagore and Anita Desai? As the two top destinations for remittances from the U.S., have we tried to understand and compare the trends of Mexican and Indian migration there? Can the Mexican Foreign Ministry make room for India in Mexico's calculations, monopolized by bilateral relations with the U.S. and the trade and investment possibilities with China?

SLOWLY APPROACHING EACH OTHER FROM AFAR

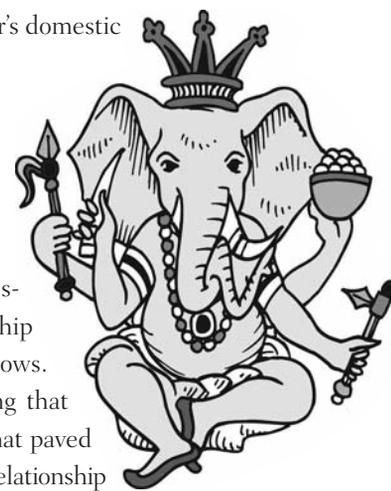
The animal fable of the elephant becoming a tiger that Shashi Tharoor, former United Nations under-secretary-general of public communications and information, created in the shape of a twenty-first-century Panchatantra,⁴ helps us understand India's evolution and —I would call it— attraction. This metaphor comparing the miracle of the Asian tigers and the reemergence of the Indian giant as a leader and competitive neighbor fully explains why Mexico needs to understand the primary importance of a stronger relationship with India. The reasons range from the superlatives of India's economic trends and political system to lesser used arguments such as the political, cultural and developmental similarities. But the fact is that Mexico and India have a greater potential for finding bilateral opportunities than has been acknowledged.

India is "one of the world's fastest growing economies," the second to be precise: gross domestic product (GDP) growth during the Tenth Plan period (2002-2007) averaged 7.6 percent, with the growth rate accelerating to 9 percent in 2005-2006 and 9.4 percent in 2006-2007. Its economy is the twelfth-largest in the world measured in nominal U.S. dollars, but rises to fourth-largest when measured in purchasing power at parity exchange rates. It continues to be a favored FDI destination and is ranked second in capital market inflows.

For Mexico it is not only a matter of convenience, but of inevitability, as Roberto Jaguaribe, vice minister of political affairs at Brazil's Foreign Ministry, described the need to build a special relationship with India. First, because of the global responsibilities both countries share as emerging economies and regional leaders, and secondly, because the two countries represent attractive markets for each other and find resonance in each other's domestic and geostrategic realities.

SWAAGAT MEXICO! WELCOME BACK

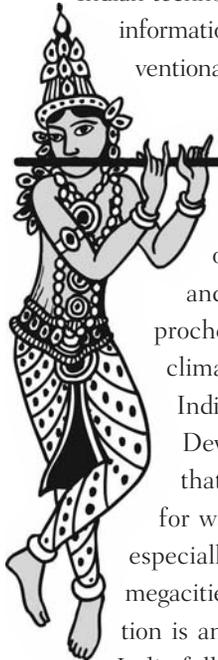
Recently, the Calderón administration has boosted a relationship that had been kept in the shadows. However, it is worth mentioning that there was a set of instruments that paved the way for a stronger bilateral relationship



such as the mechanism for bilateral consultation: the Mexico-India Permanent Bilateral Commission, which actually did not meet for 10 years until October 2005. In addition, in 2007 Mexico's Ministry of the Economy proposed the creation of a "High-Level Bilateral Group" to explore the possible synergies of both economies, a kind of consultative group that is only maintained with China, Japan, the United States, Canada and Korea. Some of the greatest steps forward favoring a closer economic relationship are the celebration of an Agreement for Mutual Promotion and Protection of Investment, signed on May 21, 2007, and the Agreement to Prevent Double Taxation. Nonetheless, these instruments are not enough for the potential of this kind of bilateral relationship regarding their national economies' leverage worldwide and the opportunities for mutual learning and experience sharing. In the area of investment and trade, several sectors have been identified in which the two countries could work together, such as pharmaceuticals, the automotive industry, information technologies, biotechnology, energy and the environment. In fact, in recent years, trade between Mexico and India has increased by 400 percent (the trade balance in 2007 was US\$2.2 billion). This is noteworthy, but still mediocre, *vis-à-vis* the possibilities and if compared to the US\$31 billion in total trade between Mexico and China. India's infrastructure needs, estimated at between US\$1 trillion and US\$1.5 trillion over the next five years, can be a profitable destination for Mexico's construction industry.

Indian technology has proved its competence in areas like information technology, pharmaceuticals and non-conventional energy, while Mexican competence can be seen in the fields of food processing, energy, high yield crops, and housing.

India represents an opportunity beyond commercial convenience in the areas of democratic consolidation, human development and security. There is a big opportunity for rapprochement in jointly addressing the challenges of climate change through alternative energy sources. India's Minister of Science, Technology and Ocean Development Kail Sabil has publicly recognized that both countries share problems in facilities for water delivery and fighting urban pollution, especially as a consequence of the phenomenon of megacities like New Delhi and Mexico City. Migration is another shared phenomenon. In 2008 alone, India followed by China and then Mexico occupied



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Mexico and India are historically bonded and tied together through multilateralism. Actually, Mexico was one of the first countries to recognize India's independence.

the top three spots as remittance-receiving developing countries, with US\$30 billion, US\$27 billion and US\$23.8 billion, respectively. The agenda of democratic institutional consolidation is also attractive for bilateral dialogue: India may be the biggest democracy on earth, but the truth is that there is an overwhelming demand to make democracy accountable and transparent. Both countries suffer threats that endanger the population's right to live free of fear and to public health, whether because of drug trafficking or fundamentalist terrorism. Not to mince words, India and Mexico were second and third only to Iraq as the three most dangerous places for media professionals, according to the International News Safety Institute.

Indian exploitation of its soft power is attractive learning material for Mexico. India's civilizational ethos has been an immeasurable asset for its international prestige, included its multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracy, contentious NGOs, Bollywood movies and Indian literature. The tools used to achieve India's independence (non-violence and Satyagraha)⁵ are examples of Indian soft power that have been present since the Gandhian era. It is accurately argued that Indian soft power has to be included in the South-South dialogue because so far it is almost exclusive to the North-South exchange, and it would definitely help to build closer relationships with the "others," such as the unknown Mexico.

Finally I would like to mention that exchange of best practices could be extremely useful in managing higher education, migration and promotion of small and medium-sized companies. Mexico can learn from the Indian experience of building an information economy, since it is the fourth largest scientific talent pool, and in this way, promoting an information-oriented development path, that would undeniably impact trends in migration and development.

STRATEGIC PARTNER

India is already considered a privileged partner by the U.S., a strategic ally by Brazil, and certainly a defiant neighbor by

China. While the tiger has to cope with the burden of being labeled the next super-power and balance its course of action outside its borders with its domestic needs, Mexico has to deal with the burden of being an unrealized potential regional leader that belongs fully neither to North America nor to Latin America.

For Mexico, India is beginning to be fertile terrain for a promising partnership arising out of the shared challenges of confirming their leverage in the international order, fighting domestic development problems, consolidating their bridging power between developing and developed countries and designing a coherent, effective foreign policy to pursue their respective national interests. **MM**

NOTES

¹ Shashi Tharoor, *The Elephant, the Tiger and the Cell Phone. Reflections on India in the Twenty-First Century* (New Delhi: Viking-Penguin Books, 2007).

² This term comes from the moves toward "outreach" at the G-8, whereby non-G-8 member states are included in aspects of G-8 summit discussions. The first move came in 2000 when Japan invited a group of leaders from developing countries, including the presidents of South Africa, Nigeria and Algeria, and international institutions to meet G-8 members over dinner. The United Kingdom presidency at Gleneagles in 2005 re-established an informal G-8 dialogue with the "Outreach 5" ("O-5" – Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa), now G-5. The 2007 Germany presidency proposed the establishment of regular, structured and institutionalized cooperation between the G-8 and the O-5, under the heading "Heiligendamm Process" (a dialogue between the member states of the G-8 group of countries and the important emerging economies, dealing with the biggest challenges the global economy is facing today).

³ T. Myatt, C. Sayao, D. Torney and Z. Zommers, *Outreach 5 Country Objectives Report. 2007 Heiligendamm Summit*, G-8 Research Group-Oxford, June 7, 2007, available on line at <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/oxford/g8rg-ox-objectives2007.pdf>.

⁴ The Panchatantra is one of India's most influential contributions to world literature; it consists of five books of animal fables and magic tales that were compiled, in their current form, between the third and fifth centuries AD.

⁵ Philosophy and practice of non-violent resistance developed by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

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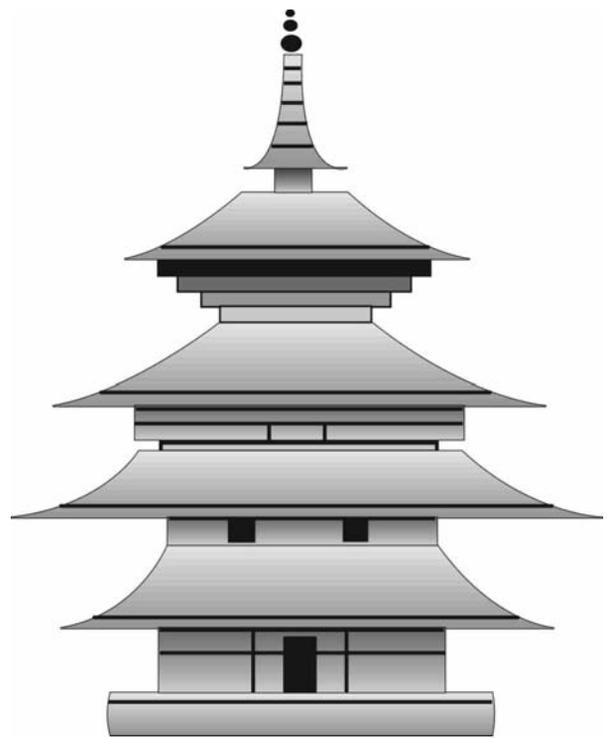
Lessons for Mexico: Chile and Brazil's Experience with China

María José Calderón Matute*

The Chinese government has diversified its foreign policy and trade relations to include all possible geographical regions and potential partners. It is common knowledge that China has increased its presence in Asian and African countries like North Korea, the Sudan, Zimbabwe, Iran and Myanmar. In fact, China has become the main trading partner of the first three, taking advantage of the bilateral relationships it had with their regimes. For instance, Iran is one of China's main oil suppliers and has consequently also become an observer state in the Shanghai Organization for Cooperation, which promotes military and security cooperation among six Asian states (the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan). This inclusion has given it better access to natural resources and a greater share of foreign direct investment (FDI), especially in the energy industry.

In addition to expanding its trade relations, China has lent strong support to these countries in international political negotiations. For instance it backed Sudan and Zimbabwe during the United Nations Security Council vote on resolutions including sanctions against both of them as a result of the Darfur conflict, the humanitarian crisis in Sudan and the condemnation of the crisis in Zimbabwe after Operation Drive Out Trash.

In this diversification effort, China has decided to expand its interests beyond Africa to Latin America. Here, the links with some countries like Mexico, Brazil and Chile, have been the result of different approaches. The love-hate relationship between Mexico and China is based on the



Chile recognized China's market economy and was the first Latin American country to support its entry into the World Trade Organization, unlike Mexico, the last country of the region to acquiesce.

perception that China has bumped Mexico down to second place among the United States' trade partners. For this reason, Mexico has had to redesign its foreign, economic and trade policy toward China, starting by banishing the belief that it is a threat because of its lead in trade with the U.S. and the reduction in the foreign direct investment Mexico used to receive that now has been re-directed to China.

* International issues analyst.

China's importance in the current international order makes it imperative for Mexico to carefully consider the opportunities a stronger bilateral relationship could offer. On the other hand, it would be very helpful to learn from other bilateral experiences with the Latin American countries to get more out of a renewed partnership between Mexico and China. In this regard, it is essential to study Chile and Brazil's involvement with the emerging Asian power and their focus areas of cooperation.

CHILE-CHINA: ALLIES, NOT ENEMIES

Chile has paid special attention to its relations with Asian countries as shown by the free trade agreements it has signed with Singapore, New Zealand and even Brunei. China has not been the exception; in 2005 they signed a free trade agreement (FTA) that was an important step forward for both countries in achieving cooperation in trade and investment. Chile recognized China's market economy and was the first Latin American country to support its entry into the World Trade Organization, unlike Mexico, the last country of the region to acquiesce.

Since the signing of the Chile-China FTA, their total trade has increased by 65 percent. In 2007, Chile sent 8.8 percent of its total exports to China, the fourth largest destination country for its exports. By the end of the first half of 2008, exports to China increased from 8.8 percent to 14.7 percent, making it Chile's most important destination. Chile's biggest export to China is copper; China's are televisions, automobiles and fabric. Sino-Chilean relations also include tourism and entrepreneurial relations through different instruments like the Agreement on Cooperation in Tourism and the Agreement to Establish a Business Committee.

For China, Chile has become a great partner and ally in the international community; as mentioned before, during the negotiations of China's entry into the WTO, Chile was the country that thought it better to have it as a member and make China abide by international trade rules than to block its membership and deny it recognition as a market economy. In a nutshell, Chile decided to make China an ally instead of an enemy. This particular relationship has been key for China's getting closer to the rest of the South American countries, and is a landmark in bilateral partnership-building with Latin American countries.

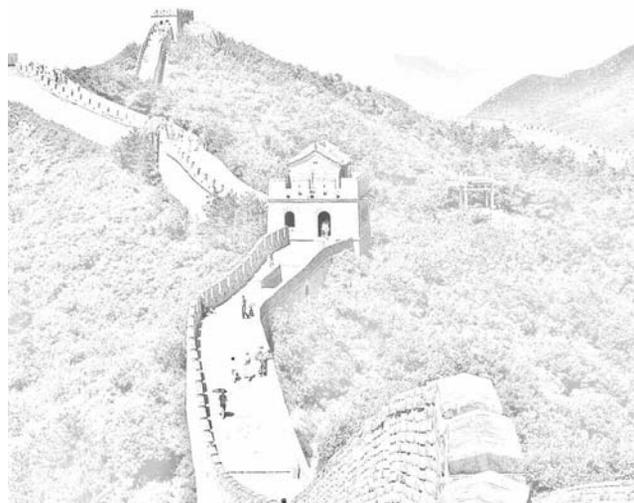
CHINA-BRAZIL, THE UNSTOPPABLE DUO

Sino-Brazilian relations are a clear example of diversified cooperation, leaving behind the international trend of focusing only on bilateral trade opportunities. Although relations officially began in the 1980s, it was not until 1993 that China and Brazil signed a partnership agreement, making Brazil the first Latin American nation to do so. Since then, Brazil has become China's biggest partner in Latin America. The agreement covered different areas of mutual interest, not only economic and commercial exchange but also cooperation in science, culture and sports.

The most important bilateral achievement is that they have become close allies. This alliance has been tested at different international negotiations, especially in the heart of the World Trade Organization, where they agree on agricultural policies, and within the G-20, where they have coincided on issues like intellectual property rights and foreign direct investment patterns, among others. It should be highlighted that most of the cooperation involves energy and technology. Brazilian and Chinese enterprises have achieved agreements on these matters; some of the companies have decided to establish branches in the other country or start



Just like with the other Latin American countries, Mexico and China are growing closer in alternative areas of cooperation such as culture and education.



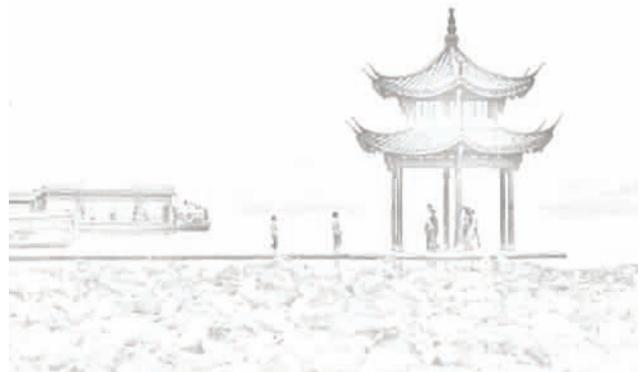
joint ventures like the one created between the Companhia Vale do Rio Doce (CVRD) and the Shanghai Baosteel Group Corporation to produce steel in Brazil, and the agreement between Petrobras and Sinopec to explore for oil in different countries.

The Brazilian-Chinese relationship is more diversified than any other bilateral arrangement between Latin American countries and China. Regardless of the importance of the commercial exchanges —Brazilian exports to China enjoy the first place in the Latin American ranking, at US\$12 billion— the partnership goes beyond this. China takes advantage of the Brazilian position in the hemisphere and its access to natural resources, while Brazil gets know-how from the Chinese and promotes diversified Brazilian investment in China.

MEXICO-CHINA: A RELATIONSHIP UNDER CONSTRUCTION

China's rapid growth produced discomfort and anxiety in many countries, and Mexico was no exception. It was the last country to accept China in the WTO. Today, it understands the benefits of having China as a member; however in the very beginning, apprehension about a growing trade power created serious concerns. Thanks to China's participation in multilateral organizations, Mexico has been able to initiate several complaint processes against Chinese dumping practices, like the claim presented two years ago regarding the steel industry. Despite these complaints, China is Mexico's second trade partner, right after the U.S. Nevertheless, this bilateral trade is tremendously asymmetrical: while Mexico exports only 0.7 percent to China, Chinese products represent 9.5 percent of its total imports; as a result, the trade deficit skyrocketed in 2007 to US\$28 billion.

It is significant for trade relations that Mexican companies have set up shop inside China. Mexican direct investment in China includes companies from different industries, like food (Bimbo, Gruma and El Fogoncito). Conversely, Chinese FDI in Mexico is clear in the auto and copper industries (by the Chinese Giant Engine Company and the Huaxi Group, respectively). Continuing in this same vein, after three years of negotiations, both countries finally signed an Agreement on Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investment on July 11, 2008. It is important to recall that Mexico has already signed 24 agreements of this kind, three of them

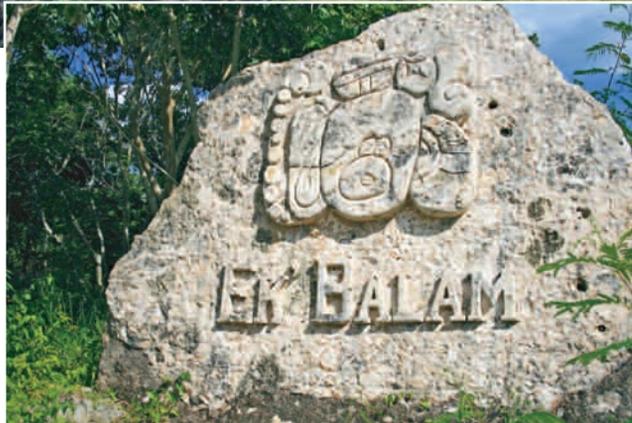


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The love-hate relationship between Mexico and China is based on the perception that China has bumped Mexico down to second place among the United States' trade partners.

with Asian economies. This particular agreement is a turning point in bilateral relations because it will definitely help protect Mexican entrepreneurs as well as to create an environment of confidence and security for Chinese investors.

Just like with the other Latin American countries, Mexico and China are growing closer in alternative areas of cooperation such as culture and education. However it will take a long time to reach even what China and Brazil have already achieved. Mexico must learn from the Brazilian and Chilean experiences, two clear examples of the potential that a strategic partnership with China can produce. From Brazil, Mexico should take note of the exchange in cooperation in technology and joint research on new ways to exploit natural resources. From Chile, Mexico should learn how to better analyze its competitors instead of being reticent just as a result of being left behind in the commercial race. Chile works as a platform for China to have a smoother entry to the rest of the region; likewise, Mexico can make use of its natural competitive advantages: first, the border it shares with the United States, which is China's main target market, and secondly, the availability of inadequately exploited natural resources —a condition it shares with Brazil— is a carrot for attracting the Asian dragon. **MM**



A Glimpse of *Ek' Balam*

Leticia Vargas de la Peña
Víctor R. Castillo Borges*

Ek' Balam, the capital of the ancient Talol kingdom, one of the most important in the pre-Hispanic Mayan region, is located in the far-eastern part of the state of Yucatán. According to our epigraphic data, Ek' Balam means “jaguar day-star” or “jaguar splendor.”

This archaeological site, mentioned as early as the nineteenth century by the first explorers and travelers who passed through the Yucatán peninsula, among them, Désiré Charnay in 1886, only began to be studied scientifically in the second half of the 1980s. This work, done by a group of U.S. researchers, produced among other things a site map putting its size as approximately 12 square kilometers. Beginning in 1994, we Yucatán-born archaeologists from the Yucatán offices of the National Institute of Anthropology and History

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Photos previous page, a view of Structure 18 from the Oval Palace, and Ek' Balam's glyph. Photos by Elsie Montiel.

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Detail of the monster of the Earth façade.

Elsie Montiel

(INAH) initiated the Ek' Balam Architectural Conservation and Research Project, which continues until today.

Ek' Balam's location is very significant, situated as it is between the ancient domains of Cobá and Chichén Itzá. It is also important chronologically, since it was at its height after the domination of Cobá and before that of Chichén Itzá, although it was also contemporary with both of them, relating to them to a certain extent. Thanks to the research done in Ek' Balam, we now know that a large part of the northern Mayan lowlands were not only ruled over by Cobá and Chichén Itzá, but also by the Talol *ajawlel* or kingdom.

Ek' Balam's importance also resides in its antiquity and the long period it was inhabited. Archaeological evidence shows that its first inhabitants settled there as early as the



The Oval Palace seen from the entrance.

Elsie Montiel



The entrance to Ukit Kan Lek Tok's tomb.

Elsie Montiel

They are part of the settlement's central nucleus, together with approximately another 45 constructions of different sizes and characteristics. Outstanding among all these are the large structures numbered 1, 2 and 3, which make up the North Plaza. The main building is Structure 1, known as the Acropolis, which is 162 meters long, 68 meters wide and more than 32 meters high. Structures 2 and 3 are each more than 120 meters long and over 20 meters high. Other very small structures are scattered around the plaza, like a few altars, the smallest shrine in the site and a circular steam bath located across from the Acropolis.

middle pre-classical era (approximately 700-200 B.C.); it remained inhabited until the post-classical era or beyond, as is demonstrated by the vestiges of a small colonial settlement that can still be found at the site. It was a living city, then, for a very long time, but the height of its power and development came in the late classical period (approximately A.D. 770-870), with an explosion in construction and the flowering of science and the arts, including painting, sculpture and writing.

After 13 years of research and work at the site, several buildings distributed in the two main plazas have been restored.

TOURING THE SITE

You get to the center of Ek' Balam by walking along *sacbe* number 2,¹ which crosses the two concentric walls surrounding the area. A Third Wall joins the main buildings together. These three constructions were a defensive, protective perimeter around the seat of power and the residence of the rulers of the Talol kingdom at a time when they must have been subject to warring attacks by neighboring settlements.



The Ball Game, Structure 9.

Elsie Montiel



Elsie Montiel

View of the South Plaza from the Oval Palace; in the back the Acropolis.

Ukit Kan Lek Tok' gathered the best specialists, architects, sculptors, painters and craftsmen of his time to create extraordinary works of art.

Sacbe 2 leads to a building known as Structure 18, a peculiar vaulted passageway in the form of a cross that was the formal entrance to the site.

Past this structure is the Ball Game Court, formed by Structures 8 and 9, which have rooms decorated with small friezes of columns. It is interesting to observe the gradated talud walls of Structure 8, unique in Ek' Balam, decorated the same way as the Acropolis.

Next to the Ball Game Court is the South Plaza, which boasts several restored buildings, among them the Twins, easily identifiable because they are two large identical buildings situated on a single basement. Next to them is the Oval Palace, whose lower level is made up of oval bodies superimposed on one another. The building was later changed and rooms were built on the first and second floors of the front. However, on the sides, there is a single floor. These rooms were used as living quarters, but on the highest part is a small shrine that was used for rituals.

On the far eastern side of this plaza is a large basement, Structure 10, with large, leaning walls topped by huge stones forming a cornice. At the top is a small space that was used for religious purposes, just like the one atop the Oval Palace. There are also other smaller shrines distributed around the site's two main plazas.

In the middle of this plaza is the Platform of the Stelae, which has two monuments: Stela 2, to the right is much eroded, but on Stela 1's surface, on the left, we can still see beautifully carved figures and writing. Among the distinguishable shapes is the main figure, King K'ihnich Junpik Tok' K'uh...nal, who must have erected the monument to commemorate his ascension to the throne in A.D. 840. At the top of this monolith is the carved figure of the *ajaw* Ukit Kan Lek Tok', the builder's ancestor and founder of the ruling dynasty in the late classical period. Everything we can now see in Ek' Balam we owe to the genius of this last figure, who came to the throne in A.D. 770. Ukit Kan Lek Tok' dedicated his reign to the construction and decoration of Ek' Balam's most important buildings, mainly his palace, the Acropolis.

Arriving at this enormous, complex six-level palace, we are welcomed by the Hieroglyphic Serpents, two stone monuments representing open-jawed snakes whose tongues "descend" along the staircase and on which is carved the in-

scription containing the distinctive emblem glyph of the kingdom of Talol and its rulers.

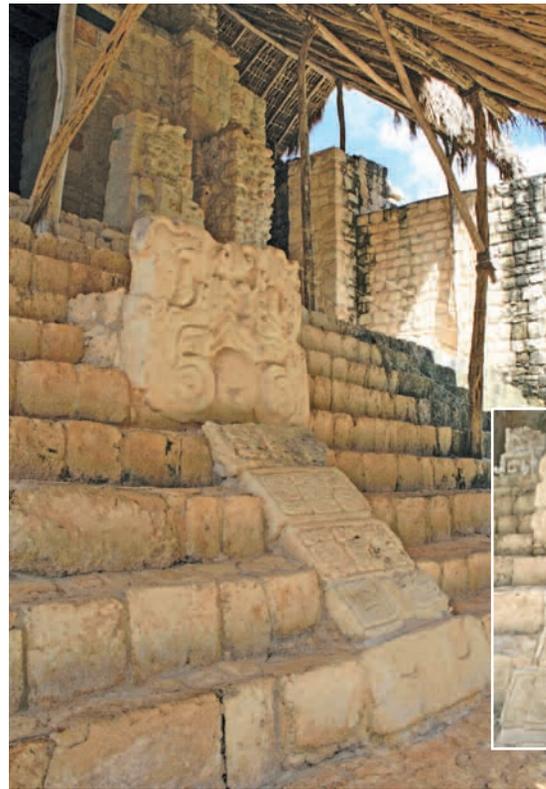
A little above this, flanking the great stairway, are two constructions whose façades were completely covered with giant masks stylized in a cascade, only vestiges of which remain at the lower part, although on the southeast corner there is a good sample of what they originally were like.

Ukit Kan Lek Tok' gathered the best specialists, architects, sculptors, painters and craftsmen of his time to create extraordinary works of art, although we have only recovered fragments of most of them. It is our good fortune that the best example of their creativity has been preserved and that today we can appreciate it thanks to the fact that in pre-Hispanic times it was covered up to protect not only its decorations but Ukit Kan Lek Tok's royal tomb inside. The ruler's remains were deposited in this space with a more than 7,000-piece funeral offering, including 21 vessels made of ceramics and alabaster and jewels and other objects made of shell, flintstone, jade, bone, pyrite and rare materials like three pearls and a gold pendant.

The façade boasts the face of the monster of the earth, a mythical being that the ancient Mayans used to symbolize the entrance to the underworld. The impressive figure surrounding the door recreates the monster's maw, that "devoured" or "spit out" whoever entered or left by it, and its jaw juts forward forming a walkway crowned by large fangs. Also very beautiful are the statues of figures atop the façade, richly dressed in jaguar-skin skirts, the large belts of ballgame players, and feather fantails, making them look like winged beings. At the center is Ukit Kan Lek Tok', seated on a throne resting on the monster's maw.

These Chenes-style façades express the same basic idea as those found in several archaeological sites of neighboring Campeche state. However, these stand out because of the large size of the molded stucco, showing how highly specialized the craftsmen who produced this kind of extraordinary work, unique in the Mayan area, were.

On either side of this magnificent building are two small spaces with the representation of the monster of the earth only on the frieze. On the right-hand structure, which we call the Temple of the Fish because there are three fish on it, a small mural can still be made out on the entrance's right door-jamb. It depicts the building itself at the moment of a meeting between the lord of Ek' Balam, seated at the center, and several figures who may have come from other cities and who seem to be presenting him with gifts.



Arriving at the Acropolis, we are welcomed by the Hieroglyphic Serpents, two stone monuments representing open-jawed snakes whose tongues "descend" along the staircase.

Interestingly, the city's architecture and decoration are very specific: even though they share similarities with those of other Mayan cultural regions like the Petén, Puuc and Chenes, the way they are combined with others of local origin results in a site that is very different from other known Mayan settlements.

In general, we could say that the most important thing about Ek' Balam is that it is a wonderful opportunity to enrich archaeological research because of the diversity of its materials and the fortunate preservation of several glyph texts that have allowed us to uncover part of its history. Lastly, its restoration, conservation and opening to the public will allow visitors interested in the Mayan culture to see an archaeological site unparalleled in this part of Yucatán. **MM**

NOTES

¹ *Sacbe* is the Mayan word for pre-Hispanic roads and means "white road." This *sacbe* is one of five in Ek' Balam, although the others are no longer visible.



Dzibilchaltún
A Mayan Regional Center

Rubén Maldonado Cárdenas*

Dzibilchaltún, located a scant 15 kilometers from Mérida, the capital of Yucatán, is renowned for its architecture, plazas and roadways or *sacbe'ob*, all of which give it an urban air. The constructions with Mayan or corbelled vaults and cut-stone walls covered with stucco and paintings are typical of the city's unique style. The buildings in the central complex were occupied by representations of deities or the rulers; around them were stonework rooms for the elite, and around those, housing for the general population. The modeled, painted stucco-decorated façades sometimes had giant masks of the rain or sun deities on their

upper panels, or simple plant or animal motifs, like that of a serpent, probably indicating the cult of Kukulcán.

The site is only 17 kilometers from the Gulf coast, a privileged location that determined a marine-coastal economy which included products both from the sea and from inland agriculture. The nearby Mayan port of Xcambó, up the northern coast, played an important role in sea trade and must have been the source of exotic materials like Campeche's multi-colored ceramics and Tabasco's fine oranges. Society sustained itself mainly through rain-fed agriculture; from the Gulf waters, they obtained fish, salt and shells. Archaeological explorations of the site's platforms and buildings produced many artifacts made of conch shell, a material they also used to decorate their buildings.

Dzibilchaltún, at its height between A.D. 600 and A.D. 900-1000, a time known as the late/end classical period, reached a population of 20,000. Building, however, began

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Photo previous page: Rubén Vázquez.

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The Temple of the Seven Dolls, named after the clay figurines found inside. These figurines are exhibited in Dzibilchaltún's Site Museum.

Elsie Montiel

Rubén Vázquez

in the upper pre-classical period (about 300 B.C.). Together with Tihó (built on the site of what is today Mérida), Dzibilam and Aké, Dzibilchaltún was one of the four most important regional centers in the very northern part of Yucatán. Its decline began in the early post-classical period and lasted until the late period (from A.D. 1000 to A.D. 1520), among other things because of the militarist expansion of Chichén Itzá. On the Europeans' arrival, the city was still relatively important, judging by the open chapel (also known as an "Indian" chapel) the Spaniards built in the Central Plaza to help them spread the Catholic Gospel, and by their efforts to destroy any vestiges of the icons depicting the old gods, which the conquistadors thought came from the devil.

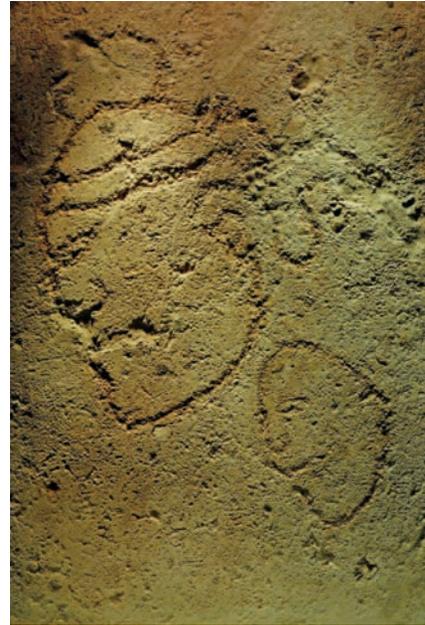
The stelae, with their *bas-relief* work, are one of the forms of sculpture from the later classical and final classical periods. Of the 12 to 15 extant examples, many are incomplete, broken or reduced to simple fragments, making it difficult to determine exactly how many of them there are. One of the most outstanding, reminiscent of the ones found in Palenque, is Stela 19, next to Stela 18, depicting a figure with an elegant bird-shaped headdress made of precious feathers. Both stelae are part of the stone covering of the first platform on the only pyramid on the Central Plaza, Structure 36, which seems to indicate important social

One of the most outstanding, stelae is Stela 19, depicting a figure with an elegant bird-shaped headdress made of rare feathers.



Elsie Montiel

Stela 19, Structure 36.



Rubén Vázquez

An example of graffiti displayed at the site museum.

changes at the site, linked to the end of a dynasty of Dzibilchaltún rulers and the incursion of people from outside, apparently linked to Chichén Itzá's expansion in the area.

In the central part of the site is the beautiful Xlakah *cenote* (sink hole), whose name means "old town," alluding to the name the modern Mayas use for the first settlement that would later be Dzibilchaltún. The sink hole was a source of water for the inhabitants and in times of drought, it attracted neighbors from the surrounding areas, one of the reasons the population began to grow. From its depths, archaeologists have recovered hundreds of ceramic receptacles and shards of pots that were used for holding water.

The site has three great plazas: the Central Plaza, the Southern Plaza, and a third to the southwest. Of the three, only the first is almost completely uncovered. Archaeologists are currently exploring the second, and the third has not been dug yet, even though it contains Structure 89, one of the highest pyramids in the area.

The Central Plaza was surrounded by buildings with terraced façades, giving them a surprising unity. It is thought that the plaza was used for mass gatherings during the celebration of special events related to their civic and religious calendars. Undoubtedly, these events were attended by both local inhabitants and visitors who would have arrived to the



Rúben Vázquez

The “Indian” Chapel, built by Spaniards in the middle of the Central Plaza; to the left, Structure 36.

city using the *sacbe'ob* (roadway) system —Dzibilchaltún has 10— that linked the central part of the city with the surrounding areas. The National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) began the restoration of these ancient roadways in 1986.

Sacbe'ob 1 and 2 converge at the Central Plaza: the first connects it to the Temple of the Seven Dolls platform, located to the east. To the west, along the same line is the *sacbe'ob* 2, which about 200 meters from where it starts passes near the platform adjacent to the Standing Temple, so called because it is the only building that remained standing when in the 1940s, archaeologists recognized Dzibilchaltún's importance. It is a long, vaulted residential building with double rooms, erected in the late period. Several human burials were discovered underneath its floors, a common practice in Dzibilchaltún.

The best known building on the site is the Temple of the Seven Dolls. It may have been used as an astronomical observatory given its central tower open to the heavens on the south side. The four entryways face the four points on the compass, and it has four small windows, two to the east and two to the west, that let the sunlight in. The central part, covered with

a vaulted area, is surrounded by an interior hallway, a considerable architectural feat for its time.

In this building, on March 21, it is possible to see the lights and shadows that announced the arrival of the beginning of the rainy season and the need to begin preparations of the soil for planting. On September 21, they announce the beginning of the dry season and harvest time. At dawn on those days, the sun begins its ascent and, little by little, situates itself between the main openings in the building's wall; its rays go all the way through before continuing their way to the heavens. From the west, this gives the impression of a great mask of fire, which is why archaeologists infer that the building may have been dedicated to Kin, the Mayan god of the sun. The frieze was decorated with interlaced motifs evoking serpentine forms and eight great masks, covered with

painted stucco, one on each corner and one over every door, which must have given the whole a singular, impressive appearance.

The most important building on the southern side of the Central Plaza is the great Structure 44 which was used for administrative and ceremonial purposes. This is one of the buildings with the largest volume in the whole site, and one of the longest in



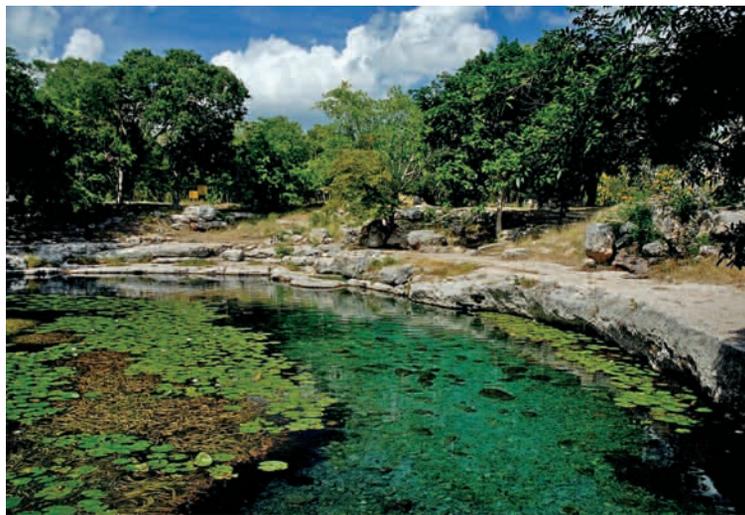
Adriana Velázquez

the whole Mayan region (130 meters). The great stairway covers the entire front; its base is made with great blocks of stone and smaller flagstone slabs to reinforce it.

The upper rooms were long, narrow and vaulted with entryways at either end that, combined with the openings in the walls and the columns in relief, must have looked from afar like multiple entryways. The façade had two platforms placed back to back, one in the lower northeast, the other larger one at the center. Most certainly these platforms were used for dancing on days when special ceremonies were held. The building shows signs of four different stages of construction and was used the most at Dzibilchaltún's zenith,

open court a little more than 20 meters long and 12 meters wide with variations that tend to make it asymmetrical. The construction on the west was built atop a previously existing one, while the one on the east is completely new. Both were built in an area of minor altars, the best preserved of which ended up being completely immersed in the western part of the field. A smooth, fragmented stela served partially to mark the limit of the sidewalk's vertical wall.

Graffiti was used to decorate buildings that were no longer being used; the drawings were sometimes outlined in black. The motifs were usually faces, human figures or human games, like the so-called *patolli* in Central Mexico,



Rubén Vázquez

The beautiful Xlakah cenote; visitors can swim in its crystal-clear waters.

when its functions were linked to the activities in the Central Plaza, which were carried out in this and the other buildings around it.

Another important building on the plaza is Structure 42. A large, low platform, approximately 67 meters long and 22 meters wide, what is left of its rooms are only 4.7 meters high at the most. Its long, vaulted rooms are aligned in a north-south direction. Apparently, this was the only building on the plaza used as dwellings for the governing elite, given that the central room was discovered to contain the most important burial site in Dzibilchaltún, that of Kalom Uk'uw Chan Chac, the ruler of Ch'iy Chan Ti Ho. Apparently, this was the site's original name and is carved as an emblem glyph in a deer bone found in the burial site. A similar, though incomplete, inscription is carved into Stela 19, which is inferred to represent the same figure.

Obviously, the city could not be without its ball game court, which seems to date from quite a late period. It is an

played with beans used as dice thrown against a drawing of crisscrossed squares. Some of these drawings were recovered on the floor and walls of the Temple of the Seven Dolls, Building 44 and Sub-structure 44.

Between A.D. 800 and A.D. 1000, Dzibilchaltún reached its zenith and its population was at its densest; its decline began toward the end of the early post-classical period. However, the power of Chichén Itzá had an impact on this area of northern Yucatán; the construction of buildings stopped and the population shrank drastically. It is thought that under Chichén Itzá's hegemony, Dzibilchaltún's population may have completely dispersed.

Given its importance, in 1986 an archaeological project was promoted in Dzibilchaltún, and on April 14, 1987, a presidential decree turned it into a national park to protect and preserve it. Nevertheless, the protection is only relative, among other things, because of the growing urban sprawl of the city of Mérida. **MM**



Elsie Montiel

Yucatán's *Green Gold*

Elsie Montiel*

Among the most noteworthy protagonists in the history of Yucatán is henequen. This agave plant native to the peninsula transformed the region's society and the economy at the end of the nineteenth century. Thanks to the sudden worldwide demand for the fiber extracted

from the henequen plant, Yucatán developed the two extremes of immense wealth and abject poverty: while some forged incalculable fortunes, putting them among the richest men in the Americas, most of the population, of Mayan ancestry, would be the object of abuse, exploitation and outright theft. The boom did not last very long, but its effect was such that henequen came to be known as "green gold."

* Editor of *Voices of Mexico*.

THE PLANT AND ITS ATTRIBUTES

Native to the Yucatán Peninsula, *Agave fourcroydes* Lemaire had been used since pre-Hispanic times. With the fiber extracted from its leaves—*soskil* as the Mayas called it—they made different kinds of textiles, and with its sap, a refreshing beverage. Its status and use did not change much during the colonial period; henequen was one of the items produced and traded throughout the peninsula. The fiber was used, among other things, for making twine, thick line used to moor ships, hammocks, bags and sacks for storing and transporting agricultural products.

Henequen has many qualities, but among the most important is its resistance to pests, disease and decay; it is adapted to survive in arid regions with very little water, and it reproduces without being cultivated. *Soskil* products could hold a larger weight for longer, and the sacks made with it preserved the products they held during transport better, making them suitable both for sailing and transporting raw materials. However, until 1861, the fiber was extracted by hand, making large-scale production for trade difficult.

A henequen agave plant takes between five and seven years to mature and after that has a useful life of about 20 years. The fiber is obtained from the sword-shaped leaves, which must be cut and cleaned of thorns before being scraped to separate the fiber. Once the threads have been extracted, they must be dried and then “combed,” beating

them against a kind of fixed rake to soften them. This operation is performed several times using finer- and finer-toothed rakes. The scraping and combing takes a very long time, so it was not until these processes were mechanized that production rapidly became massive.

THE BOOM

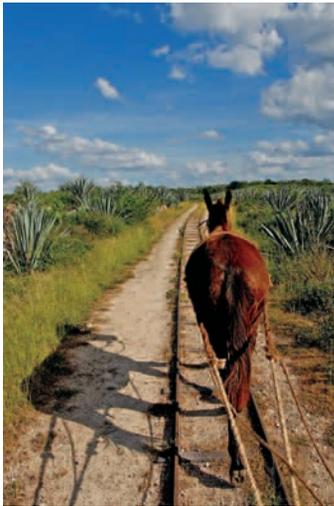
Large-scale production for commercialization began when José Esteban Solís, the owner of the Itzincab Hacienda imported the first steam engine into the area and adapted it to a mechanical rasper in 1861. Technological advances coincided with growing world demand for the product.

In a very short time, the northeastern part of the peninsula became one enormous henequen field. From 2,600 hectares (or 65,000 *mecates*, a local surface area measurement) sown in 1860, the numbers jumped to 16,000 hectares (400,000 *mecates*) in 1869 and 170,000 hectares and (4.25 million *mecates*) by 1910. For a few decades, Yucatán would be the world's only producer of the fiber; out of its haciendas came 90 percent of the rope and sacks consumed internationally. Henequen then began to be called sisal fiber because it was exported to Europe and the United States through the port of Sisal in Yucatán. The giant bales arrived at their destination with the seal of the port, so importers began calling it by that name.



Elsie Montiel

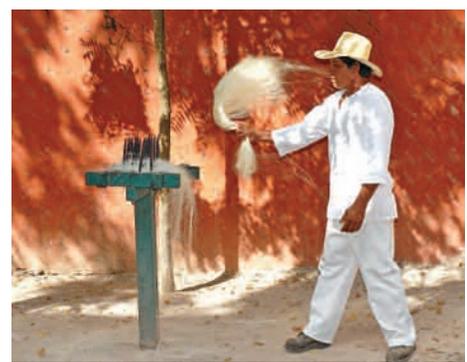
The Misné Hacienda has been turned into a luxurious hotel in Mérida.



Elsie Montiel



Unless otherwise specified, photos this page by Rubén Vázquez



Visitors today can tour the Sotuta de Peón Hacienda to see all the stages henequen fiber production went through a century ago.

The fiber is obtained from the leaves, which must be cut and cleaned of thorns, scraped to separate the threads, which are dried and then “combed” to soften them.

The price skyrocketed and the owners of the henequen haciendas rapidly became immensely rich, as the spectacular mansions along Mérida’s Montejo Boulevard show. The boom had a cost, however: the demands of producing the fiber and using it to make saleable products led to the exploitation of thousands of Mayan peasants, who did the heaviest work for miserable wages and were tied to the haciendas mainly through debt. The social differences in the peninsula became an abyss.

WORKING CONDITIONS

In Yucatán, like in many other parts of New Spain, the colonial government imposed the *encomienda* system.¹ The abuses that went along with it soon led to its elimination, but by that time, there was already a relationship of domi-

nation among the Spaniards, *criollos* (people of Spanish descent born in Mexico) and the Mayan population.

At that time, the first haciendas were established in the southern part of the peninsula where the land was fertile. They produced sugar cane, corn and citrus fruit, and some raised cattle. The system was fed by the labor of the Mayan peoples in conditions of exploitation that did not change even when Mexico gained its independence.

THE REBELLION

In Yucatán, it is a truism that the Mayan peoples have often been subjected but never dominated. The bloody Caste War, which broke out in 1847 and did not formally come to an end until 1901, is proof of that. The roots of the rebellion are in the Mayan peoples’ desire to recover their lands that little by little had been taken from them and end the exploitation they were subjected to on the haciendas.² Both sides committed the bloodiest acts imaginable during the first years of the rebellion. Given the violence unleashed, both



Entrance to the Yaxcopoil Hacienda main house.

hacienda owners and many Mayas who were not participating in the hostilities fled to the northern and central part of Yucatán, where there was less danger. There, however, the land was chalky and completely infertile. The only plant that could grow in it was henequen. The relations of domination did not change; with support from those in power, the *criollos* began to grab the land, and the Mayan peasants—both the locally born and the refugees—had to adjust to even worse working conditions, but now on the henequen haciendas.

THE LINK BETWEEN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC POWER

In the mid-nineteenth century, the peninsula's hacienda-owning oligarchy controlled not only the economy, but also local politics. Landowners and local notables distributed and rotated among themselves local and state political posts, which they then used to legally justify their acts of expropriation and appropriation. With the local justice system also

on the landowners' side, ordinary citizens had little chance of defending their individual rights. The precarious living conditions outside the haciendas reduced the Mayas' autonomy and many ended up working on the haciendas. The most common form of subjugation was through debt: the Mayas were paid much less than what they needed to live. This situation was solved by becoming indebted to the boss, who harbored no expectations of being paid, because he benefited from it, as the worker became permanently tied to his hacienda. With the support of even clearly unconstitutional state laws, the hacienda owners managed to get the labor they needed to survive in the new conditions of the world market. It is said that in some towns, more than 50 percent of the inhabitants resided permanently on the haciendas.³ Thus, by the end of the century, the hacienda owners were in more than favorable conditions to respond to the world demand for their product.

LIFE ON THE HACIENDAS

By 1904, 1,000 haciendas in Yucatán were producing and processing henequen fiber. Though small, compared to the haciendas in Northern Mexico, they were as large as 13,000 hectares. Henequen plantations covered 60 percent of all the land in the state. Among the surprising things about the whole period was that the great fortunes henequen produced were based on using only 5-percent of each agave leaf, since that is all the fiber is. So, to fill one bale, 10,000 leaves had to be scraped.



The engine room and the mechanical reaper room of Yaxcopoil, one of the biggest henequen haciendas in the early twentieth century.



Even before the boom, hacienda owners were dubbed “the Divine Caste” given their wealth and power. For most of the time the economic bonanza lasted, henequen haciendas functioned like autonomous states: they had their own churches, cemeteries, hospitals and they all smelted their own coins. In their “hacienda stores,” the workers were paid in local money and had to buy what they needed to feed themselves and live, plus paying their rent. They did not have the right to leave, and, since they were paid in coins that were worthless outside, they had no money to move around outside the hacienda anyway.

It is said that the hacienda owners did not live on their lands because the processing of the fiber produced a very disagreeable smell. Whether this is the reason or not, the fact is that most of them lived in lavish, European-style mansions in the city of Mérida. A drive down the city’s Montejo Boulevard reveals in seconds the significance of the wealth some fortunate members of the Divine Caste accumulated.

AN ABRUPT COLLAPSE

The exporting boom was very short-lived. By 1916, production and demand began to stagnate. The invention of plastic and synthetic fibers was one of the main causes. But the cul-

Henequen haciendas functioned like autonomous states: they had their own churches, cemeteries, hospitals and they all smelted their own coins.



The drying area, Yaxcopoil Hacienda.

Photos this page Elsie Montiel

tivation of the same plant in other places like Brazil and Tanzania broke the monopoly of henequen production. Also, the Mexican Revolution came —albeit belatedly, in 1915— to Yucatán, and with it the debt system was abolished, the debts cancelled and the minimum wage established.

Production progressively slowed until, by 1950, many of the haciendas were completely abandoned. Today, the former maker of fortunes is used to make handbags and other crafts, although now the remaining 95 percent of the plant is also put to other industrial and medicinal uses. Yucatán’s lands are no longer painted green with the plants, but here and there abandoned or reconstructed buildings of many henequen haciendas remain, just like the great Mayan cities, to testify to that almost fleeting moment of splendor created by what was once called “green gold.” **MM**

NOTES

- ¹ The kings of Spain granted the conquistadors lands to exploit and indigenous people to work them. In exchange, the proud owners committed themselves to “caring for” the natives and spreading the Catholic Gospel.
- ² Even after Mexico became independent from Spain, the exploitation of and land theft from the Mayas on the peninsula did not come to an end. By abolishing all forms of corporate property, the Reform Laws themselves were used to facilitate the privatization and progressive transfer of the indigenous communities’ communal lands, formerly the property of villages and towns. The law demanded that communal property be divided up among the heads of families, but that fostered abuses of the isolated individuals with little recourse for defending themselves from the powerful and the authorities —even though they had not elected them— who applied the law against them.
- ³ Environmental factors also placed an important role in this demographic concentration. Temperatures of 90 degrees Fahrenheit from March to September hindered the peasants’ mobility. Pests and drought made agriculture unstable —between 1881 and 1886, locusts did away with a large part of corn production. This increased the henequen plantation-owners’ negotiating capacity. The population had little choice: they could either die of hunger or move to the haciendas.

The Ingredients in Yucatán Cuisine*



Elsie Montiel

Mérida's central market, a quick lesson in the basic colors and flavors of regional cooking.

One undeniable attraction of the Yucatán peninsula is its cuisine, a delicious result of the culinary pairing of European and local influences. This combination has resulted in such unparalleled, exquisite dishes, that many outsiders have become permanent aficionados of the unmistakable flavor of Yucatán cuisine. Perhaps the most interesting thing about this gastronomical

region is the fact that relatively few ingredients are needed to prepare a wide variety of dishes. Whether in a Yucatán family cupboard or the walk-in storeroom of a five-star restaurant, you will find certain basic ingredients with which housewives and great chefs prepare the dishes you will never tire of.

To start: *achiote* (annatto seed paste), used to prepare the best-known Yucatán dish, *pibil* pork, plus chicken, fish and a host of other dishes. Another basic is banana leaves, sold in any local market. No authentic Yucatán table can be without its *Habanero* chili pepper salsa—but, newcomers to chili peppers beware!—or red onions pickled in lime

* Information provided by Isabel Morales Quezada; written by Elsie Montiel.

Photos of dishes by Rubén Vázquez.

juice and spices; limes, sour oranges, garlic, fines herbes and spices like cloves, black pepper, oregano, cumin, coriander and vinegar. *Chaya*, a local plant, is used to make the most delicately flavored tamales and many other dishes.

Spices are used to prepare what are called *recados* or marinating pastes: squash seed *recado*, red or *achiote recado*, black *recado*, white *recado*, *recado* for steak, pumpkin seed *recado* (*pipián*) and *recado* for tamales. The most common kind is red *recado* made with the red annatto seed paste, used in all the *pibil* dishes, like *pibil* chicken or pork and Tikin-xic fish.

If you ask a Yucatán native what his or her favorite dishes are, you risk hearing an interminable list that usually includes *papadzules* (enchiladas filled with hard-boiled egg covered in squash-seed sauce (*pepita*); *salbutes* (tortillas with pork or chicken accompanied by the invariable pickled red onion; *panuchos*, which are similar to *salbutes*, but with an open tortilla, filled with beans; *cochinita pibil* and *pollo pibil* (pork or chicken marinated in *achiote*); *brazo de reina* (a tamale filled with *chaya*, hard-boiled eggs and a special squash-seed sauce, wrapped in banana leaves and oven roasted, then cut into pieces to serve several people. And the list goes on: *relleno negro* (a mixture of hard-boiled egg, ground meat and a special black *recado*); or *poc-chuc* (roast pork marinated in sour orange juice and served with potatoes and tortillas, *Habanero* chili salsa and pickled red onions. It could continue practically *ad infinitum*: lime soup; stuffed cheese, a cheese ball filled with ground meat and hard-boiled egg seasoned with black *recado* (“ball cheese” is a kind of Gouda used very frequently in Yucatán cooking); pork and beans; *kibis*, hand-rolled cracked wheat stuffed with shrimp, beef or cheese...

The most popular beverages are made from *nanche* fruit and *chaya*, and the region boasts an anise liqueur called Ixtabentun. And there’s always room for dessert. The most popular are *machacado*, an ice slush made with pieces of fruit (peach, strawberry, cantaloupe, etc.) and condensed milk; and *marquesitas*, a kind of crepe served rolled up like a taco filled with grated cheese and goat-milk caramel sauce, Nutella hazelnut spread or chocolate. These sweets are so popular that they are sold by street vendors.

Yucatán natives are proud that their food is as delicious as it is easy to prepare. We include here three very popular recipes that will bring the real flavor of the peninsula to your table.

Lime Soup

Ingredients

- 1 chicken cut into pieces or four large chicken breasts
- 10 c. water
- 2 sprigs oregano
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1 onion cut into quarters
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 Tbsp. corn oil
- 2 tomatoes, skinned and chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 6 limes, thinly sliced
- 6 tortillas, cut into strips, deep fried and drained on paper towels



Preparation

Cook the chicken in the water together with the oregano, garlic, onion and salt to taste; once cooked, take out the chicken, let it cool and shred it. Strain the broth. Sauté the chopped onion in the corn oil until translucent; add the chopped tomatoes and green pepper and sauté well; add the broth and half the sliced limes and boil 10 minutes. Add the shredded chicken and the rest of the sliced lime; serve immediately garnished with the fried tortilla strips. Serve in deep soup dishes. The fried tortillas should be served separately so they stay crunchy when added to the soup just before eating.

Taken from: http://www.yucatan.com.mx/especiales/yucateca/sopa_de_lima.asp

Pibil Chicken

Ingredients

- 1 banana leaf
- 6 chicken legs
- 100 grams red *recado**
- 3 sour oranges**
- 2 tomatoes
- 1 sprig of *epazote*
- salt to taste
- 100 grams of lard



* Red *recado* is a marinating paste using *achiote* or annatto seeds, native to the southeast, to make it red. The annatto seeds are slightly toasted and then ground with chicken broth and different spices like bay leaves, thyme, marjoram, oregano, onion, and garlic to form a paste used to flavor fowl, fish and pork. *Achiote* is also sold in powder form that is then seasoned to taste. ** Sour oranges can be substituted by combining lemon juice with regular orange juice; this tastes quite similar. If you cannot find banana leaves in Latino markets, very often Filipino markets have them.

Preparation

Marinate the chicken pieces in the red *recado* dissolved in sour orange juice and salt until they take on the red color. Cut the onion and tomato into thin strips. Put each piece of chicken into a banana leaf with the chopped *epazote*, the onion and tomato strips and a little lard for flavor. Wrap the chicken pieces in the banana leaves and tie them with the strings taken from the leaves themselves. Steam for 45 minutes. Open up the wrapped chicken pieces and put one on each plate. Serve with *xnipec* salsa on the side.

Xnipec Salsa

- 3 Italian tomatoes, seeded and finely chopped
- 3 *Habanero* chili peppers (or to taste), finely chopped
- 1 red onion, finely chopped
- ½ c. vinegar or sour orange juice
- salt to taste

Preparation

Mix all the ingredients and serve in a clay or glass salsa dish. Taken from: http://www.yucatan.com.mx/especiales/yucateca/pollo_pibil.asp

Papadzules

Ingredients

- ground *pepita* (squash-seed paste)*
- hard-boiled eggs, cut into chunks
- *epazote*
- tortillas
- tomatoes



* *Pepita* is dried, hulled, toasted squash seed which is ground with a little water (preferably on a traditional Mexican stone mortar and pestle or *metate*) until you get a paste.

Preparation

Boil the eggs until the shells crack, peel them and put them to one side. In a separate pot, boil the water and the *epazote* until it releases its color; then remove from heat and let cool. In a bowl, add the ground *pepita* to the *epazote* water, mixing gradually until creamy. Prepare the tomato sauce: cook, peel and puree the tomatoes in the blender; fry a little chopped onion, the tomato liquid, salt and, if desired, roasted *Habanero* chili peppers in oil until the sauce thickens. Finally, fill the tortillas with chopped hard-boiled egg, and bathe them first in *pepita* sauce and on top of that, the tomato sauce. Serve the *papadzules* hot, accompanied with a roasted *Habanero* chili pepper. This is a very simple meal, easy to prepare, and most importantly, delicious!

Taken from: http://yucatan.in/revista/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=222

We would like to thank the owners of the **99.9 Restaurant**, in Mexico City, specialized in Yucatán cuisine, for their kindness in letting us take pictures of the dishes.



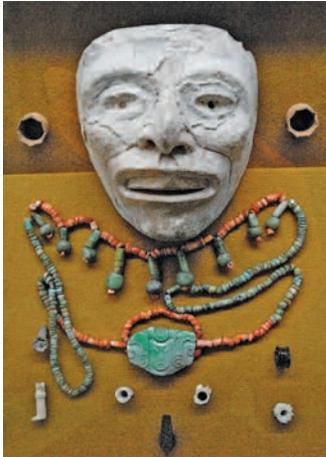
Elsie Montiel



Elsie Montiel

The Cantón Palace
Yucatán's Regional Anthropology Museum

Blanca M. González Rodríguez*



Rubén Vázquez

Fragment of an incense-burner, necklaces, beads and other ornaments from different parts of Yucatán.



Elsie Montiel

The god Hu Nah Yel.

What must not be missed is the wealth of jade necklaces, pendants and other ornaments that were part of the offerings found in Chichén Itzá's sacred *cenote* (sink hole) during the first explorations there.

an attic, it is located on Mérida's main avenue, Montejo Boulevard, testifying to its eclectic style and the technical advances that introduced iron, stained glass and marble into the construction of public buildings and the new mansions erected at the end of the nineteenth century.

It was built as a family residence for conservative General Francisco Cantón Rosado, supporter of Maximilian's empire and governor of Yucatán between 1898 and 1902. Cantón later supported General Porfirio Díaz and played an important part in the long Caste War against the Mayan rebels in the southern part of the peninsula.

General Cantón occupied his new house in the last years of his life. On his death, it passed to his widow and son who, with time, had to give it up to the local government. Today, it is the only public building on Montejo Boulevard.

The Cantón Palace is not only witness to and a disseminator of the peninsula's ancient history, but also more recent events. Once in the hands of the state government, it became the Fine Arts School. Then, in the 1940s, it was turned into the Hidalgo Primary School, and the principal and his family lived in it to take care of it; the attic was the dormitory for students boarded there.

Visitors to the Museo Regional de Antropología de Yucatán (Yucatán Regional Anthropology Museum) shift between two eras. One is represented by the imposing building that houses the museum, the Cantón Palace, an irrefutable symbol of the "sisal fiber episode." Sisal fiber was dubbed "green gold" because, between 1880 and 1920, it was the basis for colossal fortunes in the region. U.S. demand for it for mechanized agriculture led the Yucatán countryside to be covered with *agave* plants. The wealth it produced transformed what had until then been the sober, colonial city of Mérida into one of the last century's most modern, beautiful capitals. It was in this period that the Cantón Palace was built.

The other era the visitor enters is determined by the museum's collection: the pre-Columbian past. The Mayan culture's marvelous legacy on the peninsula was disseminated worldwide by Stephens and Catherwood in the first half of the nineteenth century, to the amazement of any and all who took a look at its history. Even today, it is a culture that marvels those who look at its vestiges or study its intellectual achievements.

THE CANTÓN PALACE

The Cantón Palace is undoubtedly one of the city's emblematic buildings. Imposing, with two stories, a basement and



Elsie Montiel

Room with items related to trade.

* Director of the Yucatán Regional Anthropology Museum in the city of Mérida, Yucatán.



Elsie Montiel

Case displaying several Mayan gods.



Elsie Montiel

A piece by Manuel Mendive in the temporary exhibit on the second floor.



Rubén Vázquez

Hall with a Chaac Mool from Chichén Itzá at one end.

In the early 1950s, it was the official residence of the governors of Yucatán as well as the guest house for the president and other illustrious visitors.

At the end of the 1950s, it became the headquarters for the Yucatán Institute of Anthropology and History and the Crescencio Carrillo y Ancona Library, specialized in Yucatán history. It was then that it first housed the museum in the basement, which had been moved from place to place before that. In 1980, the main floor became host to an exhibit of the museum's permanent collection.

Years later, the upper floor was used to give courses in what would later be the Yucatán Autonomous University School of Anthropological Sciences' majors of archaeology and social anthropology.

THE PERMANENT EXHIBIT

Visitors enter the museum through a vestibule that was originally the family dining room. A walk around the ground floor gives you a taste of important issues in Mayan culture. The description of the environment in which the culture developed, a plain with little cultivable land and without surface water sources, is particularly interesting.

The exhibit examines the Mayas' physical characteristics, aesthetic ideas, production, trade, writing, calendars, war, funeral customs, world view, rites, offerings and architecture, displaying groups of significant artifacts recovered and interpreted for an entire century by archaeologists and epigraphers.

The museographic design for both displaying the collection and facilitating a view of the building includes two axes along which the main medium- and large-scale sculptures are displayed.

Following the passageway after the vestibule, you can enjoy, for example, the works involving two extremely important topics: jaguars and the serpent. The jaguar was one of the most venerated and oft-represented animals in Mesoamerica. Among the Mayas, its skin was used as part of the rulers' wardrobe: they are often seen sitting on thrones sculpted in the form of a jaguar, like in the case of Chichén Itzá, displayed in the museum. Jaguars are also depicted on friezes, stone standard-holders, clay figurines and ceramic vessels.

Serpents were also very important in the ancient peoples' mythology and world view. Several different representations have been found in the Mayan area, the most noteworthy of which is the Plumed Serpent, K'uk'ulkan, known in central Mexico as Quetzalcóatl, the combination of a rattlesnake and a bird, associated with water and the god of the wind, Ehecatl.

At the end of the passageway, the Tabi monolith is visible from the



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Representation of the goddess Ixchel. ▶



Elsie Montiel

Intentionally deformed skull with jade-incrusted teeth, from Jaina, Campeche.

entryway, with its marvelous scene of two hunters returning from the hunt with their prize, a deer.

Undoubtedly, one of the things that most attracts the eye of visitors of all ages is the custom of intentionally changing the body. In the Mayan case, this includes different kinds of deformations of the skull; teeth that are filed or incrustated with jade; induced squinting; or facial scarring. All these lead the visitor to think about different cultures' aesthetic values, yesterday and today.

In recent years, in response to a public increasingly interested in understanding the past and viewing the new discoveries of archaeological projects, the number of pieces has practically doubled, reaching almost 1,000. Among the



Rubén Vázquez

Incense-burner found in Mayapán depicting the god of writing.

recently included pieces is a striking effigy incense-burner found in Mayapán depicting the god of writing with all his attributes: a paintbrush held in one hand and in the other, a conch shell fragment, used to prepare pigments. He is also carrying a bag of copal, and wears a monkey mask, the patron animal of scribes.

In the same showcase are writing instruments: fine, delicately decorated bone needles and stiletos, found in Oxkintok.

Visitors often stop for several minutes in this room in their effort to understand the Mayas' 20-based number system and way of measuring time.

Three years ago, an offering found in the tomb of *Ukit Kan Le'k Tok*, the Lord of the Talol Kingdom, who erected the Acropolis and the main monuments still on view at Ek' Balam, the capital of this Mayan region, was placed in the next room, dedicated to death and funeral customs. The offering is one of the richest of the northern part of the peninsula: it includes jade, alabaster and fine ceramic pieces; imposing obsidian and flint knives; pearls and a small gold frog, perhaps brought from what is now Costa Rica; as well as delicate work in shell depicting cacao beans, deer, shrimp, flours and geometric figures. Outstanding among the shell work are small skulls, some with articulated mandibles, whose delicacy is testimony to the importance of the person the offering is for. Other pieces are a scepter with glyphs alluding to the monarch, a fish pendant and a cup on which can be read "cacao drinking cup of Ukit." Another pendant shows a deformed face that is believed may have been the monarch himself, since physical anthropological studies have shown that he had a disease that may have caused this deformation. Also of interest is the key stone that closed the funeral chamber itself, depicting the young god of corn, but whose mouth has a defect, allowing us to speculate that it may have been the king depicted as a god.

Another topic that has developed greatly in recent years is the Mayan world view. In



Rubén Vázquez

Two-piece shell mask from Chichén Itzá.



Rubén Vázquez

Fragment of an incense-burner from Mayapán.



Elsie Montiel

The Cantón Palace is located on Mérida's main avenue, Montejo Boulevard, testifying to its eclectic style and the technical advances that introduced iron, stained glass and marble into the construction of public buildings.

the three showcases dedicated to this, the visitor gets to know a little about the Mayan universe, traversed by a cosmic tree, the *ceiba*, whose branches reach skyward, while the trunk remains on the earth and its roots sink into the underworld, the place where the dead go and where life emerges anew.

The second showcase displays Mayan gods like Itzamná, the main deity; Hunab Yel, the god of flowering corn, whose birth in Mayan myths is the first act of the new cosmic era; Chaac, the god of rain; Kawil, the god of rulers; Kinich Ahau, the god of the face of the sun; Ek Chuah, deity of traders; Ah Puch, god of death; and Ixchel, god of fertility and flooding, who takes the form of a young Moon goddess, Uh Bak, or of Sak Bak, the Knitting Lady. Finally, this case presents examples of another long-lasting belief: the *aluxes*, a kind of mischievous sprite, that even today peasants bury in their corn fields for protection.

The third showcase displays examples of representations of deities from Central Mexico found at different sites in the Mayan region, particularly at Chichén Itzá and Mayapán. Incense-burners with the effigy of Tláloc, the Central Highlands god of storms, or of Quetzalcóatl, the plumed serpent, and Chicomecóatl, the goddess of corn, show the intercultural relations between the Mayas and other peoples.

At the end of the other passageway is the Chac-Mool figure from Chichén Itzá. Another smaller Chac-Mool from the same archaeological site is exhibited in the part of the museum dedicated to stone production.

As you move forward, you find yourself before Stelae 26 and 3 from Oxkintok, as well

as the great ballgame ring from the same site, with its hieroglyphic inscriptions of the dates corresponding to A.D. 713 or A.D. 714, allowing us to pinpoint it in the late classical period of the Mayan culture.

What must not be missed is the wealth of jade necklaces, pendants and other ornaments that were part of the offerings found in Chichén Itzá's sacred *cenote* (sink hole) during the first explorations there. After the jade pieces, the visitor is transported again to the twentieth century. The imposing Carrara marble stairway that leads to the top floor once again brings us back to the era of the sisal fiber bonanza. Upstairs are the rooms for temporary exhibits. There, you will find displays of part of the museum collection dealing more in depth with some of the themes of the permanent exhibit, or with new issues, like the finds from specific projects in Mayapán or Ek' Balam, or with all of the archaeological works being carried out in Yucatán.

At times, itinerant exhibits of other cultures are also on display, whether from Mexico or abroad, which, like the Central Highland deities or the pieces from other regions imported by traders indicating the relationship between the Yucatán Mayas and other Mesoamerican peoples, make the museum a space for exchange and dialogue. **MM**

Elsie Montiel



An *alux*.



Elsie Montiel

Fragment of a lintel on Chichén Itzá's Temple of the Jaguars.

Museo Regional de Antropología de Yucatán
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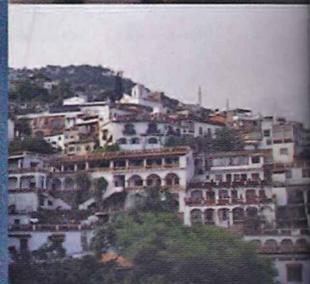
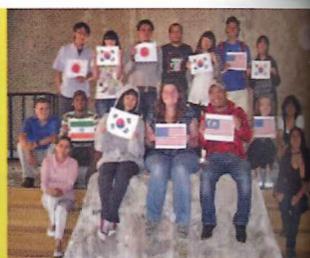
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Don Ernesto de la Torre Villar

Professor Emeritus

Ana Carolina Ibarra*



Courtesy of *Caceta UNAM*

In his extremely brief 2005 autobiography, Don Ernesto de la Torre commented that he still had the good fortune to be giving his doctoral course, advising students on their theses, orienting students and reviewing their work. He wrote, “Neither envious nor envied, I continue with the teaching mission that has been my vocation. I give thanks to the Lord that he has allowed me to spend almost 70 years spreading knowledge and experiences among young students.”

His vocation for teaching has not been given the weight it deserves. His many talents as an erudite man, researcher, editor and creator of institutions has made it easy to lose

track of his much beloved day-to-day efforts over the years at the School of Philosophy and Letters. That is why in this article I am going to tell a story; perhaps too personal a story, but one that is a small example of what his work as the teacher of several generations of students meant.

Around 1987, I went back to school to study my master’s in history and, on the advice of Masae Sugawara and Miguel Soto, I decided to take the seminar Don Ernesto gave every Thursday around noon at the School of Philosophy and Letters. And, as he wrote every semester on the doctoral program grade sheet, I “attended the seminar unfailingly.”

Professor De la Torre’s seminar was a big attraction. It would be hard to find anyone who did not at one time or

* Researcher at the UNAM Institute for Historical Studies.

another sit in on his class, even if only temporarily. For long periods, we spent our time studying the important institutions of New Spain, especially the ecclesiastic institutions, making those teachings decisive for my research. At one point we studied the seventeenth century because, as the professor used to say, it had been somewhat neglected by historiographers. In other courses, we delved into the sixteenth century: there we followed the footsteps of the first Franciscans in the New World, “the twelve,” the establishment of a missionary church, their evangelizing among the neophytes, the catechisms and Zumárraga and Gante, among so many other topics. Through his words I came to appreciate the rectitude of figures like Bishop Don Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, whom the professor would later dedicate an entire work to. We studied crucial figures like Mendieta and Las Casas. With the same facility that Professor De la Torre was able to deal with the great topics of the colonial centuries or the period of independence struggles, his prolific production of more than 100 volumes restored our proximity to the men who had made their indelible mark on our past. We got to know figures who are essential for really valuing New Spain’s culture, like the eminent Eguíara y Eguren; the elder statesman from Michoacán, Pérez Calama; or Mariano Beristain from Puebla—his “countryman” as the professor used to say— just to mention a few.

It was in his seminar that for the first time I came to value the humanism of New Spain, that I began to understand processes fundamental for my training: missionary activity and the processes of enforcing the Rule and of secularizers. With no pretensions to revisionism, the professor taught us the wealth of the world of New Spain and of the great men who forged its culture. With extreme modesty and pristine clarity, he let us see the importance of this Catholic culture, which he covered seamlessly and lovingly, just as he loved all these figures and their institutions.

Just as naturally, De la Torre understood the way in which New Spain society suffered under the colonial yoke. And he professed that same devotion to the fathers of our country. Of all our national heroes, for him, Miguel Hidalgo may have been the most interesting: he was the one who, as Don Ernesto points out in many of his texts, divided our history into a “be-



His prolific production
of more than 100 volumes restored our proximity
to the men who had made their indelible
mark on our past.

fore” and an “after.” Three unique works of his deal masterfully with the independence process.

Reticent to fall in line with fashionable, sometimes seductive—to the students—findings, he often commented to me, “I said that many years ago.” And it was true. We students would go look up the many texts he had written for so many magazines over the years that had been forgotten amidst his vast body of work, and we would find that many of them were still very relevant and would benefit us all by republication.

By contrast, Don Ernesto was very well aware of the new questions that should be asked of the past. That was how he gladly received the new methodologies that allowed us to critically rethink our history. He encouraged us to have broad theoretical horizons, to be up to date in our reading. Of course, he was also interested in our work in the archives. He had so much experience that he knew very well which places were worth visiting and what kind of information we were going to find there. So, every Thursday, after the class, the professor’s lecture and the comments ended, Don Ernesto would stay in his classroom to talk about how our projects were advancing. From the moment we arrived, he took advantage of the time to share his enthusiasm with the rest of the students: so-and-so is studying such-and-such; there are such-and-such new findings in his/her research. Using his experience, he would discourage us from going to certain archives: “You’re not going to find anything there. It’s a complete mess!” He knew a lot, an enormous amount, but he wanted to know more and he encouraged us to move ahead, to find out about more things, to visit other places. For me, his presence was medicine against discouragement, disappointment or weariness. His enthusiasm was a driving force and a certainty for taking specific roads.

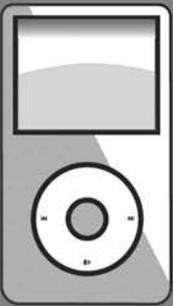
When I stopped going to the seminar, I was lucky enough to visit him at the Institute for Historical Research library, and I had the privilege of being received in his home. I was fortunate in having his sup-



What remains with us forever
is his exceptional example as a teacher,
his erudite body of work, his great generosity as a
human being and his untiring historical curiosity.

port for the collective research project about the independence in southern Mexico, for whose publication he honored us with a prologue complimenting his students' performance. Then came *La independencia en el norte* (Independence in the North), a project for which he traced fundamental guidelines. He counseled us, gave his opinion, commented and recommended, but above all, he became enthused with the possibility that more data and events of our history would become

known, that there would be pioneering work done on certain topics in certain regions. There is much today that we still do not know and that may change our view of the topic. He would say to us. "I'm so happy to see you so active in the bicentennial preparations!" he said the last time I called to tell him we had put together a final version of the "independence in the north" and to ask him, as we had planned, to write the prologue of this volume, too. And, of course, he was going to. But he was taken from us when we least expected it. Nevertheless, what remains with us forever is his exceptional example as a teacher, his erudite body of work, his great generosity as a human being and his untiring historical curiosity, which led so many generations of students to search the roads of history he had opened up. **MM**

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Reviews

La americanización de la modernidad
(The Americanization of Modernity)
Bolívar Echeverría, compiler
CISAN-UNAM/Ediciones Era
Mexico City, 307 pp.

THE MODERNITY OF THE BARBARIANS

Whether as an obligatory intellectual exercise or as a methodological tool for academic tasks, reviewing this book becomes a disturbing journey that leads us from discussion to commotion, from philosophical questioning to cinematic narration, passing through psychoanalysis, feminism and art.

Analyzed from the standpoint of multiple fields of study, this polyphonic examination delves into an undesirable specificity of that historical category we call modernity: its Americanization.

The playful counterpoint of the first section allows Bolívar Echeverría and Ignacio Díaz de la Serna to summarize two aspects of that Americanization: “American hubris” and the “historical singularity” of the emergence of the United States.

In just a few strokes, Echeverría puts forward the conceptualization and genealogy of capitalist modernity: it is a civilizing project that reconstructs human life and its world by updating it and developing its technical possibilities. Born at the dawn of the Late Middle Ages, by the seventeenth century, the European and American branches went their separate ways, only to meet up again finally in the nineteenth century.

A civilizing project, yes; but one which from its very origins contained the clash between what Echeverría calls the “‘natural form’ of human life and its world” and the “form of value.” By the time the two branches of capitalist modernity re-converge, the former had been subsumed in the latter, giving rise to the era of “productive capital,” of “production for production’s sake,” the era of “progressism” in harmonious symbiosis with “present-ism,” in which the monstrous imposition of “mercantile value... leads to



the suicide of human beings and nature being plowed under.”

This is what the American hubris consists of: “making the natural artificial” or “making the artificial natural.” As Echeverría says, it is exactly “the most characteristic and determinant of all the transformations that capitalist modernity undergoes with its ‘Americanization,’” whose maximum expression is summarized in the triumph of use value, which reigns on all levels and in all spheres of reality, and which

Echeverría exemplifies with refreshing humor citing the “Give me more!” of the porn industry. Use is the *telos* of the American Dream and the American Way of Life. To me, dear lay reader, a devastating confirmation.

Díaz de la Serna seems to be saying to us, “Come along! Let’s look at the underbelly of the beast” when he summarizes the events that forged the United States’ independence, made it evolve and gave it purpose.

Eighteen days sufficed for Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence, alone, consulting no book or opinion, inspired by John Locke. This capital document in the development of modernity includes in its preamble two outstanding principles: “that all men are created equal,” and “that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” This *jus naturalism* justifies the inevitable social order and its congenital need for a government with the consent of the governed, committed to them, which is sufficient reason to abolish it if it does not comply with their wishes.

In Díaz de la Serna’s opinion it is a declaration that justifies the free will of the newborn nation and appeals to the concert of nations. This point was used to enlist Louis XVI’s decisive aid, achieve the political organization that chose the road of the division of powers and to write the Constitution ratified in 1788.

Díaz de la Serna leaves us with an acute observation: the singularity of the birth of the United States of America resides in its originality, its lack of precedents and because “to a great extent, it shows the way forward for modernity.”

The second part deals with culture. In the first essay, Eduardo Subirats states that U.S. and global academic systems are faced with a borderline situation in which “semiotic formalism” and cultural studies have replaced not only the great twentieth-century currents of thought, but also aesthetic theory and literary criticism. A colonization of thinking that includes Latin America: “The simultaneously semiotic and geo-political conversion strategies” are demonstrated in the conversion of the Latin American intelligentsia into “magical-realist entertainment with the guardianship of the cultural industry”; into a canon reduced to the “trademark of the real-marvelous”; and into the academic subservience that practices multiculturalism, hybrid-cultures and gender studies. A flagrant suppression of “the aesthetic subject” and “the re-forging of a new world order without memories, without gods and without being.”

Make no mistake, says Carlos Monsiváis, Americanization is “a psychological and sociological process that deposits in U.S. culture the traits and qualities of modernity.” Being modern, then, consists of a “growing taste for the habits and mythologies over that hill or behind the *migra* [immigration officers].” And although today everything is Americanized—and “everything” is the planet—for Monsiváis, this idea is exaggerated because it underestimates the “interaction with the cultures of the rest of the world” and, in a way, denies what is already experienced day to day. Don’t American television series promote a broadening of criteria? Has American marketing imposed itself onto politics?

Rafael Pérez Gay reviews the anatomy of the most highly disseminated temptation in modernity: living in the only place “where anyone could do something new if he/she wanted to.” Participating in the American Dream fed by “one more of the many genocides of modern history”; being part of the people of “Manifest Destiny,” a conviction that is intact despite the War of Succession, which showed all by itself that the United States came onto the scene of history in the post-historic phase.

And what about the Americanization of modernity in science and the economy? Manuel Peimbert responds about the former. The genuine Americanization of science lies in the universalization of the method for stimulating it: evaluation based on the number of publications, the num-

ber of quotes, and the irremediable domination of English as the *lingua franca* of the sciences.

For his part, Rolando Cordera reviews the economic viewpoint that the United States applied in Latin America in the midst of the bi-polar Cold War period. In the end, it made Americanization emerge as the only alternative, masked as “globalization,” which, in this author’s opinion, continued despite the crises of the late twentieth century. To demonstrate this, he goes into the obscene case of Mexico.

Roberto Castro Rodríguez and Marta Lamas explore the Americanization of psychoanalysis and feminism. Castro reviews the reception of Freudian theories in the United States, added to the thesis of state structure as an expression of the absence of the father. In his view, no one was more forceful than Freud “in considerations about this state of spoliation in which individuals live in the U.S. capitalist system,” above all when, in the American world, psychoanalysis is only applied to “subjects susceptible to readapting to the laws of the market.” Once again, the socio-economic system is above the individual.

The gender perspective arose in the United States in the late 1950s and U.S. feminist academics were its greatest promoters. Lamas describes its greatest deficiency: leaving to one side sexual difference, forgetting that “the place of women and men in human society is not exclusively a product of the meaning their activities acquire through concrete social interactions, but also of what they are biologically and psychically.”

The book concludes with three discourses about art: one about U.S. visual arts that Jorge Juanes exemplifies with pop art, a current that breaks with “the dream of aureate art” and acts to dissolve the consumer society. A second article by Raquel Serur reviews Coetzee in the book’s most perturbing essay; and a final contribution from José Marquina deals with cinema, saying that “it is so young that in fact, in and of itself, it is one of the elements that make up modernity.”

La americanización de la modernidad is undoubtedly a read that from beginning to end wavers between disturbing and uneasy, between humor and the surprise caused by the fertile, multi-formed universe of knowledge that reminds us of Arab wisdom: we men look more like our times than like our parents.

Julio Roldán
Mexican author

Aquella Luz, la que estremece.
The Light That Makes Us Tremble
 Nela Rio (Hugh Hazelton, trans.)
 Broken Jaw Press-Enana Blanca
 Montreal, 2008, 96 pp.

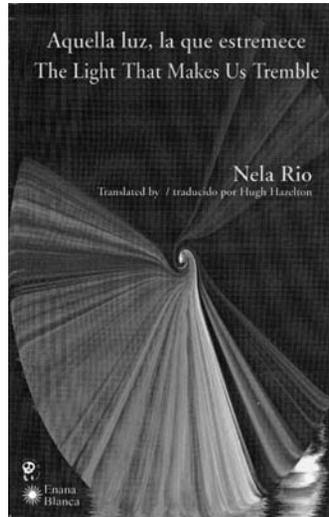
NELA RIO'S FEMININE EROTIC POETRY

"Before reading *The Light That Makes Us Tremble*, you have to find a quiet spot: perhaps a room with a soft, natural light, or a place beneath the huge spreading arms of a flowering tree where you can read it out loud.... [It] demands an absolute respect...[and] requires both time and silence."

This scripted suggestion for the reader written by Marjorie Agosín in her introduction to this bilingual collection of romantic-erotic poems by Nela Rio proposes certain requirements she considers basic for the greater enjoyment of these 24 poems.

Whether they be read in the original Spanish (on the left hand side of the page), or in English, the language into which Hugh Hazelton has translated them magnificently (on the right hand side of the page), the experience is liable to be deliciously evocative, tremulous and very possibly intensely moving. A bilingual reading will inevitably lure the reader into mirror-worlds that reverberate to differing cadences, entrancing in their rich array. In this sense, pleasure is increased when the interweaving of the poet-voice and the translator-voice are able to create yet another dialogue for the reader to delight in.

Argentinian-born Latina-Canadian poet, writer and artist Nela Rio has published eight collections of poetry, among them *En las noches que desvisten otras noches/During Nights That Undress Other Nights*, *Túnel de Proa Verde/Tunnel of the Green Prow*, and *Cuerpo amado/Beloved Body* (Emma Egea International Poetry Award, Spain), as well as creative fiction, such as that contained in *El espacio de la luz/The Space of Light*. Her academic focus as professor of Hispanic language and literature has been on several topics, such as testimonial literature and erotic poetry, in addition to a special interest in Sor Leonor de Ovando,



the first (sixteenth-century) poet of the Americas. Actively involved in Hispanic-Canadian cultural and literary issues, she is president of the Registro Creativo for the Canadian Association of Hispanists/Asociación Canadiense de Hispanistas and has organized many cultural and literary events, such as the International Poster Poems by Contemporary Ibero-american Poets, as well as the virtual exhibition of art and poetry Outspoken Art/

Arte Claro.

The English version of the poems is by Hugh Hazelton, an award-winning translator (2006 Governor General's Literary Award for Translation), who has previously translated Nela Rio's poetry (*Túnel de proa verde/Tunnel of the Green Prow* and *Cuerpo amado/Beloved Body*). He is clearly attuned to the dune lands and fresh spring waters of these poems that he is in more than one way re-writing, an activity translators engage in when offering the reader a landscape of similar soft hues and hazes as that of the pristine original. Hazelton is also the author of "Eros and Thanatos in the Work of Nela Rio" contained in his book of essays: *Latinocanada: A Critical Study of Ten Latin American Writers of Canada*.

Originally published in Spanish (Madrid: Ediciones Torremozas, 1992), *The Light That Makes Us Tremble* was finalist for the VIII Premio Carmen Conde de Poesía de Mujeres, Madrid, Spain, (1991) and has been translated into French (*Cette lumière, celle qui fait frémir*). It has also been included in courses at several universities in the U.S. and Canada. The publication of the present bilingual version can be regarded as a good omen—despite this happening several years after the Spanish original was gifted to the general public—as an indicator that bilingual editions are becoming more acceptable and more common nowadays, which many readers are sure to appreciate.

Nela Rio's *The Light That Makes Us Tremble* is defined as "luminous" by Marjorie Agosín. Dedicated quite simply "To the one who brought love," these evocative erotic poems illumine love in its most intimate, breathtaking and breath-giving light:

Amado,
 buscaré los hilos
 del manto de la noche solitaria,
 iré hilando los quejidos por ti, ausente,
 y cuando vuelvas
 haré que laboriosamente destejas cada lágrima
 hasta que desnudes de tristezas
 la noche que no te vio.

“Su presencia me es dulce al paladar”

My love,
 I will look for threads
 from the cloak of the lonely night,
 and will keep spinning moans for you,
 and when you return
 I will have you painstakingly unravel each tear
 till you undress your absent night
 of all its sadness.

“His presence is sweet to my taste”

In these candid poems, flowing and springwater-fresh, can be heard a subjective voice that is at every moment, and in every movement, feminine. As Clara Román-Odio points out, these poems “invite us to peruse the feminine erotic experience through a yearning subject.” In addition, they offer, often overtly, the not-so-usual erotic perspective of a mature feminine subject:

Cuando pensé
 que mi cuerpo era crepuscular
 olvidaba

 que el amor no está atado
 al ciclo mitológico del tiempo
 que es una mentira fabricada
 que desmiente
 esta explosión de naufragio
 y de espigas saturadas

“Las estaciones son ficciones”

When I thought
 that my body was twilight
 I forgot
 ...
 that love is not tied
 to the mythological cycle of time
 which is a fabricated lie
 refuted by
 this explosion of shipwreck
 and saturated ears of grain

“The Seasons Are Fictions”

These poems also lead the reader on a journey of “vivifying discovery that reveals... the exiles of Eden who, through bodily love, learn to abandon themselves to time and the cosmos as they aspire to unity between body and spirit,” as Román-Odio writes. In “Genesis,” for instance, Nela Rio evokes an indigenous version of Edenic-idyllic origins:

Encontró a Ascalic
 fatigado en su búsqueda de la luz y de la vida.
 Nurimbá lo invitó a su cuerpo y le dio ambas.
 Tomados de la mano
 caminando lado a lado
 entraron juntos al campo
 y se amaron en el génesis.

She found Ascalic
 exhausted by his search for light and life.
 Nurimbá invited him to her body and gave him both.
 Hand in hand
 walking side by side
 they went together into the field
 and loved each other in genesis.

In *Aquella Luz, la que estremece/The Light That Makes Us Tremble*, poet Nela Rio offers a flowing “chiaroscuro”—a term Spanish poet Francisco Pino used in referring to the essence of poetry itself—nestled into an erotic landscaping of intense and vulnerably delicate murmurings. The poems collected in this volume illuminate flitting shadows to reveal and hide, suggest and expose, open and close, tide and swell, the loving and erotic perceptions of a female subject willing to share the elusiveness of loving, tactile and profound moments with utmost luminous grace. 

Claire Joysmith
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