

# VOICES *of Mexico*

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Toward a Politics of Consensus in Mexico

Jesús Rodríguez Zepeda

The Latin American State

Crisis and Reform

Marcos Kaplan

Juárez by Toledo

Carlos Monsiváis

Jaime Sabines: A Tribute

Articles by Del Valle, Argüelles, Labastida and Trejo



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# OUR VOICE

California, the world's sixth largest economy, has a very intimate relationship with Mexico for many reasons. We have a common history that took different paths during the last century. As a border state, we share with it both water and general environmental pollution and sizeable trade. Unfortunately for Mexico, the number of our citizens who emigrate to California grows daily. Deaths from abuse and violations of human rights of these immigrants are also on the rise. Although sectors of United States agriculture could not produce without Mexican labor, many U.S. citizens harbor negative feelings about immigrants. The tensest moment in Mexican relations with California came when ex-governor Wilson promoted Proposition 187 denying social services to the children of undocumented immigrants. But, challenged in the courts, the measure was found unconstitutional and has not been applied.

Fortunately, Gray Davis was recently elected governor of California, showing the immense political strength of Hispanics, whose electoral support was definitive for his victory. We are finally beginning to see our way clear to a different kind of relationship with Mexico. The first sign was the new governor's immediate visit to Mexico. President Zedillo, responded to the gesture by returning the visit from May 17 to May 19. Both men acted as statesmen, putting misunderstandings behind them and trying to establish a new kind of relationship to benefit both their constituents. There is undoubtedly still an enormous amount left to be done to better relations, but the foundations have been laid and the future looks promising.

While Mexico now has a democratic system, it still suffers from great institutional weakness. We have not been able to move ahead to a culture of consensus for promoting government policies around the great social demands. This part of the democratic process has still to be gone through, according to Jesús Rodríguez Zepeda's analysis, which begins this issue's "Politics" section. Dr. Marcos Kaplan continues the section in a rather pessimistic tone focusing on the loss of sovereignty stemming from opening up markets in the age of globalization. He points to the paradox inherent in imposing neoliberal reforms to limit the state using the very same state-centered policies being criticized. The high-tech world financial market limits and distorts the state's decisions and actions, thus benefiting only certain groups, regions and sectors in detriment to the majority.

Eloy Garza González' article on the advances of the reform of the state emphasizes that while the agenda has been ambitious, the achievements have fallen short



of the mark. The topics include, among others, run-off elections, Mexican's voting abroad, access to the media, campaign financing and spending, the relationship between indigenous peoples and the state, control of organized crime and electoral reforms. But, in Garza's opinion, Congress has not been capable of creating the consensus needed to consolidate the advances.

Marco Antonio Baños Martínez considers that the transition to democracy has been possible thanks to the transformation of electoral norms, among them, the establishment of the Federal Electoral Institute as an independent body, the development of trustworthy voters rolls, the creation of state and local electoral bodies made up of non-partisan, citizen councilors and the choosing of polling place officials by lot. All these measures have lent credibility to the electoral process, although many changes are still needed to perfect it.

Painter Francisco Toledo from Oaxaca is one of Mexico's best and most widely recognized artists. It is sufficient to see one of his paintings for the viewer never to forget the emotions they evoke. In this issue, Carlos Monsiváis and José Pierre write about Toledo and his work in our "Science, Art and Culture" section.

We also present comments by Raquel Tibol and María Navarro on the work of Mario Orozco, who joins *amate* and painting to achieve a combination of colors and textures expressing much of that strange mixture of cultures that defines us as Mexicans.

Our "Economy" section begins with an article on a debate current throughout Latin America: dollarization. In the opinion of Francisco Sevilla, dollarizing the economy would complicate Mexico's situation even more and solve nothing.

The announcement of the privatization of Mexico's electricity system has been received with great disquiet. Rosío Vargas lays out the positions for and against its total privatization.

The nineteenth century was a time of tense Mexico-U.S. relations given American expansionism and the lack of political consolidation of the Mexican state. Historian Jesús Velasco describes these ups and downs in our "History" section.

The "United States Affairs" section begins with an article by Alejandro Becerra Gelóver describing how Mexican lobbying in the United States began under President Echeverría to soothe relations with our northern neighbor, relations disturbed by his non-aligned, Third Worldist policies. It was Carlos Salinas who launched an aggressive lobbying strategy that, although costly, succeeded in helping bring about the approval of the North American Free Trade Agreement, counter to the wishes of important U.S. pressure groups.

Undoubtedly, year after year since 1986, bilateral relations are put to the test by the U.S. executive and congressional certification of Mexico with regard to drug trafficking. Silvia Vélez analyzes the U.S. position on the question, foreseeing few possibilities that this unfortunate procedure be eliminated.

If we ask ourselves what the most important social movements of the end of this millennium are, we would surely have to include environmentalist movements. For this reason, our "Canadian Issues" section features an article by Sofía Gallardo on



Canadian nongovernmental environmentalist organizations, groups that have emerged from civil society to act politically beyond electoral periods. While the author underlines their agreements on defending the environment, she also mentions their different tactics and origins, highlighting the movement's complexity.

Also in this section, Adam T. Sellen describes how Canada and Mexico have joined together in a very special project: UNAM technology and personnel has been put to use together with the Royal Ontario Museum to authenticate pieces of Zapotec pottery, among them monumental funeral urns.

Oaxaca fully deserves the description "magical." Twelve millennia of history make for an incomparable accumulation of tradition and cultural wealth. This issue of *Voices of Mexico* dedicates its "Splendor of Mexico" section to this land of artists and shamans, historical figures and traditions, and indigenous peoples' survival.

Jorge Bautista and Adrián Salinas describe Monte Albán and Mitla, two impressive urban centers that flowered under the Zapotec and Mixtec cultures.

David Malpica delves into that fantastic craft, *alebrije* making, that gives us magical, brightly colored wooden figures in the form of animals, mythical monsters and devils or angels, and collector and Oaxacan culture expert Ruth Lechuga introduces us to the meaning of traditional Oaxacan textiles.

Amelia Lara and Manuel Esparza write about the Santo Domingo Cultural Center, housed in a colonial monastery that has become a monument in itself. Alejandro de Avila records the important work done to recover the region's flora by the cultural center's ethnobotanical garden. In our next issue of *Voices of Mexico*, we will continue to present our readers with articles about this fascinating state.

The population explosion has had a negative impact on nature. In his article for the "Ecology" section, Gerardo Ceballos warns that 25 percent of Mexico's vertebrates are endangered species, calling on government and civil society to prevent the catastrophe threatened by this alarming situation.

Recently deceased Jaime Sabines has been catalogued as "the people's poet" because of his ability to touch the emotions of most Mexicans. Together with Octavio Paz and Juan Rulfo, he is probably the Mexican writer most read by his countrymen. In a well deserved homage to his work, *Voices of Mexico* dedicates this issue's "Literature" section to him, with a brief anthology of his poems and three essays by experts on his work: Mario del Valle, Jaime Labastida and Juan Domingo Argüelles.

Another important, prolific Mexican writer also died recently. Our "In Memoriam" section pays homage to Ricardo Garibay, a writer both honest and polemical, who will be remembered for his capacity to understand and put in his writing the mentality, culture and day-to-day speech of Mexico's marginalized poor.

Paz Consuelo Márquez Padilla  
- Director of CISAN



# Toward a Politics Of Consensus in Mexico

*Jesús Rodríguez Zepeda\**

Contemporary perspectives on democracy share a growing interest in the notion of consensus. Both in political science, which is of a descriptive bent, and in the discourses of political philosophy, which are more normative, the value of consensus has become key to the constitution of a democratic order that can achieve the collective goals of a modern political community.

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In the sphere of political science, authors like Giovanni Sartori have emphasized that the value of dissension, a crucial element for guaranteeing the different levels of social pluralism, only makes sense if it is exercised on the basis of a series of basic consensuses among the pluralist universe of actors about the political procedures for collective decision-making. In fact, Sartori distinguishes among three levels of consensus: a basic or value level which covers the socio-cultural structure; a procedural level, referring to the norm of conflict resolution (in general, institutionalized as majority rule)



Octavio Nava / AVE

The Congress is key to the achieving of consensus in Mexico.



and other political regulations; and finally a level of consensus regarding specific policies and governmental subjects. Under this model, the second type of consensus is absolutely necessary for a functional democratic society to exist, while the first level, though in some cases a historic condition for democracy, is not presented as an unequivocal prerequisite. The most significant aspect of this

A democratic society is characterized by the existence  
of a plurality of comprehensive philosophical,  
religious and moral doctrines.

This plurality is a positive historic fact resulting  
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model is that dissension is only democratically functional if it is situated on the third level of consensus, that is, as a form of debate and competition among different political programs based on strict procedural and institutional agreement.<sup>1</sup>

In the field of political philosophy, the theory of democratic consensus has culminated in John Rawls' last great work, *Political Liberalism*.<sup>2</sup> Although posed on a very different level of analysis from that of political science, Rawls' political philosophy also presupposes a very specific relationship between social pluralism and political consensus. According to Rawls, a democratic society is characterized by the existence of an irreducible plurality of comprehensive philosophical, religious and moral doctrines. This plurality is not unfortunate, but a positive historic fact resulting from social action exercised in conditions of freedom. Nevertheless, a modern democratic society not only demands doctrinal pluralism in its social fiber, but also that that pluralism be reasonable. This is a crucial point, since it recognizes that mere ideological and political variety does not lead to any politically significant consensus. On the contrary, pluralism understood as a mere variety of unrelated doctrines generates fragmentation and factional strife. In this sense, the import of reasonable pluralism is

equivalent to constituting a common public sphere in which different moral, religious, philosophical and political conceptions can coexist. Overlapping consensus among different points of view is the guarantee of stability and social justice.

Of course, these understandings of consensus do not refer to unanimity nor the dissolution of the differences among programs or sets of political ideals. Rather, they point to the generation of a common public space in which the institutions of a democratic society may prevail. For this reason, consensus is a fundamental level of agreement for democracy, while dissension and opposition are significant only on the basis of this fundamental agreement. The so-called "dissension imperative," which some authors<sup>3</sup> consider the basis for the demand for the consolidation and broadening out of citizens' rights in a complex society, can only be sustained given a fundamental agreement about the political system's methods, institutions and values.

But there is yet another level of political consensus that we should highlight, a level that, while not a constituent factor of democracy, is essential for developing state policies capable of dealing with the aggregate problems of any democratic society. Although the foundational values of a democratic system as such demand unanimous consensus, that is, that it involve all social forces in political debate and competition, the development of state policies requires that at least a very broad majority agree on the definition of a series of structural public policies. In that sense, the notion of consensus may be interpreted as unanimity only in cases in which the founding principles of the democratic order themselves are in play, while it can mean just a broad majority when dealing with defining state policies and the design of functional institutions. What is more, on the level of partisan competition and parliamentary debate, wherein dissension and the opposition find their niche of political signification, the generation of an atmosphere of republican loyalty

depends on the ability of the different elements of the broad political spectrum to come to specific agreements.

Consensus is a collective construction. It is the result of pressure groups' and political parties' intelligence in using the criteria of rationality in conditions of uncertainty. Opting for consensus presupposes the recognition of the inviability of lone political trajectories and making the decision to forge basic agreements that guarantee not only conditions for peaceful competition for power, but also the design of institutions oriented to ameliorating the great collective problems. Contemporary political experience has demonstrated that the highest levels of stability and institutional productivity have been attained only in countries where consensus has prevailed in dealing with economic, social and labor policies.<sup>4</sup> The articulation of the different levels of consensus is a guarantee of institutional effectiveness, while the break-up of consensus on the level of state policies is a form of weakening institutional productivity and, therefore, stability and governability.

In the case of Mexico, the discussion about consensus has been situated fundamentally in the terrain of the reform of the institutions and procedures that regulate electoral competition. It could be no other way. The biggest source of conflict in recent decades has been, precisely, procedural irregularities constantly discovered in elections at all levels. The process of the transition to democracy in Mexico has been made, fundamentally, as a process of liberalization of partisan competition and the development of institutions and an electoral legality independent of the executive branch of government. In this sense, democratization in Mexico—in contrast with other countries which have gone through democratic transitions—has been built on the basis of a gradual loosening of government control over elections.

It has frequently been said that the Mexican transition has been “voted in but not agreed upon.”<sup>5</sup> This does nothing more than sum up a

long chain of agreements and breaks in the negotiations between the opposition and the government about elections. In terms of the liberalization of electoral competition, the beginning of Mexico's transition dates from the 1976-1977 reforms which made it possible to legalize the Communist Party. However, it was most dynamic after 1989, with the reforms that gave rise to the creation of

**In the case of Mexico, the discussion about consensus has been situated fundamentally in the terrain of the reform of the institutions and procedures that regulate electoral competition.**

the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), the state body designed to oversee electoral processes. Two additional reforms are highly significant. Although in 1993 a political electoral reform introduced variations in the rule for assigning Chamber of Deputies seats by proportional representation, eliminated the self-certification of the elections by the two chambers of Congress and opened the Senate up for proportional representation, it was the reforms of 1994 and 1996 that showed the way and marked the vicissitudes of what has been political consensus in recent years.

As a result of the conjunction of various destabilizing elements (among others, the emergence of the Zapatista National Liberation Army guerrilla movement and the assassinations of the national Institutional Revolutionary Party [PRI] leader José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio and Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas) for the first time in recent Mexican history, all political parties agreed on a reform to eliminate the direct link between the executive branch of government and electoral officials. This reform has been considered, perfectly logically, the moment of consensus.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, only two years later, the next electoral reform, eliminating political parties' right to vote in the IFE and stipulating



that the electoral authority should be made up completely of individual citizens, became the moment of "the breaking of consensus," given that the main opposition parties (the National Action Party [PAN] and the Party of the Democratic Revolution [PRD]) voted against the regulatory legislation because of differences over financing to political parties.

This would not be so important if it had not been set as the model for political competition from 1996 until today. As the 2000 presidential elections approach and a ferocious struggle for a new distribution of power develops, the politics of consensus becomes more and more difficult as a model of confrontation and clashes strengthens.

It could be said that, despite matters still pending, the system of political competition in Mexico has been liberalized. Without forgetting the need to resolve the remaining problems of equality in electoral competition, we can say that the foundation for considering the Mexican political system a polyarchy has been laid.<sup>7</sup> However, what marks the institutional weakness of Mexico's public space is the lack of consensus at the level of joint promotion of state policies.

To a great extent, the current partisan struggle for the presidency is an obstacle to making parliamentary pacts that would produce or strengthen institutions aimed at assuaging Mexico's high level of social and economic conflict. In this sense, even though a relatively functional democratic regimen in terms of peacefully processing political representation has been built through liberalizing political competition, what has been postponed is the aim of giving the political structure the institutional resources it needs to confront social problems on the basis of broad national accords about the crucial points on the country's socio-economic agenda.

The immediate result of the break-up of consensus as a definitive characteristic of partisan competition is the generation of a democratic model with low-quality institutions and scant abil-

ity to process the priority demands of a complex society. The model for political negotiation which has accompanied this transition is incapable of generating a reform of the party identities guided by the principle of republican loyalty.<sup>8</sup> This inability determines the individual agendas of the parties themselves and impedes their arriving at entrenched agreements to deal with the excesses of electoral competition and individual aspirations in the new distribution of power.

The only possibility of making the democratization of Mexico possible with a strong, effective institutional framework lies in staking our hopes on a policy of state consensus among the main political forces. A policy of consensus that not only would not limit legitimate competition among party programs and national projects, but would put them at the service of institutional effectiveness, a better quality of life for the population and the always necessary governability. ■■■

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Sartori, *Teoría de la democracia 1. El debate contemporáneo* (Madrid: Alianza Universidad, 1988), pp. 121-126.

<sup>2</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Javier Muguerza, *El fundamento de los derechos humanos* (Madrid: Debate, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> P. C. Schmitter and G. Lehmbruch, eds., *Trends Toward Corporatist Intermediation* (London and Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979); A. Cawson, *Organized Interests and the State* (London: Sage, 1985); and A. Cawson, *Corporatism and Political Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Luis Salazar, ed., *1997: Elecciones y transición a la democracia en México* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Jorge Alcocer, "El ciclo de las reformas electorales, 1978-1996," *Diálogo y Debate 1* (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios para la Reforma del Estado, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> If we review Mexico's institutional structure in light of the polyarchical requirements Dahl formulated, we may conclude that Mexico is already a democratic country. See Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

<sup>8</sup> See my critique of the Mexican model of political negotiation in Jesús Rodríguez Zepeda, "México: crisis política y negociación," *Etcétera 161* (Mexico City, 1996).

# The Latin American State Crisis and Reform

*Marcos Kaplan\**

The central role of the state, its intervention and the process of its becoming autonomous with regard to the economy and society have been given historically in Latin America. This intervention was manifest in the crises and reforms of the state after the processes leading up to independence and the forging of a nation; later, in the transition between the late nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth; and from 1930-1945 until today, first in the form of protectionist, welfare-state interventionism and later in the form of neoliberal interventionism.

## AN INTERVENTIONIST-PROTECTIONIST- WELFARE STATE

Interventionism in the last half century has been a response to the need for Latin American countries to become part of a changing international order and to the conflicts, crises and domestic repercussions derived from that. The national order is restructured as a function of the conditions imposed by the concentration of power on a world scale. Centers of power, interests and decision making outside the region exercise great influence on the internal sphere and on the Latin American states' development strategies and policies.

State interventionism has also increased in response to the challenges and readjustments that

spring from economic growth: agrarian restructuring; industrialization based on import substitution and hyper-urbanization; the changes in social stratification and mobilizations; ideological and political conflicts; and the cycles of authoritarianism and democracy.

State interventionism is closely related to import-substitution industrialization (ISI), a form of industrialization without an industrial revolution. Faced with the absence of an autonomous domestic process of saving and technological development, ISI is financed by earnings from exports, debt and private investments. It makes comparative advantages of the abundance of cheap labor, fuel, food and raw materials, and state protectionism.

ISI-based growth does not imply integral development: it is insufficient with regard to population growth, unequal in the distribution of its results, and stagnation and regression are permanent threats. The resulting multiplication of social tensions and conflicts permanently poses the dilemma of growth backed by authoritarian or democratic regimens. The constellation of old and new needs, demands and conflicts cannot be resolved satisfactorily enough by competing private businesses or by a supposedly free market.

As a result, the state augments and diversifies its functions in the organization of the economy, society and in the political actions linked to both: repression, social and political control, arbitration and conflict resolution among classes and groups, and the preservation of governability; culture, edu-

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\*Researcher at the UNAM Institute for Legal Research.



cation, science and technology. With this, the state reinforces its own autonomy and its role as regulator and mediator of international relations. It brings its institutionalization, legitimation and legal system up to date and readjusts its constitutional and legal regimen to include changes and make it possible for the new functions and forms of operating to coexist with the traditional government and administrative apparatus.

With this diversification of functions, the preservation of national sovereignty can enter into contradiction with an opening to the exterior, in the same way that the intervention of the state and the public sector contradicts freedom of initiative and competition in a semi-regulated market.

#### NEOLIBERAL INTERVENTIONISM

In the 1960s and 1970s, Latin American state interventionism began to show deficiencies and limits which, after both external and internal pressures, led to the emergence of the apparent paradox of a neoliberal interventionism or statism.

The crisis of the state has historical-structural roots and is directly linked to the sharp economic and social fluctuations that came out of a subordinate insertion into the world order, accompanied by a process of transnationalization, the link up of international and national crises and the wearing out of the inward-looking ISI development model.

From the 1980s on, plans for reform made a priority of stabilization according to certain macro-economic indicators and guaranteeing the payment and renegotiation of the foreign debt. To this were added the attempts to overcome the crisis, renew growth and insert Latin American countries in the available niches of a new world division of labor.

The state's declining ability to exercise its policies honestly, legally, efficiently and effectively had negative results, weakened its authority and legitimacy and caused it to lose consensus.

Policies and plans for reform were proposed and promoted by developed countries' governments and multinational companies, international financial institutions and domestic forces and institutions, each according to individual interests and diagnostic analyses.

An attempt was made to replace ISI with strong state protectionism, export-oriented industrialization and the attraction of foreign investments, with widespread trade and financial openings. The outcome was an increasingly transnationalized economy restructured by the new world division of labor.

The reform of the state was put under the heading of economic liberalization; the social and political were subordinated to the economic and financial.

The effect was not an integral reform, but a series of partial reforms, inspired in the criteria fixed by the dominant forces and institutions in the world order, which place governability high on their reform agenda, and with that, the concern for ensuring a legal framework that would foster a stable environment to allow for the efficient use of resources, productive investment and the economic actors being able to carry out their transactions without arbitrary political interference.

The establishment of criteria for the intervention of the state and its legal system neither prevents nor resolves socio-political problems, but rather sharpens them and brings out new ones.

In an apparent paradox, neoliberal reforms have been designed through strong state interventionism and authoritarian practices. This has been thrown into particularly sharp relief in the procedures and styles of privatization: protectionism for large companies and authoritarian, repressive methods in dealing with and solving dilemmas and conflicts of all kinds.

Thus, state interventionism not only endures, but is reinforced given the high economic and social cost that large social groups and the nations themselves have had to pay. Liberalization did not

In Latin America  
—in an apparent  
paradox— strong  
states designed  
neoliberal reforms  
aimed at weakening  
government  
intervention in  
national economies  
and used  
authoritarian means  
to implement them.

bring the hoped-for benefits, but did bring grave tensions and conflicts.

An interventionist semi-welfare state is making the transition toward a developmentalist-gendarme state, partially displaced by the market in terms of its regulatory and dynamizing functions.

#### COERCION AND LIMITS

##### *The External Coordinates*

Externally, states, multinational corporations, financial speculators and international institutions are decision-making centers for trade operations, terms of exchange, capital flows, monetary reserves, technology, import capacity, indebtedness and the control of vital resources.

The conflicts over and competition for markets, resources, profits and political and military power as well as diverging interests and economic policies frustrate negotiations aimed at achieving a world order based on full economic liberalism. At the same time, they maintain or reinforce protectionist tendencies and the formation of rival economic blocs.

The contradiction between population growth and the chronic development crisis in the Third World and the former Second World is heightened by outward-looking development policies and their effects of deformed specialization, neo-colonial subordination, de-capitalization and marginalization.

Transnationalization imposes a gigantic new reshuffling of the cards in the world pyramid. It produces a triple dis-association: between the primary and the industrial economies; between both of these and employment; and between the real and the symbolic economies.

A country's comparative advantages are increasingly based on its ability to use information and less and less on the abundance and low cost of raw materials, food, fuel and labor. The industrial economy separates production from employ-

ment, creating a worldwide trend toward structural unemployment.

The new world financial market, technologically unified by an electronically integrated network, ignores borders and increasingly dominates economic actors and forces, societies and national policies. This poses the problem of governability for states; it limits or detracts from their decisions and actions, particularly the formulation and implementation of truly national economic policies.

Globalization both concentrates and marginalizes, benefitting only certain sectors, groups, countries and regions to the detriment of the vast majority, making this majority superfluous or redundant.

The growth of world trade is slowing in relation to the growth of world production. The economies of the advanced countries and their productive-trade blocks concentrate much of their trade and investments within their own confines, at the same time that they intensify competition and increase protectionism vis-à-vis Latin America.

The nation-state and its sovereignty is suffering two forms of erosion: from without, due to the action of transnational forces and processes, and from within, as a result of economic decomposition, social disintegration, political destabilization and the segmentation of societies and national states on regional and local levels.

##### *The Internal Coordinates*

Internally, the state is promoting growth and modernization, the accumulation of capital and the profitability of large companies from the standpoint of their own vision and interests. The state frequently imposes limits on and coerces companies. They, in turn, conditionally and temporarily accept this because they would not accept a state that tried to foster growth and modernization based on a social change that would mean a transformation of production and the redistribution of output, promoting participation and democracy. The state's failures are used as arguments to demand less intervention and even privatization.

The new world financial market, unified electronically, takes no notice of borders and increasingly dominates economic actors and forces, societies and national policies.



Self-generated centralization and broadening out of state powers, the maintenance of privileged minorities and the marginalization and depolitization of the majority of the population increase conflicts of all kinds.

Thus, the state and public elites do not dominate the social and political game they are playing; they must submit to many of these conditions and compensate and regulate more important imbalances and conflicts *a posteriori*.

Above all, on the economic plane, “savage capitalism” creates favorable conditions for the rule of economic success at any price. For this reason, non-productive activities, intermediation and speculation abound, taking advantage of the opportunities created by crises, inflation and corruption. Similarly, the informal economy, organized crime and the criminal economy grow and develop. Domestic growth and international integration take the form above all of technical-economic and socio-cultural enclaves. Money, wealth, markets and mercantilism are insufficient and inappropriate models for social organization and cohesion, for reproduction and growth, for civilized coexistence and human and social solidarity.

The disintegration of society is seen in the enfeeblement, the crumbling, the beginning of the destruction of groups and the very fiber of society. The victims are defined not only by social class, but also by sex and age, and by ethnic group and region. A sub- or non-class of pariahs is being constituted with the fragments and waste from the disintegration of the middle and lower classes.

Economic decomposition and social disintegration impede the appropriate use of the potential of many groups and their relationships, structures and interactions. The productive chains deteriorate or are destroyed, and the social division of labor's complexity, outer limits and potential are reduced.

Extreme individualism in the quest for survival at any cost is the reaction to uncertainty and insecurity. Withdrawal into privacy is also prompted by the mass media and the entertainment industry. Adaptation to what exists and cannot be changed leads to a renunciation of social and political participation in institutions, movements and parties.

Protection is sought in patronage, clientelist and corporatist systems of relations.

Social mobilization and turbulence and the demand for broader participation are answered with restrictions and repression. The state, public elites, institutional orders, neo-oligarchical groups and most parties favor the decline of the participation of middle and lower sectors of society in politics and their marginalization and de-politization.

Classes and groups, organizations and institutions lack cohesion, consciousness and a unified will, effective representation, the aptitude for formulating and imposing their own interests and projects and building broad coalitions.

Self-generated centralization and broadening out of state powers, the maintenance of privileged minorities and the marginalization and de-politization of the majority of the population increase contradictions and conflicts of all kinds, actually backfire and have a negative impact on the state.

Unrepresentative states and governments—without the support of civil society's intricate network of productive, innovative forces because civil society does not exist—are pressured and controlled by conservative or regressive public-private minorities.

In these conditions, state intervention is improvised, inorganic and contradictory, subject to the pressures of the political moment and emergencies, feeding its own irrationality and chaos. Policies oscillate between a statizing national populism and a neocolonialist-privatizing elitism, or combine both of these to differing degrees. Much remains subject to the dynamic of the market and dominant private interests on the one hand, and the judgement of government apparatuses and elites on the other. The coexistence of the public and private sectors is difficult and tends to strengthen the latter to the detriment of state autonomy and effectiveness.

The merely interventionist, planning or dirigist state is continually forced to deal with irreconcilable interests, difficult problems, insoluble con-

flicts and divergent ends. At the same time, the state lacks certain criteria and the effective ability to perceive, evaluate and make decisions about the main problems and conflicts.

Information about needs and subsystems is yielded hazily or in a deformed way by an opaque society, through distorted mediations, enigmatic or ambiguous messages, in turn uncertainly deciphered. Given the conflicts, changes and crises, as well as the lack of a lasting solution to the question of hegemony, no class, group, organization or institution dominates the state totally and exclusively, nor uses it, unfettered, to its own ends.

The state apparatus and its personnel suffer from the dialectic of the authoritarian centralization of power and feudal dispersion. The state becomes increasingly heterogeneous and contradictory.

The international crisis, together with unsatisfactory growth, increase problems and conflicts for which there do not yet seem to be solutions or actors to implement and carry them forward.

As a mental exercise in prediction, the resurrection of neo-statism is possible. Its coming into being would depend on the combination of several factors: a) the resolution of conflicts and crises; b) alliances among elites, classes, groups and institutions; c) the internal impact of external factors; d) the redefinition of development strategies and policies; e) a re-delineation of relations between the state and the market, the state and civil society, and among the public, private and social sectors; and f) the resolution of the dilemma between authoritarianism or democratization. **MM**

Policies oscillate between statizing national populism and neocolonialist-privatizing elitism, or combine both of these to differing degrees.

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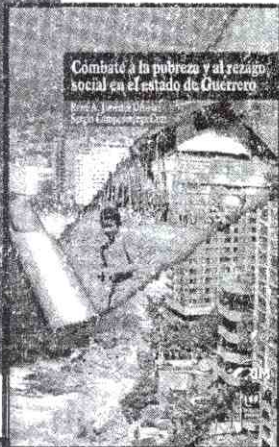


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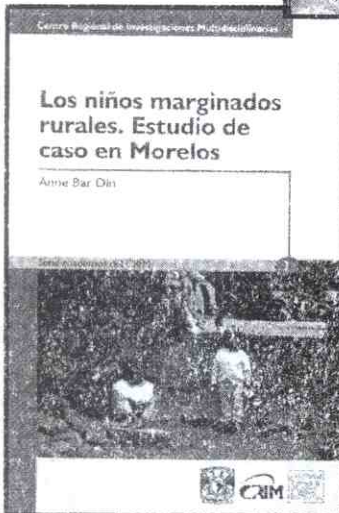
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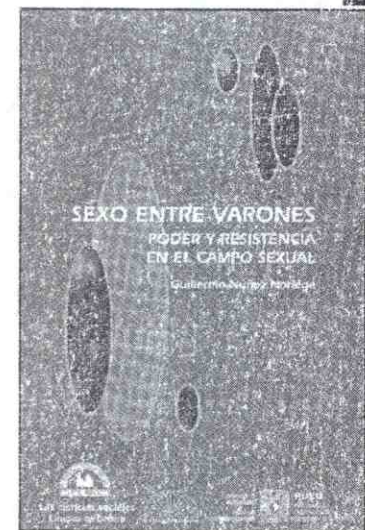
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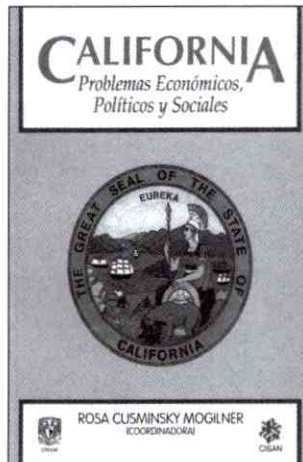
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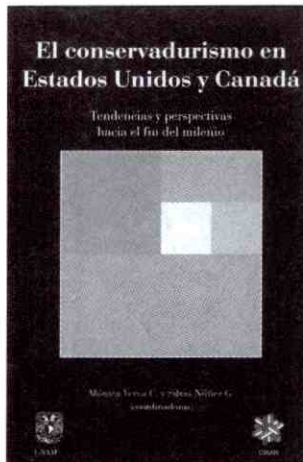
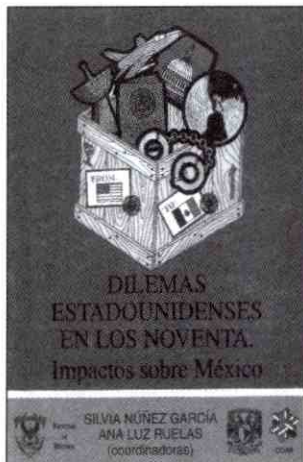
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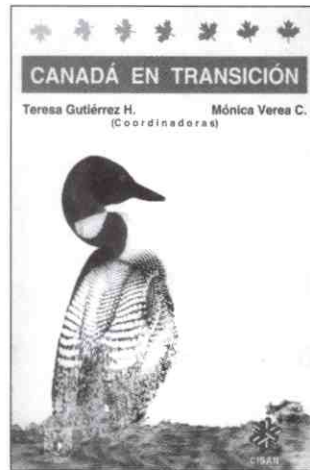




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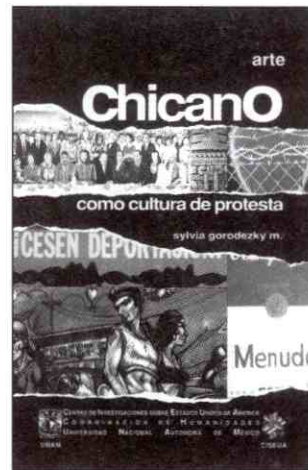
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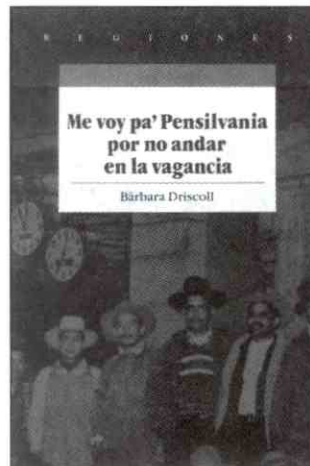
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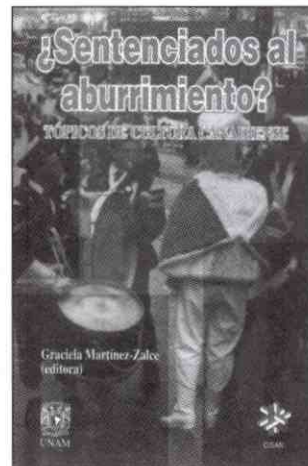
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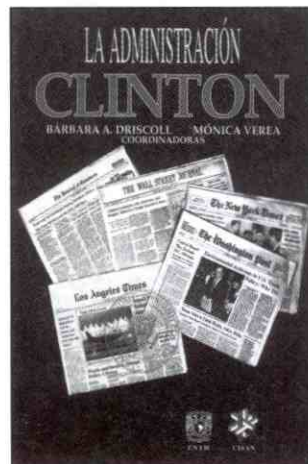
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# The Reform of the State in Mexico

## Advances and Setbacks

*Eloy Garza González\**

Talking about the reform of the state in countries like the United States would be a waste of time. For the majority of Americans, their governmental institutions generally fulfill the aims for which they were created. Certainly, the average U.S. citizen usually complains about excessive red tape and the inefficiency of some public offices, but the debate there does not point to a complete overhaul of the country's state apparatus.

Things are different in Mexico. Without a doubt, both the form and essence of Mexico's political system urgently needs a change. This cannot be achieved from one day to the next. Nor is one six-year presidential term enough to implement the necessary transformations. Perhaps the first point here should be what is understood by reform of the state, a concept not always comprehensible to most citizens.

The reform of the state is a topic that has surfaced repeatedly since the 1980s when in Western Europe systematic critiques of the functioning of the welfare state, of the size of bureaucracies and fiscal crises forced state institutions to seek new forms of organization to make governments function better.

In Latin America, the transitions to democracy led to structural reforms of the state to make administrative processes more efficient and permit democracy—so long postponed in the area's political life—to consolidate.

To delve into the question of the reform of the state, we must remember that the particular objectives of institutional change vary according to each country's specific needs. The same recipe cannot be applied to every single state. The malaise of bureaucracy may be similar in one government and another, but the cure depends on the idiosyncracies, history and particular experience of each people.

In the case of Mexico, the reform of the state aims to give public functions new democratic content, establishing a new relationship between the state and society and promoting an internal reform of state institutions. What is sought is the stimulation of the country's social, economic and political development under conditions of democratic governability which, until recently, was questioned by broad sectors of the populace.

The reform of the state currently underway is an attempt to consolidate a democratic order that can ensure that whoever is elected Mexico's president in the year 2000 will have the legal-normative conditions that guarantee the full exercise of his prerogatives and attributions.

It should be taken into account that the transformations of the state apparatus are not linked to a specific policy, although the process is the result of a series of reforms that began in the government and the administration, that change the functioning of the institutions and redefine the extent of citizens' civil and political rights.

The reform of the state creates a necessary political space for negotiations among different groups and sectors in order for them to build polit-

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\* Political analyst.



The legislative agenda includes electoral questions such as Mexicans' voting abroad, runoff elections, the reelection of legislators and the monitoring of party campaign spending.

ical agreements to make it possible to live together in political harmony based on dialogue and negotiation, sidestepping confrontations and possible conflicts.

With this intention, in early 1998, the federal government, through the Ministry of the Interior, proposed to the political parties with seats in Congress that a legislative agenda for the reform of the state be drawn up. This agenda included general topics such as the political system and democratic governability, security and justice, federalism and public participation.

Later, the executive and legislative branches met and reached a consensus on an inclusive, balanced legislative agenda. It should be pointed out that, on the request of the political parties, the legislative agenda includes electoral questions, such as Mexicans' voting abroad, runoff elections, the reelection of legislators and the monitoring of party campaign spending.

The main agenda includes issues such as an overall fiscal reform, different forms of direct democracy, the strengthening of the legislative branch, the autonomy of the National Human Rights Commission, federalism and strengthening the municipality, among others. Other topics will be added as the ones listed above are dealt with, such as reforms to the Federal Labor Law and the development of environmental legislation.

Beyond the legal and political reforms approved during the present administration of President Ernesto Zedillo, we should take into account the different advances and setbacks on each of the points of the legislative agenda.

Take, for example, electoral reform. As part of a process of political modernization, a series of reforms have been promoted to transform the electoral system, making it more competitive. From 1911 until today, there have been 10 different electoral reforms, each useful in a particular moment and for a specific political situation in Mexico.

Recently, this important aspect of the political reform has been gone into more profoundly due to the debate on the democratic transition of the Mexican state suggested by political analysts such as Lorenzo Meyer and José Antonio Crespo. Another reason for this deepening of the debate was the July 1988 federal elections, in which the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which for the last 70 years has won every presidential election, received one of the lowest vote counts in its history.

On March 17, 1998, the congressional caucus of the conservative National Action Party (PAN), Mexico's second electoral force, presented a bill to the Chamber of Deputies to reform Article 81 of the Constitution to make runoff elections, or a second round, possible in the presidential elections when none of the candidates obtain an absolute majority of the votes in the first round of balloting. Since the 2000 elections are expected to be the closest in contemporary Mexican history, PAN legislators say a second round would make the winner more legitimate. In recent months, debate about this bill spread beyond the confines of the legislature to include the public nationwide. However, when this proposal is put to the vote in the Senate, dominated by the PRI, it may be rejected, among other reasons because of its operational and logistical difficulties.

On November 12, 1998, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) charged a commission of specialists with the study of whether Mexicans' voting abroad is viable and what forms it might take. This commission issued a report to try to establish norms on the necessary criteria based on trustworthy figures so that when the time came, the Congress could

decide about the legal reforms required. However, the discussion of this question turns around whether Mexicans resident abroad should enjoy the same rights as their countrymen (voting for those who govern them) without fulfilling the same obligations (paying taxes to the Mexican government, for example).

On April 29, 1999, the opposition majority in the Chamber of Deputies passed a bill that would reform, add to and repeal different articles in the Federal Electoral Institutions and Procedures Code, the legislation that regulates Mexico's elections, and sent it to the Senate. Among other things, the bill touches on coalitions, Mexicans' voting abroad, over-representation in the Chamber of Deputies, access to the media, monitoring of campaign spending, etc. Will this bill also be approved in the PRI-dominated Senate? Probably not. Mexico's Senate majority does not look kindly on any bill not presented by its own party or the executive. So, the future of this bill, already approved by the opposition in the Chamber of Deputies, is not very promising.

One of the Mexican government's most important concerns, just as important or more so than electoral reform, is the guerrilla conflict in Chiapas. Five years after the subversive Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) movement broke out, led by Sebastián Guillén (alias Subcommander Marcos), the Mexican government has put a priority on dialogue and negotiations. However, the results have not been very fruitful. In any case, the indigenous issue made a deep impression in the state apparatus, which is why on March 15, 1998, President Zedillo sent the Senate a bill to reform the Constitution with regard to indigenous rights and culture. At this writing, discussion, and possible approval, of this bill is still pending. The bill, which has not met with the approval of the Party for the Democratic Revolution (PRD), proposes substantial changes to several articles of the Constitution in order to build a new relationship among the indigenous peoples, society and the state. Critiques of

**The main agenda includes issues such as an overall fiscal reform, different forms of direct democracy, the strengthening of the legislative branch, and the municipality and federalism.**

the proposal revolve around the idea that no legislation should be passed favoring a specific group of Mexicans (in this case, the indigenous communities) because, in the long run, this would lead to creating regional separatism.

In a different vein, it is a secret to no one that insecurity in Mexico has sharpened in recent years. Latent problems involving murder, robbery and kidnapping have risen to heights that worry Mexicans. To fight this terrible crime problem, reforms of the administration of justice, law enforcement and public safety systems were passed in December 1994. The General Law on the Coordination of the National Public Safety System was passed December 11. The National Public Safety Council was established March 7, 1996, to coordinate activities of federal and state law enforcement agencies. In June, different articles of the Constitution were amended to give law enforcement officials the legal instruments they needed to fight crime, including organized crime. In November of the same year, the Federal Law Against Organized Crime was passed to reinforce this fight with new instruments and to make it possible to initiate investigations of the illicit activities of suspects who had previously enjoyed a high degree of impunity.

Of course, legislative reforms are not enough to eradicate Mexico's galloping crime rate. Therefore, on August 26, 1998, President Zedillo launched the National Crusade Against Delinquency and Crime to foster the Mexican people's aspiration of two indissoluble aims, credibility and trust. On this basis, then-Minister of the Interior Francisco Labastida Ochoa presented the National Public



Security Program, implementing short- and medium-term police strategies and actions.

Another polemic issue this year was the bank crisis that forced the government and the Congress to intervene. After intense congressional debate, the government's *Official Gazette* published January 19, 1999, the Bank Savings Protection Law, as well as the reform, addition and repeal of different aspects of the Banco de México (central bank) charter, and legislation on credit institutions, the stock market and financial institutions. All this made it possible to establish the Institute for Bank Savings Protection (IPAB) in substitution of the Savings Protection Bank Fund (Fobaproa). Initially, it was thought that all the opposition parties would oppose the government solution to the case of Fobaproa, but in the end, the PAN backed the executive's proposal against the express wishes of the PRD and voted in favor in the lower chamber.

We should actually note that the federal executive has not presented legal reforms on the issues of the public budget, nor of certain forms of direct democracy (like the plebiscite, the referendum and recall of elected officials), or the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH).<sup>1</sup>

However, the opposition parties have dealt with these issues, presenting their proposals in bills before Congress: on the budget (PAN and PRD), forms of direct democracy (PRD and PT) and the National Human Rights Commission (PAN, PRD and PT).

With regard to the CNDH, the federal government accepted in general terms the opposition's proposals in the meetings between the executive and legislative branches, also called the High Level Group (Ministry of the Interior and party caucus leaders from both chambers of Congress). Finally, at least in the case of the CNDH, all the political parties reached significant consensuses.

The executive also presented Congress with a bill November 28, 1995, that would reform the Constitution to establish a Federal Auditor's Office, which was not discussed on the floor of the Chamber of Deputies until the Fifty-seventh Congress ses-

sioned in the second half of 1998. Until now, audits and monitoring of government spending had been carried out by the Ministry of the Comptroller and Administrative Development, part of the executive branch itself. The new body, created by a bill passed by the Chamber of Deputies on April 29 of this year, will be independent, with high technical and professional levels, and the legal capability to make accountability impartial, trustworthy and convincing. Naturally, the law must still be approved by state legislatures to change the Constitution.

Mexico's agenda for the reform of the state is vast. Fortunately, it is no longer left solely in the hands of the executive. The responsibility has been divided up among different political actors, outstanding among whom are the nation's legislators. It cannot be denied, however, that the legislators have clearly not been up to their jobs, making them—as the Englishman Edmund Burke said in his day—the ambassadors of private interests instead of the architects of a renewed rule of law that would narrow the enormous gap between the ideal and reality and would make the constitutionally-established system of introducing and developing bills and passing laws more agile. The Mexican Congress needs—to again paraphrase Burke—representatives of judgement and reason who, once elected, have the freedom to decide their vote in Congress without being bound by passions or prejudices in their home districts. This is the only way the reform of the state will be completed. Until now, its agenda has been covered more or less, but not yet in the full way we all hope for. **MM**

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> At the close of this edition Mexico's Congress had approved changes both to the Constitution and regulatory legislation to give the CNDH full autonomy for its functioning and the use of its budget. The head of the CNDH will in future also be named by the Senate and not the president as in the past. [Editor's Note.]

# Notes on the Transformation Of the Mexican Electoral System

Marco Antonio Baños Martínez\*

For the last 20 years, Mexico has been immersed in a process of perfecting its electoral legislation. In that same period the public has increasingly demanded clean elections and become more and more aware of the importance of the right to vote. This political transition has been characterized by a profound transformation of political norms. In and of itself, it shows that the transition would not be possible without the constant renovation of the normative framework of elections. We can even say that, at least until the 1997 federal balloting, the constant renovation of this framework became a precondition for holding elections.

In fact, the last decade produced profound adjustments in the rules of the game. While these changes did not affect the essence of the political regimen, they did generate important modifications in electoral institutions and procedures.

As a derivation of this unfinished process of successive reforms, between 1989 and 1996 the political forces managed to significantly modify the Mexican electoral system through consensuses about parliamentary accords. This change can be seen in the August 1990 passage of new legislation, the Federal Code for Electoral Institutions and Procedures and the additions

Among the important innovations was the creation of permanent electoral authorities, totally autonomous with regard to the three branches of government.

and modifications introduced in later reforms.

Among the most important innovations from 1990 on was the creation of permanent electoral authorities, totally autonomous with regard to the three branches of government, whose decisions would not be subordinate to them. These authorities are also independent vis-à-vis party organizations, despite including in their decision-making

bodies political party representatives who have the right to speak but not to vote.

The Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) is one of the main products of the reform. Among its most outstanding characteristics is its leading bodies being completely made up of individual citizens, all its acts being subject to guiding principles elevated to the constitutional level<sup>1</sup> and its concentrating all the functions involved in organizing the elections. Without a doubt, the IFE is the institutional result of a long evolutionary process of electoral authorities which has been entrusted with the sensitive task of making Mexican elections trustworthy and believable and of achieving the acceptance and full confidence of the political actors and society. But, in trying to attain this basic objective, what have its most important achievements been?

A first achievement has been the creation of trustworthy voters' rolls that have been used in the last three federal elections, built up from

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\* Director of the Federal Electoral Institute Secretariat.





The Federal Electoral Institute's General Council.

Photos reprinted courtesy of the Federal Electoral Institute

Mexico's voter registration lists have one of the highest levels of coverage in the world.

nothing between 1990 and 1991. Another accomplishment has been the creation of a voter's registration card complete with photograph, which from 1992 on became the main instrument for exercising the vote as well as Mexico's main form of personal identification.

The voter registration rolls are permanently kept up to date, a task to which the political parties contribute through the IFE's national, state and district watchdog bodies, where they can supervise and verify its compilation and trustworthiness. It is also verified by samples taken by a specialized technical committee.

The tests and audits of the voter registration lists aim to show that they are up to date, given the country's demographic mobility and growth, and to generate confidence in their use.

The data published by electoral authorities indicates that Mexico's voter registration lists have one of the highest levels of coverage in the world. During the 1997 elections, a little over 98 percent of the citizens who fulfilled the prerequisites established by law were listed on the voters' rolls. That same number came to 93 percent of the entire population of voting age, an example of the sheer volume of the technical work done to achieve a solid, trustworthy instrument.

The electoral instruments have also been proven trustworthy by their use in different state elections, wherein, just as in federal elections, they have gone unchallenged by political forces.

Another IFE achievement has been the legal procedure for designating the electoral councilors who make up the 32 local and 300 district electoral councils, one council for each state and district respectively.

The naming of these officials is one of the central aspects of the organization of Mexican elections. Just as in the IFE's general council, state and district council members are the only ones with the right and responsibility to vote council decisions.

That is why the mechanism stipulated in the law includes finding persons who, based on their experience, knowledge, prestige and lack of ties to party organizations, represent the best options for each state and electoral district.

Therefore, in the last elections, electoral council members were designated by the highest possible consensus of the bodies that choose them. For the 1997 federal elections, a broad-based exercise to review proposals and discuss the designation was carried out. This, in turn, meant greater confidence of the political parties in electoral bodies on a national, local and district level.



The Federal Electoral Institute concentrates all the functions involved in organizing elections.

The new mechanisms for designating polling place officers are another facet which has created more certainty and trust in the organization of Mexican elections.

From the 1991 federal elections on, polling place officers have been selected by lot. The 1996 reform instituting a double drawing to pick 10 percent of the citizens on the voter registration lists to be trained and evaluated and later designated as poll officials, strengthened this procedure.

This mechanism is designed to guarantee impartiality in picking poll officials and ensuring their effective functioning. It has contributed to eliminating the old discussion about who made up the bodies that directly counted the ballots. It also represents the opportunity for the public to participate in the vast, complex organization of the elections.

Another fundamental element in building trust in Mexican elections has been the almost immediate dissemination of preliminary results.

These official results, obtained from adding up the figures on the different official certificates from each polling place, show general electoral trends. Preliminary results are crucial for inhibiting extra-official speculation among political players and the media and for making the electoral authorities

the source for trustworthy results based on official polling place documents.

Any irregularity or delay in the announcement of preliminary vote tallies would irredeemably damage electoral bodies' credibility. Therefore, the operational effectiveness in obtaining them is fundamental for making the elections transparent.

One final reflection on the question at hand: what this article describes, as well as other measures established by law or electoral authorities to create greater certainty about elections, the existence of a special electoral court and a system for challenging violations of the law, testify to the perfecting of Mexico's electoral system.

The constant updating of electoral norms will continue to be essential for Mexico's political transition and its impetus and extent will depend on agreements among political actors. In any case, however, the adjustment of the normative framework demands electoral authorities offer society the preparation and development of unquestionable elections to allow advances in the consolidation of the public's trust in them. **MM**

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>The IFE's guiding principles are legality, certainty, confidence, impartiality and professionalism. [Editor's Note.]

Another element in building trust has been the almost immediate dissemination of preliminary results.



# Trends in the Year 2000 Presidential Race

Polls show that support for possible presidential candidates not only differs widely by region, but it also varies depending on whom they might be running against.

	North	West	C-W Mexico	South	Total
<b>If you had the following presidential candidates to choose from, whom would you vote for?</b>					
Roberto Madrazo (PRI)	28%	22%	23%	29%	25%
Vicente Fox (PAN)	24%	36%	26%	14%	25%
Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (PRD)	15%	13%	18%	19%	16%
<b>If you had the following presidential candidates to choose from, whom would you vote for?</b>					
Francisco Labastida (PRI)	29%	21%	20%	21%	23%
Vicente Fox (PAN)	25%	35%	26%	17%	26%
Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (PRD)	15%	12%	18%	21%	16%
<b>If you had the following presidential candidates to choose from, whom would you vote for?</b>					
Francisco Labastida (PRI)	34%	21%	24%	24%	26%
Vicente Fox (PAN)	26%	34%	25%	18%	26%
Porfirio Muñoz Ledo (PRD)	7%	11%	14%	16%	12%

Source: *Reforma*, 26 May 1999.

## Alliances

Although improbable, it is possible that all the opposition parties could unite to run a single presidential candidate.

According to a survey published in the Mexico City daily *Reforma*,

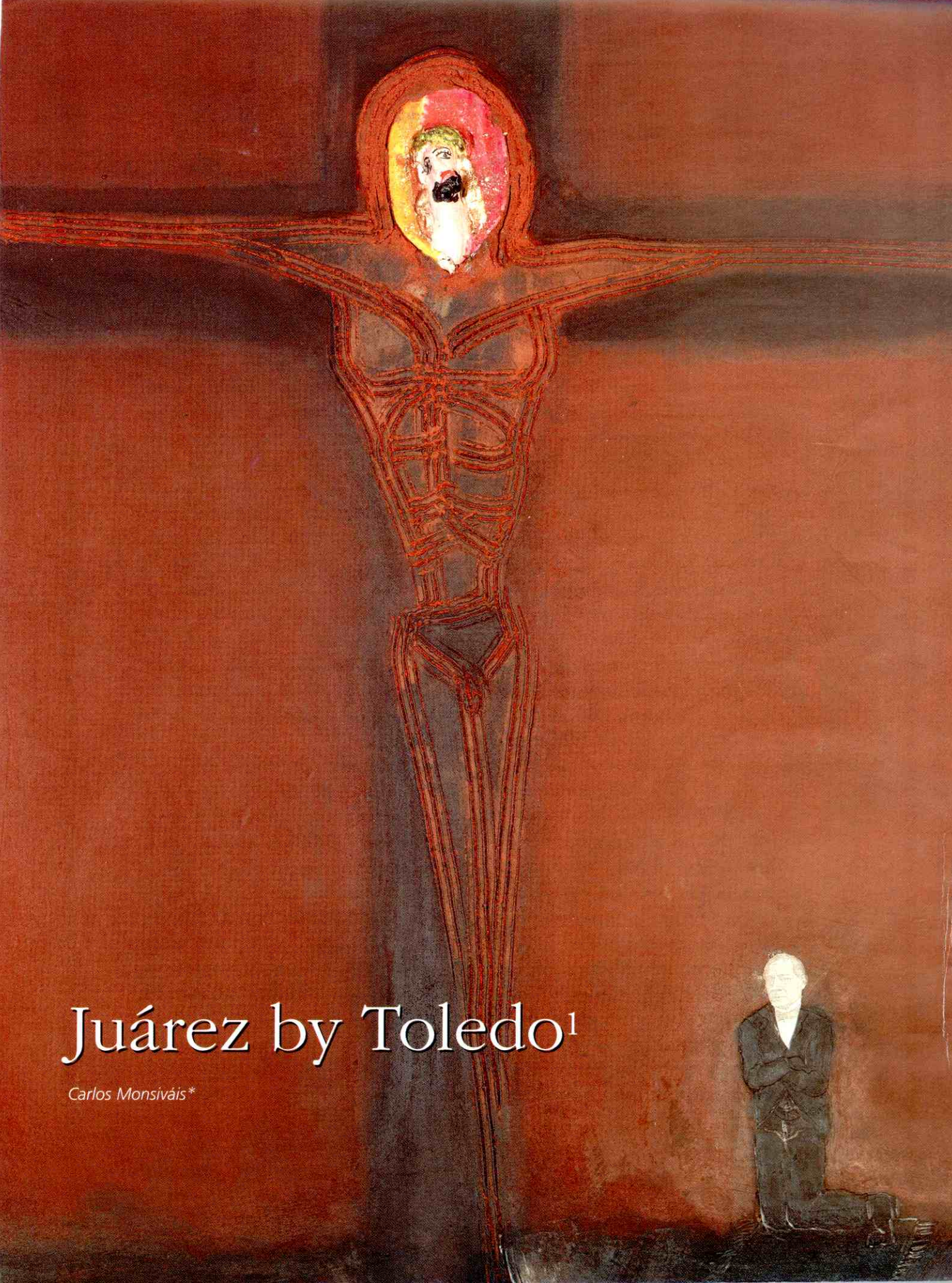
27 percent of those polled thought Vicente Fox (PAN) would be the most likely coalition candidate.

Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (PRD) came in second, Porfirio Muñoz Ledo (PRD) third and Manuel Camacho Solís, of the Party of the Democratic Center (PCD), fourth.

<b>If all opposition parties united to run a single presidential candidate, who would you like him to be?</b>	
	May '99
Vicente Fox	27
Porfirio Muñoz Ledo	8
Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas	18
Manuel Camacho	6
Other	1
None of the above	12
Don't know/No answer	25

Source: *Reforma*, 26 May 1999.





# Juárez by Toledo<sup>1</sup>

Carlos Monsiváis\*



1 For more than a century now, the only way we •Mexicans have been able to picture Juárez is in his hieratic regalia, clad in frock-coat and top hat, travelling from one corner of the Nation to another (with a capital N), a nation in the throes of agony and resurrection—and he incapable of dishonor, supreme commander in the face of supreme patriotic duty. His character is made of steel, his powers of decision lucid and his image unfathomable, or at least that is how it seems to us. What would make this *Benemérito de las Américas*, this exemplary leader of the saga of Liberal Reform, this definitive hero of our history, this visionary who contributed more than anyone else to the consolidation of our nation flinch? What could make him stir? Photographs and paintings always portray him the same, imperturbable in any setting, whether on a cliff, by the presidential carriage, heading the nomadic Republican powers, defying the rebels with a curt gesture, or quelling the treachery of the conservative faction and its attendant French imperialist invasion.

Juárez' inapprehensible appearance goes beyond the solemnities of his time, the customary stiffness of all grandees before the painter or photographer, the observance of the by-laws for facial deportment set by history and society, the admonitions of severity that each and every individual portrayed (whether minister or peasant) felt compelled to convey. Don Benito went further: his enigmatic quality is intensely individual. From the outset, according to witnesses, he was a live statue, his distant expression seemingly pointing toward the source of ancestral forces, toward (if the term had not become meaningless) atavism.

Even the resources of psychology and sociology cannot unveil the secret of the Sphinx. The Zapotec indian who learned the Castilian language and became an undecipherable mestizo will not yield his secret. We know everything about him: writings, laws, correspondence, suffering, human failings, unutter-

able virtues, unlimited courage and persistence, even the frailties of his ambition. But in the last instance, before we can condense what we have learned of him into an image both new and modern, an image removed from the Bronze History of our Bronze Race, the irresistible pull of habit, amounting to national behavior, steps in to prevent the slightest modification of the classical representation of Juárez, The Impassive One. The demythologizing effort has been substantial, but it has come late. Don Benito is the most heroic of heroes: he cannot be reduced to fragments, he never cracks or breaks down. Even if we learn by heart all the criticism inveighed against his authoritarian personality and his lust for power, in the end his figure will remain intact. What is "human" in Juárez, according to both historical interpretation and popular feeling, are his immutable features. His image is so monolithic that it does not require marble, bronze and concrete to be marble-like, bronze-like and crushing. Juárez' head watches over the Republic, Juárez' bust presides over the pageantry on the motherland, Juárez' statues (the institutions' "dragon teeth") strengthen the links between historical reckoning and individual trust in the political system.

2. Is there anything we have not tried to put Juárez in-his-place? In Porfirio Díaz' times, while the century was closing, throughout the country priests committed the upholder of the Laws of Reform to variegated torments of hell, while the "scientific," positivistic Francisco Bulnes wrote *El verdadero Juárez*, wherein he listed all his failings, errors and obfuscation. According to the right, Juárez should be held responsible for the loss of the Golden Age: his hated figure and his abominable name deserved systematic, over-exact and almost mystical detestation. Juárez drew all kinds of fire: jingles in private schools ("May the scoundrel Juárez die"); the hysteria of conservative households that, even during the 1940s, not wanting to utter "I'm going to the toilet," piously muttered, "I'm going to see Juárez"; taunts and slander from Catholic historians, among them no less than José Vasconcelos,

\* Mexican art critic, chronicler and cultural analyst.

Translation by Mathew Lane.

Previous page: *The Christ of the Bakers*, 81 x 61 cm, 1996 (oil/encaustic on wood).



Photos by Gilberto Chen. Reprinted courtesy of Galeria Juan Martín

*Juárez in the Middle East*, 56.5 x 59 cm, 1998 (mixed techniques, woven paper).

who in his *Breve historia de México* called Don Benito “gloomy” and accused him of being the protector of Yankee intervention (according to him, since there was no such thing as Indian-ness, Juárez could not be an “indigenista,” and therefore became a straw-man for Protestants and Masons).

Contumely and detestation came to a head in 1947, during a march of the right-wing National “Sinarquista” Union to the Juárez Monument in Mexico City. Puerility and fetishism took over. Each speech kindled the flame of the next, and the successors of the nineteenth century Conservatives and the twentieth century *cristero* Catholic insurgents laid charges, spewed insults, became exasperated in word and grimace and addressed the civic sculpture in an animistic mode. As their fury decomposed, they spit at the effigy and covered it with

a hood: Juárez, they claimed, “does not deserve to face decorous, right-minded people.”

3. There is no way to “demythologize” Don Benito, and his fellow Oaxacan Francisco Toledo is not unaware of this. Who could modify such unquestionable, deeply rooted language? And, since the legend does not give way or even change, Toledo approaches it sideways: he animates the surroundings, he includes the Idol in fantastic goings-on. If Juárez is *ad perpetuam* the face/mask, the very mien of protocol, he who will never tolerate emendation, then what must be subjected to the vivification of art are his landscapes and his daily activities. Juárez is inalterable: nothing he does and is made to do will make him any less Juárez. He is beyond both respect and lack of respect, and therefore he can and he must, at his ease, go fishing and skating, take part in community fiestas, scru-





*Reform Avenue*, 50 x 40 cm, 1995 (mixed techniques, woven amate).





*Juárez as a Sleeping Gypsy*, 1986 (mixed techniques/paper).

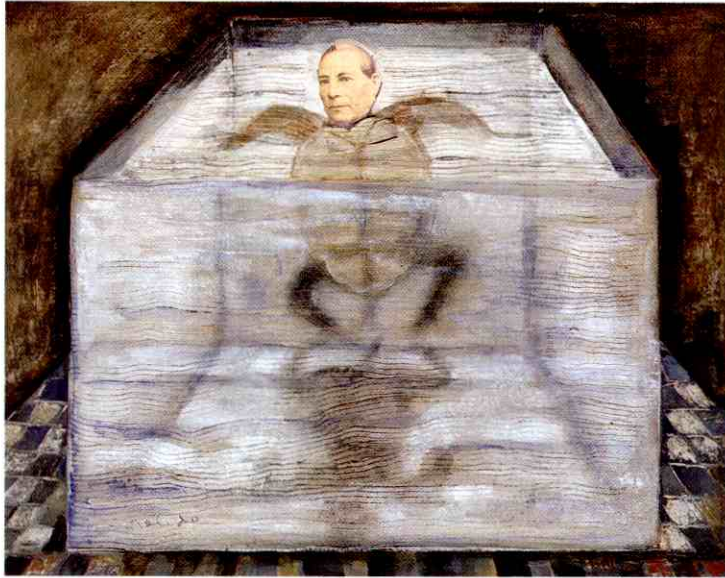
tinize newly-wed women and women giving birth, reduce his size or become a giant at will, suffer reverential treatment from iguanas and crabs and turtles and deer, go through the looking-glass, allow himself to be followed by women-folk, as well as lead Nature to seduction or to agitation.

Confronted with the omnipresent head and busts of a never-changing Juárez, Toledo addresses his subject by means of a formula whereby admiration necessitates irony and irony is founded upon admiration. The panoramas of our Bronze History and the grudges of anti-history are now abolished. If the place of heroes cannot be modified, what must change is our perception of their visual reach. If the Sacred Industry of Heroism has littered the country with story horror and with paintings which serve as lay votive offerings, then it is now time to see Juárez not only as the sym-

bol of History, but of popular culture. For the purpose of this re-creation, Toledo diversifies and uses gouache, engraving, lithography, experiments with fossil stone, collage. Juárez is the ubiquitous presence, the wake of civil apparitions opposing the celestial monopoly of miracles, the exceptional being in whose traditional strictness iconographic renewal inspires itself.

As a child—and like everyone in this country more secularized than is thought and more religious than is admitted—Toledo fed himself on a hagiographic culture made up of daily and Sunday small stamps and prints, of catechism booklets and official textbooks, of child heroes and children of Atocha,<sup>2</sup> of sainthood divided between the walls of churches and the walls of the mayor's office. Today, with both thankfulness and revenge, Toledo restores the powers of imagination to his culture; he threads through places





*Juárez in a Tank*, 26 x 35.5 cm, 1998 (mixed techniques/gouache/paper).

hitherto unexplored; he combines what was never before granted to any nation and what was never before recorded by parliamentary chroniclers. Knowingly and unknowingly, Toledo blends parallel stories and fantasies: San Felipe de Jesús before the fig tree and Juárez with his reed-grass flute dazing the sheep, San Martín de Porres watching a parade of brooms and Juárez up in the heavens of the motherland. Scenes of the joyful wedding of the corridors of hagiography and the visions of nineteenth century Mexican liberalism.

4. Once, Toledo says —opposing the official view— Don Benito, angered by the rebelliousness of Toledo's countrymen, the Juchitecs, ordered Juchitán burnt. This deplorable act does not raise vindictive intentions in our artist, but it does explain something of the mistrust that we perceive in his apotheosis of Juárez, the very symbol of himself. According to Toledo, for his people, Juárez also represents the violence of the natural elements; he is power incited to the igneous, General History razing Local History. Such an experience increases even further the distance between Juárez and the mythical and real Juchitán that surrounds him here, fauna and flora, families and individuals, signs and legends.

Never before in his extraordinary body of work had Toledo come close to History and to an illustrious personage. Surely this new insistence stems from a prolonged personal and collective obsession with a man who, for the Indian sector where he was born, is both the culmination and the deferment of possibilities. In these thousand and one Juárez, Toledo also reveals his position regarding the relations (the extreme fusion) between collective development and Nature.

Juárez seen, tracked, exalted, "humanized" by Toledo. Respect for another man's right —Juárez' by-word— becomes the immutability of the figure. Among individuals, as among landscapes. In the end, everything, including these opinions, had as much effect on our mythology as the wind did on Juárez,<sup>3</sup> to use a mythological phrase. It jiggled his hat and that's all. ■■■

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> First published in Graciela Toledo and Ramón López Quiroga, comps., *Toledo: Lo que el viento a Juárez* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1986), pp. 9-13. Reprinted by permission of Ediciones Era.

<sup>2</sup> The Infant Saint of Atocha is one of Mexico's most venerated saints, thought to perform enormous numbers of miracles. [Editor's Note.]

<sup>3</sup> The phrase "as much as the wind affected Juárez" is a common Mexican saying meaning that something had no effect at all. [Editor's Note.]





Francisco Toledo  
Between Myth and Fable<sup>1</sup>

*José Pierre\**



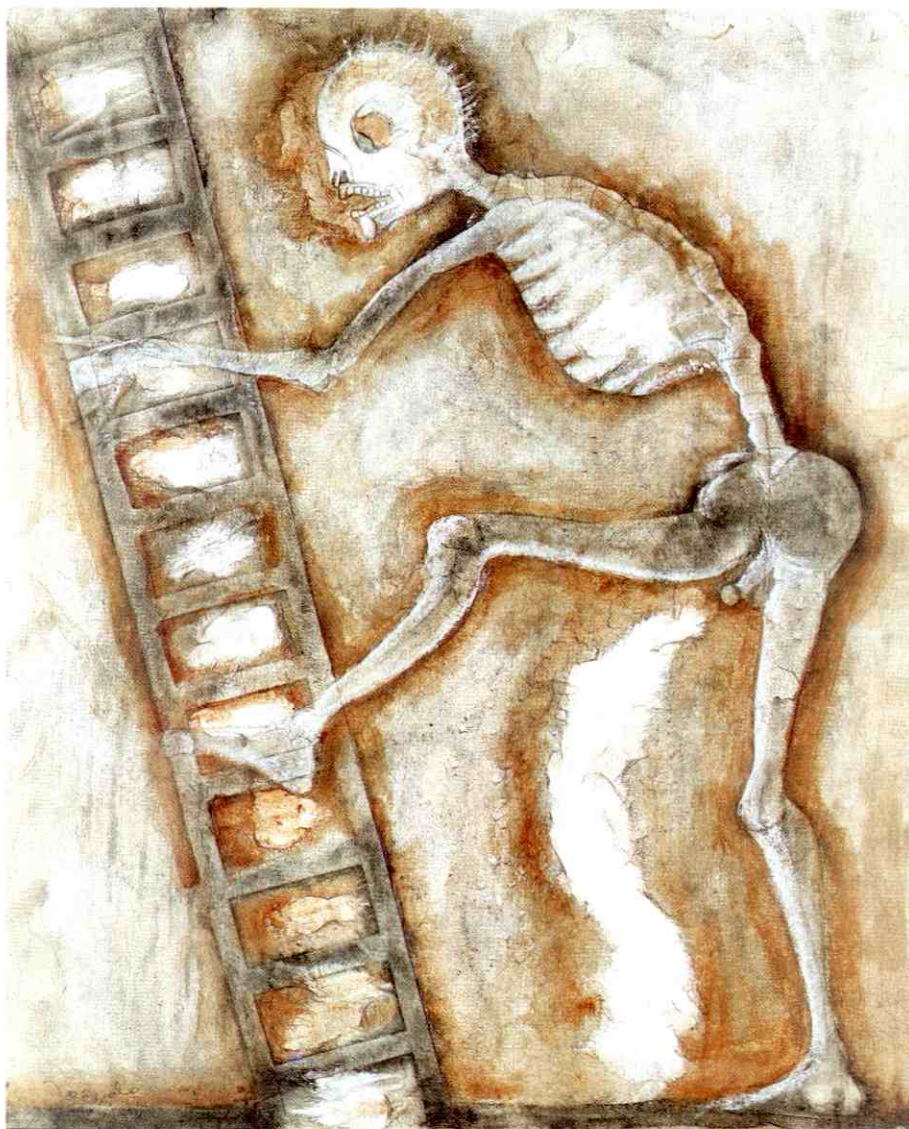


Photo by Gilberto Chen. Reprinted courtesy of Galeria Juan Martin

*Death Ascending a Stair*, 1990 (gouache/paper).

Mexican [artist Francisco] Toledo completes the trio of painters whom André Pieyre de Mandiargues calls “exceptional,” and with whom, it seems to me, some major form of essential mediation is consummated. Clearly, the mediation of Francisco Toledo, in 1964 introduced as “a young Zapotec Indian whose art is a sort of transfiguration and exaltation of the daily myths of the peoples of the Isthmus,” is linked, in the first place, with the antagonism that

\* French art critic.

**Previous page:** *Death and Toad*, 50 x 40 cm, 1989 (gouache/paper).

continues even today between Mexico's indigenous civilizations and the Western civilizations ("civilizations," plural, to distinguish perhaps between the cultural oppression of Hispanic origin and that of Anglo Saxon America). From this point of view, Toledo's situation may recall that of Wifredo Lam or, in his own country, Rufino Tamayo, also a Zapotec Indian. This double comparison is sufficient to show up the differences: in effect, it seems to me that Lam dedicated himself to revealing the symbolic forms of primitive creative vitality (he later lavished the attention that he had first given to voodoo and its Cuban variation, *santismo*, on the peoples of the Third World). Tamayo, on the other hand, limited himself to imbuing his profound Indian-ness on the aesthetic inherited from the West, among other reasons because he had one of the most exuberant and individual brushes of this century. Neither one nor the other seemed to have become a tributary of that curse of modern art that condemns the artist to paying for his right to find his own way with relative loneliness: far from his own, like someone condemned to their distrust and incomprehension.

It seems to me that, for himself, Toledo wanted to avoid this curse and that, in any case, he felt better equipped than his predecessors for confronting it. "Toledo is not a solitary artist," writes

Carlos Monsiváis. "He belongs to a people, an aesthetic...and a history." I would add that more than Lam and Tamayo, he reminds me of Chagall. Just as this great forerunner of his remained decidedly linked to the world of his childhood memories and the atmosphere of the ghetto of Vitebsk that bewitched both him and his work all his life, Toledo remained absolutely faithful to Juchitán, his native region; to his father, the shoemaker, and his grandmother, the pig butcher; to his aunt, the robust Felicitas, who every day swam across the Perros River looking for skins for her brother the shoemaker, skins that she carried back on her head without getting them wet. These memories, more or less transfigured by the imagination, are his first source of inspiration. But, in contrast with Chagall, he did not remain there, since, as Mandiargues writes

I know no modern artist who preserves so much and as naturally as he a sacred conception of the universe and a sacred meaning of life; none who delves so seriously and simply into myth and magic; none so purely inspired by rites and fable...Without there being, strictly speaking, a narrative subject, all of Toledo's production, down to the least of his work, is the development and consummation of the fantastic...Many are the details clearly related to the world of magic, but we would probably be wrong if we wanted to interpret Toledo's art



Toad, 24 x 32 cm, 1989 (encaustic/paper).



My Mother Spoils Me, 56 x 76 cm, 1996 (watercolor/paper).



as an attempt to acquire power over hidden or supernatural forces. In any case, it is a mystical attempt, of the order of profound clairvoyance.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the Mexican painter has shown himself to be the possessor of exceptional artistic means that he plays with sometimes with impetuous inspiration:

He is one of those mystics who do not deprive themselves of taking their quest as a game and are able to laugh out loud in the most beautiful moments of their exaltation.<sup>3</sup>

Mandiargues also points out that there is more than one point in common with [Paul] Klee, beginning with that playful dimension and going on to the graphic invention and transparency of certain hues. Apparently, chance gave him the gift of bewitching the universe:

Everything that his fingers touch is baptized and authentically renewed: even old newspaper clippings that become unexpected creatures, the old walls of the

neighborhoods he frequents, covered with such original graffiti that it enralls the art lover and the street itself enter the gallery and even the museum.<sup>4</sup>

Thanks to a career guided by those two imperatives, "fable and form," Toledo's work seems particularly able to play a first-class mediating role since it

is natural and simple as life and death are (or should be). Violence and charm animate it indissolubly.<sup>5</sup>

#### NOTES

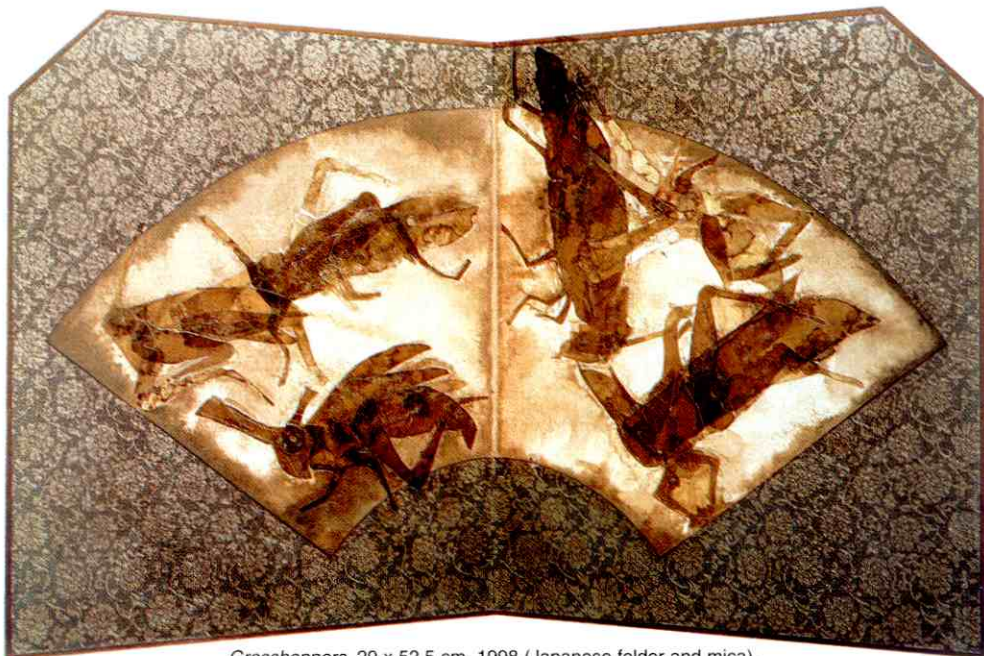
<sup>1</sup> This article is an extract of José Pierre's book *Le Belvédère Mandiargues. André Pieyre de Mandiargues et l'art du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Artcurial-Éditions d'Adam Biro, 1990), pp. 177-179.

<sup>2</sup> André Pieyre de Mandiargues, "Toledo hors de pair," *Troisième belvédère* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

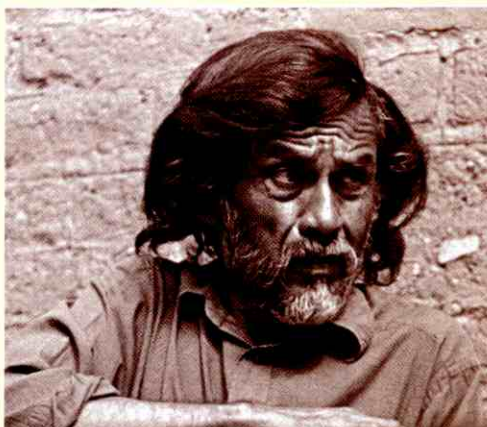
<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Francesco Toledo, *Critiquettes* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1967).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



*Grasshoppers*, 29 x 52.5 cm, 1998 (Japanese folder and mica).



Cecilia Salcedo

## Francisco Toledo

### Brief Biography

**F**rancisco Toledo was born in Juchitán, Oaxaca. In 1940, after spending his early childhood in southern Veracruz, at the age of 12 he moved to Oaxaca where he began his artistic studies in Arturo García Bustos' engraving workshop. While still a young man, he moved yet again, this time to Mexico City, where he attended the Citadel School of Design and Crafts' engraving workshop.

In 1959, he had his first show at the Fort Worth Center in Texas and Mexico City's Antonio Souza Gallery. That same year he traveled to Europe, settling in Paris where he briefly joined William Hayter's atelier to study engraving. After withdrawing from formal studies, he spent his time looking at paintings in the museums of Europe, where he got his real education. After a 1963 showing at Karl Flinker's gallery, he decided to return to Mexico in 1965.

He works in different mediums including painting, water colors, sketching, sculpture and the tapestry design he does together with the weavers of Teotitlán del Valle in Oaxaca, as well as continuing his

work in graphics. He made several trips to New York, settling there in 1979, where he began to work in ceramics. When he returned to Mexico in 1980, he had a showing in Mexico City's Modern Art Museum, exemplifying the different techniques he has used. In 1984, he began a four year stay in Barcelona and Paris, where besides painting, he did a series of engravings for the Barcelona polygraph. In 1988, he went back to Oaxaca to live.

In recent years, this Zapotec artist has spent his time promoting and disseminating the arts and culture of his native state. He founded Ediciones Toledo, a publishing house, and created the Oaxaca Graphic Arts Institute, the Oaxaca Contemporary Art Museum, the Alvarez Bravo Center for Photography, the El Pochote Cinema Club and the Oaxaca Paper Art Workshop. He has also given his support to the protection and conservation of Oaxaca's historical and cultural patrimony through the Pro-Oax Foundation, as well as to ecological projects to protect Monte Albán and the Papaloapan River. **MM**



# Devotion, Respect, Risk... Alchemy

## The Melancholy of Blue Tacks

María Navarro\*

Looking at López Orozco's work instantly puts us in a little known and even less explored context. We enter a magical world as soon as we see the transfiguration of *jonote* fiber in the hands of the artist. López Orozco is more capable of going back to our own ancestors than of trying to use the millennium's most elaborate technology to successfully infuse the deepest feelings of his soul on a piece of *amate* paper.

The abstraction of what is known, learned, lived and felt is projected in his conversation with his devotion to his work: the dialogue between the mystical and the practical, between truth and lies, between what is and what is not.

Only a few have the privilege of meeting the painter in his Santa María de la Ribera studio, in the sanctuary of *amate* paper. Whether of *jenote* from San Pablito or elsewhere, nowhere but in his studio is *amate* born and transformed, taking on a life of its own. Now it exists for us.

López Orozco's pictorial work reflects the capacity of a creator, of a human being, who from the very beginning enjoys the risk of being able to see his *amate* expand and be finished, and yet, being the

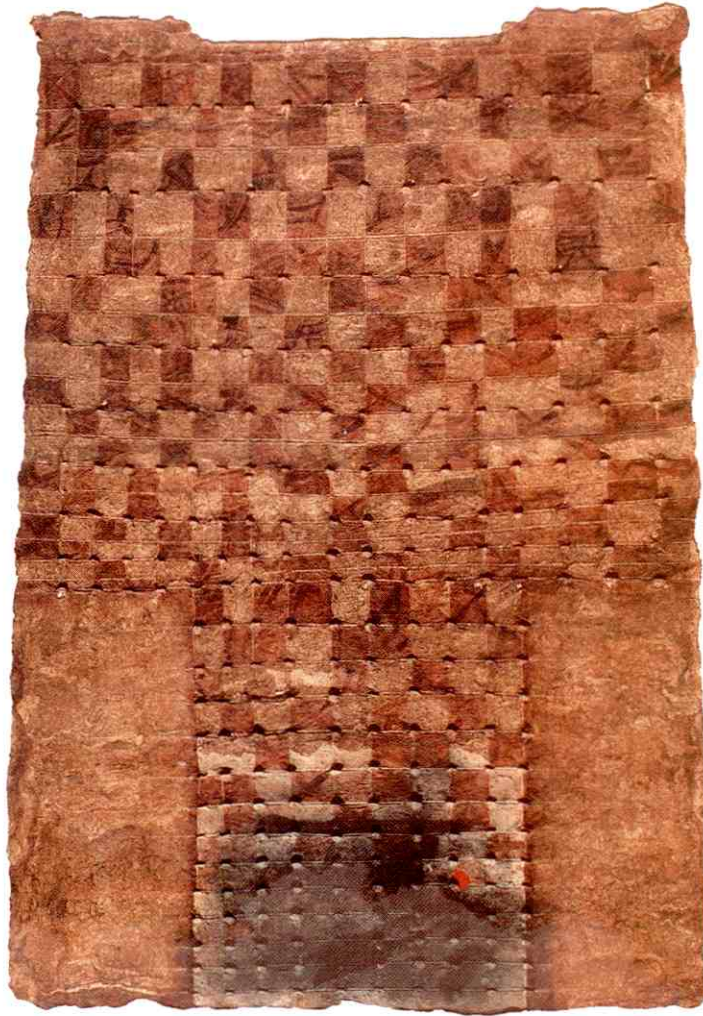
sole creator of it all. The selection of colors in every element he chooses for the paper and recreates in the paper itself are all valid causes for every visible fiber and knot. He becomes one with the paper; he merges with it and so the alchemy emerges with the transformation of the *amate* paper.

Sergio López Orozco invents his own paper and produces a unique language. His capacity for colors and his mastery of composition contribute to the consolidation of his work. His forms of expression are created in his search around the world for a new way of making the *amate*. It is here where we may find the devotion of the artist to his source, the respect for the not-respected, the search for transcendence in what is considered ephemeral. It is here that he achieves the translation of his goal and creates his impressive murals, as stretched and taut as the skin of a drum, where the echoes of feelings and unbreakable forces lie in time. The murals stand longing to be played by our feelings.

It is the strength of the fibers with the sensibility of the artist that touches our soul and tells us of our past and our future. In this mixture of fibers once stretched out and held by blue tacks, *amate* paper is born and that same day becomes one with López Orozco. **MM**

\* Mexican art critic.





## SERGIO LÓPEZ OROZCO

### The Revolution of *Amate* Paper

Raquel Tíbol\*

With his series *Adventures in Amate*, Sergio López Orozco uses a diversity of resources to restore votive or propitiatory qualities to paper objects, not as a pre-established ritual, but with material created with poetic tensions. The raw material has no expression whatsoever. It must be transfigured through invention. In that effort,

the soul leaves its mark and the result is unintentionally related to the most remote and inscrutable origins of a tradition as old and deeply rooted as the use of *amate* paper cut-out figures for healing or witchcraft ceremonies.

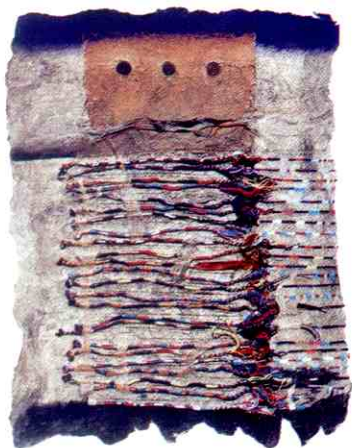
This custom originated in pre-Hispanic times and has lasted until today, when the paper made from *amatl* bark has become popular for paintings, coverings and other decorative or artistic uses.

The ritual to frighten away the afflictions of the body and the spirit with a great ring of interwoven deities cut out of paper is not practiced just anywhere. The shaman, be it man or woman, must carry out his/her office in consecrated caves or corners of the home specially organized for the purpose around a central brazier with its purifying blaze. Although today we know that the power of suggestion and psychosomatic effects make convic-

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\* Art critic.





tion a wonderful remedy, the question still remains: why the paper? This question has no answer; the enigma is indecipherable. Forty centuries ago the Egyptians already painted ideographs on papyrus (that is, paper) to defend themselves from death or to provide the dead with a guide to journey into the unknown. The pulp of a swamp plant, transformed by humans, became the solemn intermediary with the enigmatic forces of the life cycle.

Who used tree bark first to make paper? Perhaps it was produced simultaneously with the white mulberry-tree in China and the *amatl*, or fig tree, in Mexico. But while the Mexicans' technique was limited to certain communities in the Sierra Madre Occidental, the Chinese procedure spread through the world and revolutionized communications. More than 1,000 years ago, the Asians learned

it (first the Persians and much later the Japanese), and only half a millennium ago it was disseminated and industrialized in Europe, where the first paper mill was said to have been set up in Fabriano, Italy, in the mid-fourteenth century.

The Persians learned from the Chinese how to make paper with hemp fibers and perfected the quality to the point that they dared to call it "pharaoh's paper," since it could compete with the oldest and most resistant papyrus. In Samarkand and Constantinople, the language of colors was established in paper. A blue sheet meant mourning; a red one, pleasure and happiness; pink expressed a high rank capable of granting or denying favors. Even before the paper was written on, it expressed ideas as general as they were unequivocal: mourning, condemnation, authority, benefits, joy.

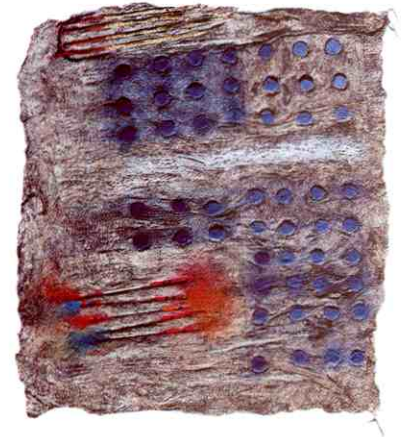
Sergio López Orozco already painted and worked in the graphic arts when five years ago he decided to penetrate the mysteries of paper itself, that foundation for paintings, sketches and prints that seemed on more than one occasion to take on a life of its own.

He was in Japan; he was in Egypt; and he went through Nepal. For a very intense year, with an exaltation that bordered on the mystical, he became increasingly familiar with the specific attributes of fibers and pulps, of glues and special tools. The result of this stage were works in which the representation and the foundation or background merged without either losing their specific differences.





It would not be until his arrival to the mountains of Puebla, to the small, isolated village of San Pablito, the most famous and orthodox in its production of *amate* paper, that he would understand that the foundation could achieve all the terms of visual eloquence. His teacher was the Otomí Camila Hernández de Santos, wise repository of knowledge for making the best Mexican papyrus. She taught him all the steps for transforming bark into an unmistakable paper: cooking it for a whole day with lime and ash; washing it until all impurities are swept away; laying it out on a board of fiber netting, filling up the board with more fibers; rhythmic beating with a small flat stone until the fibers adhere. The sun does the drying. The long cooking pro-



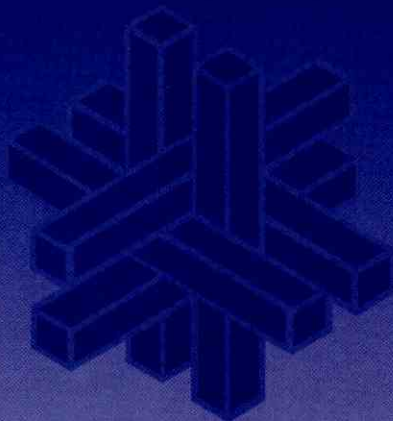
cess frees the fibers from their vegetable prison. The villagers call them *manitas*, or "little hands." These *manitas* have the virtue of sticking together without glues or adhesives. With the blow of the stone that fits in the hands of men, women and children, the *manitas* interlock.

Far from what civilization incites them to, the inhabitants of San Pablito do today the same thing they did before the Europeans arrived to the hemisphere. Not even their product's success in the curios market (when indigenous people from the state of Guerrero began to paint and draw on sheets of *amate* made precisely in San Pablito) has changed them. At the most they changed the size of the paper on the request of the artists and architects who wanted to use these rough surfaces as bases or applications and needed larger sheets.

The revolution of *amate* paper occurred to Sergio López Orozco. Having assim-

lated all the implications of Camila Hernández' teaching, he understood that the *manitas* could be called upon to interlock not only with the blow of the stone, but that they also responded to pinching, twisting, marriage to paper made of other fibers and still other procedures. Multiple variants and textures could be introduced into the long, handmade process, as many as the knowledge and inventiveness of the artist would allow. That was how *amate* paper stopped being a base or a flat texture and became very expressive, soft reliefs. The flexing of the *manitas* produces different degrees of intensity on a spectrum of emotions unknown until now. Its fully formal existence gives *amate* paper symbolic force. The material itself is impregnated with all the prodigious poetic substance deposited by the fantasy of the creator. The material itself transmits and arouses emotions. ■■■





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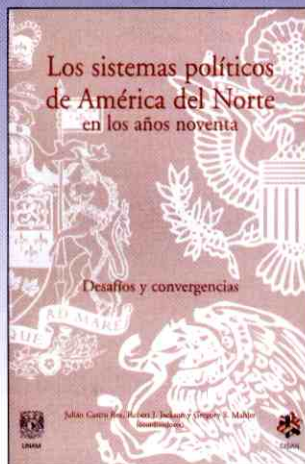
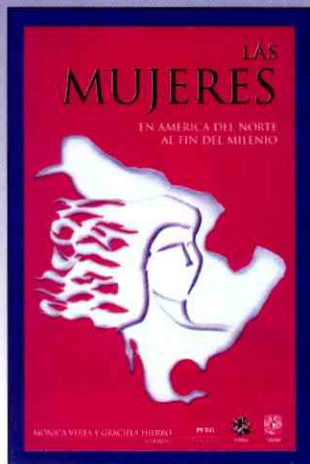
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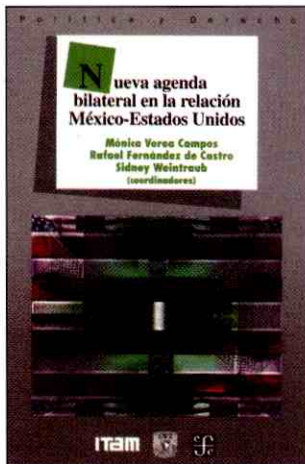
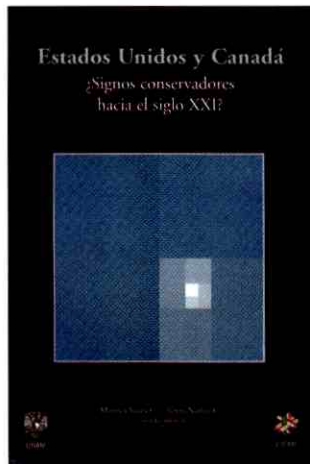
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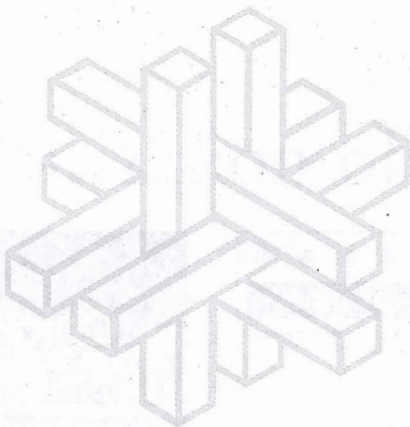
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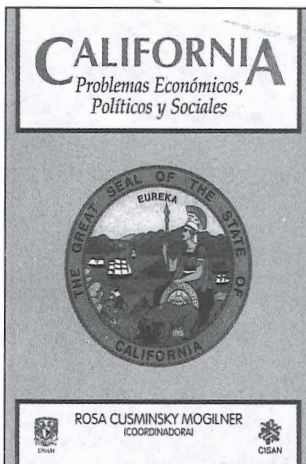
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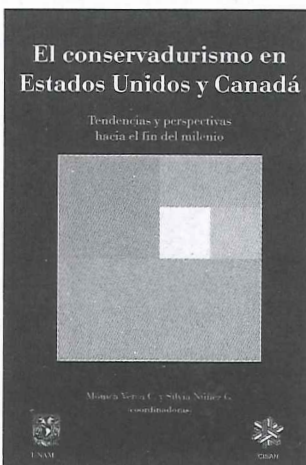
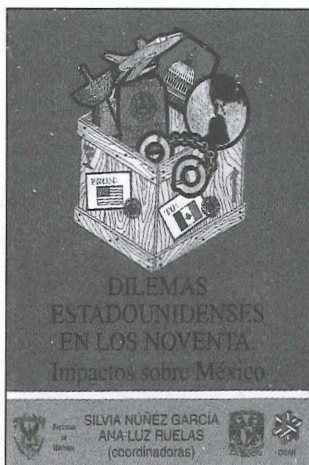
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# The Dollarization of Mexico

Francisco Sevilla\*

January of 1999 once again brought surprises to Mexico's fragile economy, which had not yet fully recovered its path of sustained growth. The ills of the Brazilian economy and plummeting international oil prices prompted a 22 percent devaluation of the peso which, added to that of the second half of the previous year, brought the total to more than 40 percent in just a few months.

Beset by recurring devaluations, politicians and businessmen began to sell the idea of a country that needed price stability, economic tranquility and a exchange rate system to take us through the year 2000's change of administrations without any upsets.

On hold since 1995, the polemic about dollarization was reactivated and reached its high point when the Mexican Businessmen's Council, whose members are the country's most powerful and influential businessmen who do most of Mexico's foreign trade, paid a visit to the president's official residence, Los Pinos, to request dollarization in the name of the entire business community.

The government position, voiced by the president himself, is that the free-floating peso system in place since the beginning of the Zedillo administration should be maintained. This economic policy instrument is the main prop of the "transition with stability," a phrase coined when announcing to the public that this time there would be no "end-of-administration crisis," and which has become the campaign slogan aimed at giving the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) a political-electoral edge.

The president's rejection of dollarization has recently been bolstered by signs of economic recovery: in April the peso recovered 15 percent vis-à-vis the dollar; interest rates continue to drop; and public finances are under less pressure because of the increase in international oil prices. However, statements by U.S. Treasury Deputy Secretary Lawrence Summers and Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan<sup>1</sup> at a Senate hearing to the effect that they would support dollarization in Latin America mean that the debate will continue and that dollarization or stabilization will be part of the candidates' government programs in Mexico's presidential race which has already begun, ahead of schedule.

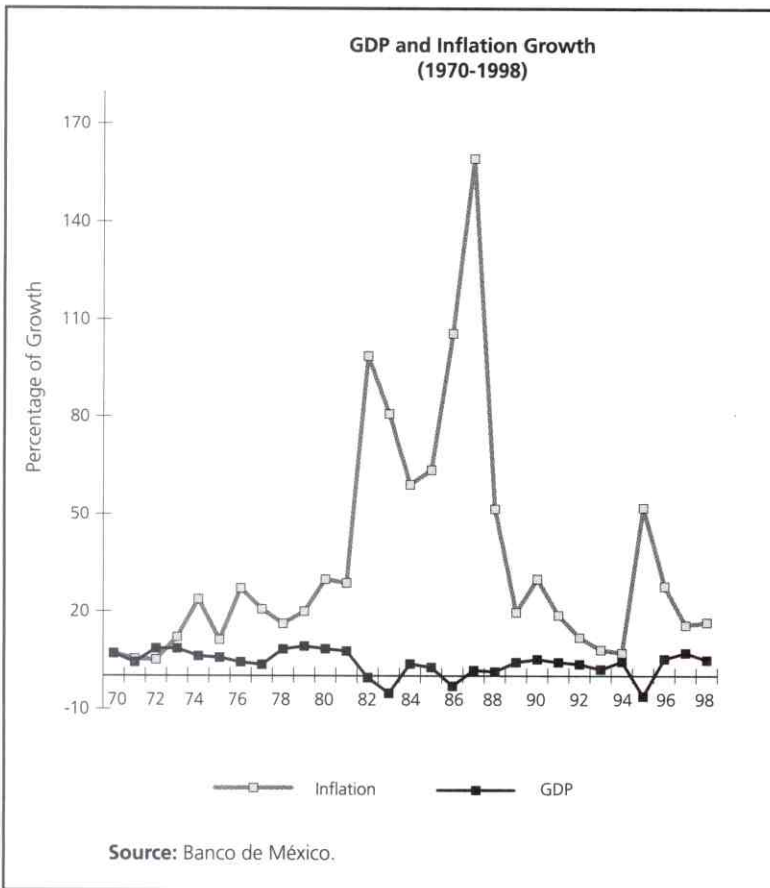
After almost three decades of growing inflation and its corresponding devaluations, three presidential terms during which moderate growth has alternated with severe crises with significant negative growth, economic stability and sustained growth have become key points demanded of the administration as one of the still-unfulfilled promises of the government program.<sup>2</sup>

## STABILIZATION: POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

### 1. *Unilateral Dollarization*

Our globalized economy makes for the need to plan and project long-term investments and means that a significant part of the economy carries out most of its operations in dollars, as for example in imports and exports, a considerable portion of financial operations, construction activ-

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ities, purchases and sales in the upper end of the real estate market and, in general, long-term economic activities.

The Mexican business community is betting on the generalization of this kind of operations, because all it requires is making the dollar legal tender and ensuring that this be an autonomous decision of Mexico. However, the most important limitation is the level of dollar reserves and the monetary authorities' inability to print them. In that sense, the functions of the Central Bank as lender of last resort would be very limited because they would depend on the level of international reserves, which in April 1999 came to less than 8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). For example, more than twice that amount is needed to guarantee the liabilities of the Bank Savings Protection Institute. The comparison of assets and liabilities would be sufficient to reveal the finan-

cial sector's insolvency and the government's inability to back them up.

On the other hand, the adoption by decree of another country's currency does not mean that everyone considers that their assets can be denominated in that currency. There is usually resistance and a long process of education would be needed that would be neither inexpensive nor easy to implement. The probably result of such a measure would be the circulation of two different currencies and the resulting generalized confusion.

In addition, we should remember the negative precedent of the "Mexdollars." In the 1980s, the banks opened dollar accounts that were not backed up by hard currency reserves. The intention was to try to stop capital flight and avoid a peso devaluation, but when the 1982 financial and political crisis broke out, the authorities ended up forcibly converting the funds in the dollar bank accounts into pesos at an arbitrarily established exchange rate.

## 2. A Monetary Council

In this variation of the unilateral adoption of the dollar, a monetary council would replace the Central Bank and assume the functions of emitting bills and coin maintaining a fixed exchange rate with international reserves backing 100 percent the monetary base and ensuring the currency's total convertibility. Because it establishes a fixed-rule monetary policy, it is outside political battles and retains high credibility because it does not finance public spending.

This arrangement's immediate effects of slowing inflation and lowering interest rates make it quite attractive. Countries like Argentina, Hong Kong and Singapore are cited as examples. However, the system depends on having enough hard currency derived from favorable relations abroad, mainly with the country in which the council is set up.



The Argentine model has many supporters in Mexico, but a “tango effect” is expected due to the fact that President Menem’s deteriorating political image increasingly highlights the currency’s being over-valued, unemployment, low growth rates, the growing foreign debt and capital flight. The general assessment is that the Monetary Stabilization Program has already shown its best results while structural changes to the Argentine economy have been postponed, turning what is simply a socially and economically costly policy instrument into an end in and of itself.

Given that freezing the exchange rate is insufficient for reducing inflation to United States levels, after a few years any product from abroad turns out to be cheaper than local products.

On the other hand, over-valuing the currency mainly affects the export sector, which gets less money for its products and loses dynamism. Today, manufactured exports are the mainstay of the Mexican economy’s growth. Also, the aim of economic reconversion (implemented for more than 15 years through the so-called “neoliberal” governments of De la Madrid [1982-1988], Salinas [1988-1994] and Zedillo [1994-2000]) has supposedly been consolidating Mexico as an industrial power through the export of manufactures.

The Mexican economy is now facing the great challenge of achieving monetary stability and sustained growth at the same time. Mexico needs to grow at least 6 percent annually simply to provide jobs for the one million young people who join the work force every year. It has to do this at the same time that more and more imports are required, making for a trade balance deficit and, therefore adjustments in the exchange rate to foster exports and discourage imports by making them more expensive.

The main difficulty with establishing a monetary council is the elimination of instruments of control (the emission of bills and coinage, the regulation of the commercial banking system, the lender of last resort, etc.), because it leaves to

the government only the policy of restricting growth to avert price hikes in a speculative economy which makes a profit off speculation whenever it can.

### 3. *Monetary Union with the United States*

The logical result of globalization and the trade agreements should be that in the long run, weak currencies would disappear and unite around a leader currency.

As part of the North American Free Trade Agreement in partnership with the United States and Canada, Mexico’s natural destiny is the adoption of the dollar. However, official resistance to the measure goes beyond the loss of “sovereignty” since public finances rest to a great extent on the benefits derived from printing money. In fact, the main criticism that “fiscal discipline” has received is that whenever there is pressure on the economy, the government starts the printing presses. Among the business community’s arguments in favor of dollarization is its traditional proposal to limit discretionary decisions with which the Banco de México, as it says, “taxes the population with inflation” to finance public spending. What is more, they argue that is how public spending is financed, high levels of corruption are maintained and, in effect, businessmen are controlled.

With the creation of the North American monetary region, the benefits derived from the emission of currency, the seigniorage, would pass to the United States Federal Reserve. Although these earnings are insignificant for the U.S. government budget, for Mexico they are quite important to public finances. However, a larger emission would correspond to the amount of new currency that would have to be bought, which means backing in dollars approximately one-fifth of the value of all the goods and services produced in a year (the GDP). In other words, we would need to triple our international reserves.



Finance Minister José Ángel Gurría opposes dollarization.

Antonio Nava/AVE

As part of the North American Free Trade Agreement Mexico’s natural destiny is the adoption of the dollar. However, official resistance to the measure goes beyond the loss of “sovereignty” since public finances rest to a great extent on the benefits derived from printing money.

#### 4. *The Silver Standard*

Another option for stabilizing the peso and avoiding devaluations is backing the peso with silver. In addition to being a nationalist measure, its defenders say it is a safe solution that would depend on advantageous conditions in national production.

The proposal originally made by Diego Fernández de Cevallos, one of the PAN's most outstanding representatives and a possible presidential hopeful, is presented as an alternative to dollarization. It has more weight as a campaign proposal than as a real option.

Since the silver standard requires using real and not fiduciary resources, as in the previous proposal, we would need to make an initial investment to acquire the new currency, which would also take about one-fifth of the GDP to back the currency in circulation.

An additional problem is that silver production is subject to the same zigzags as the production of other export goods such as coffee, oil, steel, etc.: it is ruled by the international market fluctuations stemming mainly from the participation of volatile capital that have made big profits from speculation in these products.

If we take into consideration that in the last 25 years the price of silver has oscillated between U.S.\$2 and U.S.\$50 per ounce and that when it passes the U.S.\$5 mark, supply increases on secondary markets, we can conclude that, with the adoption of the silver standard, the peso's stability would be more vulnerable than today given the volatility of international markets.

#### 5. *A Sound Economy*

Any measure adopted would have to focus on an efficient, productive economy with solid foundations and sustained growth.

Inflation, low domestic savings, recurring devaluations and, generally, the crises our econo-

my suffers are the result of having permanently operated in unfavorable circumstances and until now without a growth model that would make it possible to overcome the foreign trade deficit.

U.S.\$117 billion in exports in 1998, a five-fold increase in only 20 years, is presented as the highest achievement of the so-called "neoliberal" model. The other side of that coin, however, shows us an economy which, in the best of cases, has achieved moderate growth. This means that the success of export-related activities contrast sharply with the virtual stagnation of the rest of the economy.

The best measure for economic stability is having an economy based on growth and a development of all the sectors and a foreign trade balance that is either in equilibrium or that shows a surplus. For this, what is needed is a legal framework with new legislation that provides security to the new conditions of economic opening and globalization, in which volatility and speculation are taxed and productive investments given priority status.

Strengthening the domestic market by putting a priority on productive investment would have immediate results in job creation and the conservation of purchasing power.

Promoting a financial reform would make it possible to efficiently attract and channel both internal and external savings into production and to turn the financial sector into a lever for economic growth. ■■

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan stated February 23, 1999, that his institution had no interest in being a central bank for the region (see *Reforma* [Mexico City] 6 April 1999). Later, on April 21, at a hearing of the Senate Banking Committee, Deputy Secretary Summers and Greenspan talked of U.S. willingness to support dollarization in Latin America (see *Reforma* [Mexico City] 22 April 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Both the National Development Plan of 1995-2000 and the Constitution establish as a priority objective "the stability of the purchasing power of the nation's currency" and stipulate, "Exchange rate policy must systematically avoid an overvaluation of the real exchange rate which would inhibit internal savings and national production."



# The Debate on the Reform Of the Electricity Sector

*Rosío Vargas Suárez\**

On the eve of the celebration of the eighty-second anniversary of the signing of Mexico's Constitution, President Zedillo sent Congress a bill to change its Articles 27 and 28 to completely open up the electricity sector to private investment. The February 2 evening announcement was broadcast on all Mexican television channels and radio stations. The significance of the proposed changes merited the coverage: if the bill passes, it will put an end to the state's vertical monopoly exercised through the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE) and the Light and Power Company of Central Mexico (LyFC).

The proposal is actually a consequence of significant changes in the sector already initiated with changes to the Public Electric Services Law in 1992 and its regulatory legislation in 1993, changes also incorporated into the North American Free Trade Agreement which came into effect in January 1994. Making these proposals meant opening the doors to private enterprise in the creation of new electricity generation capacity in different forms: self-generation and small and independent production. Other mechanisms for financing joint ventures had also been implemented such as Built Lease and Transfer (BLT) and Built Operate and Transfer (BOT), as well as others outside the budget like the Public Spending Deferred Impact Registration Projects (PIDEREGAS) which have attracted both foreign and domestic capital.

However, the February 1999 presidential proposal goes much further because it means going

from a model of partial privatization to virtually total privatization by opening up the electricity sector to domestic and foreign business interests. With this new model, production, transportation, distribution and commercialization would be separated and competition introduced into electricity generation and commercialization.

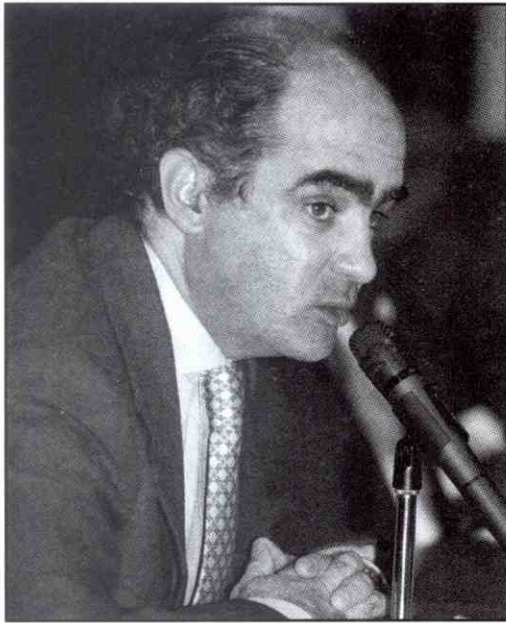
Activities which are still natural monopolies like transmission and distribution would be regulated to simulate competition. The only area that would continue to be considered a public service would be energy distribution. Electricity generation would be divided among different companies, most of which would be privately owned. Transportation and distribution networks would be leased to private companies but their rates would be regulated. Electricity prices to captive consumers would also be regulated.<sup>1</sup> All this requires important changes in the existing regulatory framework such as amending Articles 27 and 28 of the Constitution and regulatory legislation, as well as formulating new administrative directives and rules for the electricity industry.<sup>2</sup> The Mexican people are now discussing all these issues.

## THE PROS

Political and economic actors wasted no time in making their reactions known when a possible privatization was announced, generating a polemic that has tended to polarize around those who sing the praises of the market on the one hand and the defenders of state interventionism on the other. We could almost say that there are no Mexicans without an opinion on

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\* Researcher and coordinator of the CISAN's Mexico-U.S. studies area.



Photos by Antonio Nava/AVE

the matter since the electrical industry, like the oil industry, has been an important factor in the conformation of national identity and, of course, in the Mexican state's role in the economy.

Besides the president and the Ministry of Energy, the Businessmen's Coordinating Council (CEE), the National Chamber of Manufacturers (CANACINTRA) and, although without an open, official position

on the matter, the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) all favor the reform proposals and the government's reasons for making these constitutional changes. Of course, they do have slightly different arguments to support the measures, but they all agree that energy supply must be guaranteed and are optimistic about the bill getting through Congress this year.



The Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME) heads significant opposition to the measure.

## THE GOVERNMENT'S REASONS

One of the most important arguments that the president's office has made is related to the approximately 250 billion pesos in investment needed to expand and modernize the electricity system in the next 6 years given that, in accordance with official estimates, demand will grow no less than 6 percent.<sup>3</sup> Guaranteeing future electricity supply has become the standard that legitimizes privatization and a matter of national sovereignty. In the words of Minister of Energy Luis Téllez, "Sovereignty means that our country makes sovereign decisions to ensure that we have electricity."<sup>4</sup> Making the discussion on supply a question of sovereignty has given the latter the characteristic of guaranteeing the general public and industry access to the consumption of a good, in this case electricity.<sup>5</sup>

The specter of future energy scarcity seems to be foreshadowed in continual blackouts in different cities throughout the country, the scenario for national disaster that the government presents as a warning of what would happen if the necessary investment is not made. This touches directly on the interests of the public.

The proposal justifies and sets executive policy on the role of the state: a large state is not necessarily strong, much less if it substitutes itself for private enterprise. It also argues that state guidance will continue although it will be reduced to controlling the transmission network, which can be leased to private capital. Public monies previously earmarked for this kind of utilities can now be used for educational and social concerns.

Another merit attributed to the reform is that, as private investment comes in, the electricity sector will automatically be efficient, under the assumption that it can only be modernized if handed over to private capital. Given the negative reaction that President Zedillo's proposal sparked in some sectors, particularly unions, and before an exhaustive evaluation of that response, the president attributed their rejection to "ignorance and dogmatism."<sup>6</sup>



Business associations have closed ranks around the executive because they know that investment opportunities in an attractive industry are greater, which is why we can say their position is more a matter of urging the government to guarantee electricity supply to make sure “companies’ competitiveness is not negatively affected.” Theirs is a frontal attack, particularly against the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME), whose membership works for the Light and Power Company of Central Mexico (LyFC), whom they accuse of blocking the modernization of the sector. According to the CCE, the LyFC union is plagued with work place irregularities, sinecures, corruption, etc., totally incompatible with a modern, productive, competitive Mexico.<sup>7</sup>

Opinions in the Senate, an important political institution, are divided along partisan lines. Generally, however, there is resistance and concern around total privatization. This was clear the last time the minister of energy appeared before the Senate, when neither Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) nor National Action Party (PAN) members were totally convinced by his proposed regulatory legislation. In fact, some members of the party in power have had to move from frank opposition to the measure to more conciliatory proposals. For example, the PRI congressional caucus supports the state retaining 40 percent of electricity generation and allowing private capital to invest only in new hydroelectric plants.<sup>8</sup>

CTM General Secretary and Labor Congress President Leonardo Rodríguez Alcaine (also leader of the SUTERM, the Federal Electricity Commission’s union) has not hidden his support for President Zedillo’s bill, although at first, unfamiliar with the official proposal’s details, he wavered. In an interview in which he was asked about the blackouts in different Mexican cities, Rodríguez Alcaine said, “That’s a lie. It’s not true. And I’m going to make a call right now to get the exact information so as not to stick my foot in it.”<sup>9</sup>

## THE CONS

Just as in other countries, opposition to the proposal comes from electricity workers unions, those directly affected by the reform. The first to oppose the measure was the SME: 15,000 of its members will be laid off when the reform goes into effect. Although SUTERM leader Alcaine does not support the SME, the majority of his union does and the two unions have developed alternative reform proposals.

Together with these unions, the PRI Current for Renewal and many academics agree that the sector’s companies can be modernized if they remain in the hands of the state under autonomous management. They have also manifested their rejection of total sale or leasing of the electricity generation plants and the physical assets of the transmission grid. They do, however, favor incorporating private capital, just as has already been happening, in joint generation projects and independent production.

Despite the traditional alignment of the party in power, the PRI Current for Renewal has displayed its concern with regard to two questions: 1) continued state guidance of the sector, and 2) giving priority to domestic capital. The latter consideration makes sense given statements by the minister of energy himself who said that domestic investors were not very experienced in this area, basically making a preferential invitation to foreign capital. Despite these discrepancies, the current does close ranks around the government by accepting the executive argument about its financial inability to maintain the industry’s rhythm of growth and development.

Other actors base their arguments on the failure of previous privatization experiences in Mexico, mentioning the banks, highways and even railroads, which have not only not benefited the nation, but also have not meant lower prices for their services. In any case, they have given rise to corrupt practices which the citizenry now has to pay for (one example is the Savings Protection Bank Fund, Fobaproa).<sup>10</sup> They also point to the

The specter of future energy scarcity seems to be foreshadowed in continual blackouts in different cities throughout the country.

Business associations have closed ranks around the executive because they know that an attractive industry will offer investment opportunities.

fear that privatization of the electricity sector will set a precedent and create the constitutional and political conditions for privatizing *Petróleos Mexicanos* (Pemex), the national oil producer and the country's most important company.

It is no simple matter to have an objective opinion since the arguments for and against depend on where you are standing, despite the fact that some questions can be answered regardless of class and party interests. For example, to what extent are we still talking about a strategic sector? Has the most appropriate model been selected for the Mexican situation?<sup>11</sup> There is no simple answer. The factors are multifaceted. But here we will mention a few of the elements needed for a future analysis.

Taken on its own, the proposed reform is an excellent planning exercise,<sup>12</sup> an attempt to create a more advanced model for the sector similar to those of England and Wales. However, this does not take into consideration the enormous differences between the electricity systems of those countries and Mexico. Four problems could arise out of applying measures as radical as the ones proposed:

1) *Profits from the electricity sector benefiting only the few.* Víctor Rodríguez says that it is a fact that electricity systems make a profit, but that both its size and its distribution depends on the model of organization and the kinds of regulations applied. None of the existing models has proven better than any other in terms of short- and long-term economic efficiency.

When the reform goes into effect, profit distribution would become unequal because intense vertical reintegration and industrial concentration, whether legal or illegal, would occur among firms seeking a bigger share of the pie.<sup>13</sup>

2) *Increased risks to electricity supply.* The experience in other countries has shown that reforms of this kind do not necessarily guarantee long-term electricity supply. Different countries have had overcapacity problems that have spurred them to slow down investment, merge companies and elim-

inate less profitable power plants, so that generation capacity has not kept pace with the growth of demand.

3) *Higher electricity bills.* Competition in electricity generation does not necessarily lead to low prices. Although it is argued that competition and the creation of a wholesale market will make it possible to lower utility bills, the fact is that international experiences suggest a multiplicity of factors behind those drops in prices and that they were not due exclusively to the competition among producers. Actually, an effective mechanism for benefitting small and medium-sized consumers with lower electric prices on a wholesale market has not yet been discovered.

4) *More disequilibria and lags in energy policy.* Although much could be said about this, we will only point out that the important increase in gas consumption required by the electricity industry will be supplied with imports from the United States since government investment in exploration, development and processing of natural gas will be limited. The model proposed is very dependent on the United States since we have a single client for our oil, and we will be buying increasing amounts of gas because our production is insufficient for the country's needs.

## CONCLUSION

Although the scenario seems complicated because of the different positions and proposals, there also seem to be more accessible solutions for resolving the situation of the electricity companies: for example, raising rates and allowing the companies to capitalize before implementing more radical proposals, like privatization.

No one doubts that it is difficult to step outside the process of globalization, which includes changes in the energy sector. Neither is it easy to sidestep pressure from economic groups promoting privatization and the dismantling of state control in sectors



where it has historically played a leading role. However, there is room for decision making and we have to find it, since the ultimate responsibility for all these decisions lies in our national elites.

As the debate continues between two extreme positions, we must urge that the protagonists leave room for considering alternatives that would make it possible to balance state participation and the market. This would be a more appropriate option given the social and historic reality of a country like Mexico. **MM**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Víctor Rodríguez Padilla, "Propuesta de reforma eléctrica cuestionable," *Momento económico* (Mexico City) (April 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Comisión Reguladora de Energía, *Infocre*, year 2, no. 1 (Mexico City) (February 1999), pp. 3-4. See also "Iniciativa de decreto para reformar los artículos 27 y 28 de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, en materia de energía eléctrica," *Gaceta Parlamentaria* (4 February 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Opponents of privatization strongly question this figure saying it has no basis in fact. In addition, the same official sources put estimated investment requirements for 1997-2006 at 198.862 billion pesos in the Ministry of Energy's publication "Prospectiva del sector eléctrico 1997-2006" (Mexico City: September 1997).

<sup>4</sup> *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 4 February 1999.

<sup>5</sup> To justify this scenario, its supporters mention a CFE study predicting blackouts this summer because of excess demand and talking about a deficit of between 199MW and 675MW. For winter, the study predicts a deficit of between 133MW and 447MW. *Reforma* (Mexico City), 16 February 1999. We should mention that recent news items report the minister of energy saying that combined cycle plants are being started up to ensure electricity supply.

<sup>6</sup> *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 23 February 1999.

<sup>7</sup> *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 16 April 1999 and *El Financiero* (Mexico City), 20 April 1999.

<sup>8</sup> *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 29 April 1999.

<sup>9</sup> *Reforma* (Mexico City), 16 February 1999.

<sup>10</sup> See the article by Mexican economist Francisco Sevilla, "Mexico's Savings Protection Bank Fund and the Financial Crisis," in *Voices of Mexico*, no. 46, (January-March 1999), pp. 53-58. [Editor's Note.]

<sup>11</sup> I mention here only a few of the aspects developed more broadly in Víctor Rodríguez' article mentioned in endnote 1.

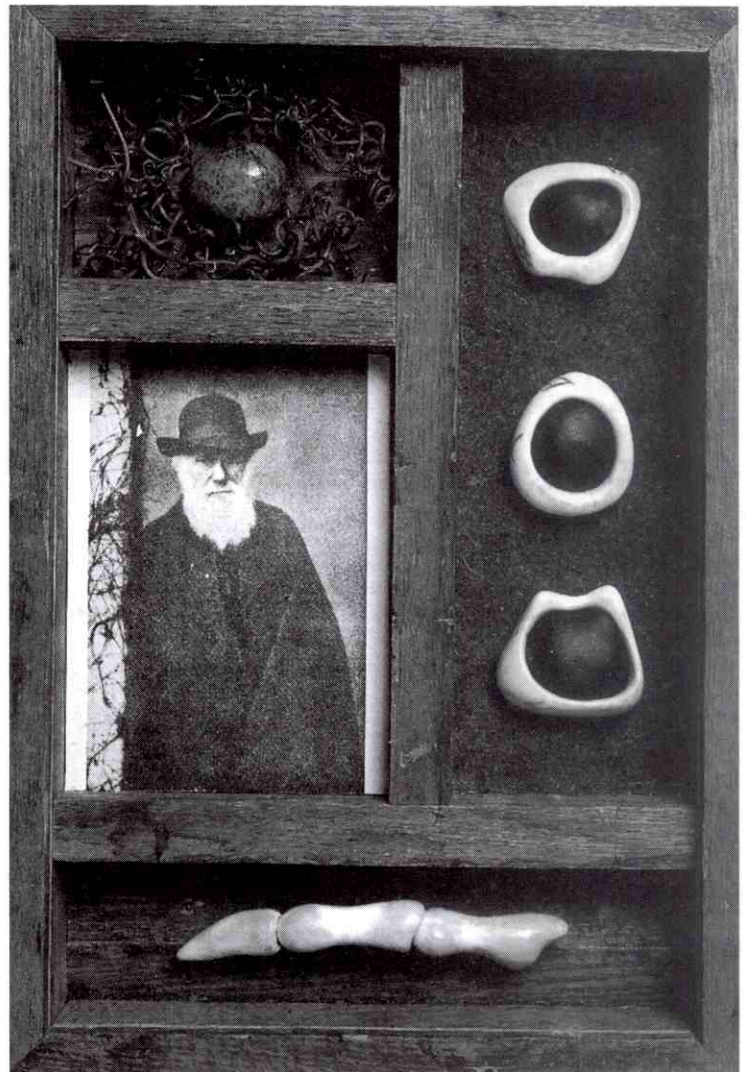
<sup>12</sup> Secretaría de Energía, "Policy Proposal for Structural Reform of the Mexican Electricity Industry" (Mexico City, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> In the Mexican case, the possibility of private monopolies is not far off given the regulations themselves. In effect, the secondary regulatory bill submitted to the Senate proposes, among other things, the disappearance of LyFC, the break-up of the CFE, the licensing of private companies to manage hydroelectric plants and the possibility of carrying out monopolistic practices after opening up to private capital.



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# The Legacy of an Ambiguous Relationship

## Nineteenth Century Mexico-U.S. Relations<sup>1</sup>

### (Part One)

*Jesús Velasco Márquez\**

The United States has always played an important role in Mexican history, affecting and occasionally shaping Mexican foreign policy. It has also influenced economic, political and social programs. This presence has contributed to the individual and collective perceptions that Mexicans have of their neighbor. Consequently, relations between Mexico and the United States are more than a traditional diplomatic history; they share a common history, the result of the overlap of their national ones. Each country's domestic problems and solutions have had repercussions on the other. However, these repercussions have been asymmetrical, as is the relationship as a whole.

This essay will analyze this overlap of national histories during the nineteenth century. It will also attempt to explain the complexity of the problems bilateral relations have always had, which have influenced the Mexican view of the United States until our time.

On December 12, 1822, the United States recognized Mexico as a sovereign nation. Bilateral relations would be shaky and unstable from then until the end of the Mexican civil war and the French intervention. The two countries were allies

in 1832, broke off diplomatic relations in 1837, renewed them two years later, went to war between 1846 and 1848 and became partners of convenience in 1867. This turbulence was closely related to domestic instability in Mexico and to regional conflicts and party disputes in the United States. The European quest for political and economic influence in the former Spanish empire was another important factor.

Mexico's nation-state building stage was rather hectic. After a weak alliance of the dominant groups that achieved independence, regional interests and factions dominated a national government, producing social and political unrest until 1880. The United States participated in party struggles directly and indirectly. Liberal politicians, both radical and moderate, thought of U.S. institutions as an example of modernity that fostered economic growth. The United States was their natural ally, and they proposed the adoption of a similar system for Mexico. Conservatives accepted the need for a reform in the economy but wanted to preserve the political institutions of the Spanish tradition. They felt the same distrust and rejection of Americans that Spain had felt about Britain since the sixteenth century, extended to its colonies. They sought stronger relations with the European powers and even saw the direct support of one of them as an option.<sup>2</sup> These

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Relations between Mexico and the United States are more than a traditional diplomatic history; they share a common history, the result of the overlap of their national ones.

ideological confrontations invited foreign intervention and foreign interests began meddling in Mexican domestic affairs. European diplomats supported the Conservatives, and the Americans backed the Liberals. The intervention of the first two U.S. plenipotentiary ministers, Joel R. Poinsett and Anthony Butler, was flagrant. American diplomats were not the only agents trying to influence Mexican politics, but their tactlessness made them more conspicuous. In addition, U.S. government insistence on the sale of Mexican territory sharpened the Mexican public's rejection of the American ministers.<sup>3</sup>

Three issues dominated the agenda of bilateral relations: trade, reparations payments and boundary disputes. The first two were solved through difficult bargaining: in 1832 the Treaty of Friendship, Trade and Navigation was ratified, and in 1839 a convention that set reparations to American citizens was agreed upon. But the definition of the border between the two countries became a primary source of conflict.<sup>4</sup> In 1828 both governments signed and approved a Treaty of Limits, but it was not ratified until 1832. This treaty recognized the boundaries that the United States had negotiated with Spain in 1819 in the Adams-Onís Treaty. During those negotiations, the Monroe administration had made clear its designs on the province of Texas, using the dubious argument that it had been part of the Louisiana Purchase. Afterwards, during the John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson administrations, the U.S. government attempted to obtain Texas by offering to purchase it; the Jackson administration even expanded its territorial ambitions to northern California.

American expansionism was complex because it involved regional and party interests, socio-cultural forces and traditions, as well as national security considerations.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, the United States had emerged as a strong state but with a very weak sense of national unity. This became evident shortly after the adoption of the

Constitution with the regional and party disputes that dominated the political debate up to the Civil War.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, American society was by definition mobile, a characteristic intensified by the economic upheavals of 1819 and 1837. Also, it was believed that American society was a model of virtue to be copied or that its mission was to enlarge its domain, and since democratic trends had advanced during the 1830s, this belief became part of political rhetoric. Finally, the United States was interested in consolidating a trade area in the Western Hemisphere, and in that endeavor, they saw European —particularly British— interests as a danger to their welfare and security.

These factors were not foreign to Mexican politicians. However, Texas was opened to American colonization due to a poorly designed policy.<sup>7</sup> New Mexico was opened to American trade before linking it to the rest of the country, thus exposing it to an early attachment to American interests. Insufficient resources and negligence left California defenseless. The United States began gaining control over an important part of these territories.<sup>8</sup>

The first contentious issue was the secession of Texas in 1836 with the help of American volunteers and President Andrew Jackson's consent. The second was its annexation by the United States in 1845, claiming the Rio Grande as the new southern international border. The third was President James K. Polk's ambition of linking the acquisition of California and New Mexico to reparations payment. Mexico was left with no bargaining room and the United States opted for military action. It is important to underline that although President Polk alleged that the defense of U.S. territory was the reason for the war, the United States army immediately invaded Mexico, driving all the way to Mexico City in 1847. Faced with U.S. aggression, the Mexican governments never declared war against the United States, but stated that they had to combat the foreign invasion to defend Mexico's territorial integrity, the basic principles



of international law and the rule of law and justice over force. In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo put an end to the war after two years. Mexico was forced to give way to American territorial interests. Aside from the economic and human losses for both sides, an important effect of the war was to infuse Mexican consciousness with distrust towards its northern neighbor making the United States a catalyst for Mexican nationalism.<sup>9</sup>

After the war, Mexico and the United States each went into a period of internal crisis. In the United States the acquisition of Mexican territory became a disturbing component of regional equilibrium between the North and the South, particularly with the admission of California as a free state in 1850. From then on the compromises for maintaining the Union were harder to reach and the final outcome was the secession of most of the southern states in 1861, sparking the Civil War.

In the meantime, in Mexico the war led to the redefinition of the political parties and their platforms. The Conservative Party, still considering the United States a potential enemy of Mexican territorial security, wanted to reestablish the monarchy with the support of the European powers, particularly France; the Liberal Party sought to maintain the republican system and proposed a program of radical social reforms. The ideological controversy led to a civil war from 1854 to 1867; both Liberals and Conservatives realized that they had to appeal to foreign powers. The Liberals could only get the support of the United States, while the Conservatives would seek it from a European power, eventually obtaining it from France. Hence, both jeopardized national sovereignty and security.

These domestic conditions were reflected in bilateral relations. During the whole decade of the 1850s, the momentum of U.S. expansionism was reflected in private filibuster attempts across the border. Officially, the aim was still to complete

the plan that it had not been possible to complete during the negotiations of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo,<sup>10</sup> meaning that some interests still wanted more territory along the southern U.S. border and total strategic control over the Gulf of Mexico, the major Caribbean islands, as well as possession of the Yucatan peninsula and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. At that time, these areas were considered strategically important for economic and security reasons. The annexationist ambitions over the Yucatan peninsula were dropped in 1853, but in that year Mexico was again forced to yield another piece of territory on its northern border through the Treaty of "La Mesilla" (the Gadsen Purchase) which also granted the U.S. some concessions in Tehuantepec.<sup>11</sup>

President Buchanan's administration saw the political crisis in Mexico as an opportunity to obtain the territorial possessions he had been unable to get when he was secretary of state in the Polk administration. So when the political confrontation broke out and the Conservative government gained control, the American government tried to push for territorial and strategic concessions, but its demands were rejected; the Buchanan administration then decided to break off relations with Mexico's Conservative government and began opening avenues to approach the Liberal government headed by Benito Juárez. In 1859, William Church was sent to Veracruz, where the Liberal government had settled, as an informal envoy of the American government offering to recognize the Juárez government in return for the cession of the Mexican border states, or the possibility of establishing an American protectorate in Mexico. A few months later, instead of the informal envoy, a formal plenipotentiary minister, Robert L. McLane, was sent with the same instructions. The Juárez administration was able to resist the territorial demands, but by the Treaty of Commerce and Friendship and the convention to administer it, the American government became a trustee of the Liberal government

**An important effect of the 1847 war was to make Mexicans distrust their northern neighbor, which became a catalyst for Mexican nationalism.**

of Mexico. In other words, the Liberals in Mexico had accepted an American protectorate. The Liberal government was now inextricably linked to American interests. Those accords were never approved by the U.S. Congress because of regional and ideological differences, as well as the approaching 1860 elections, but subsequent events granted American support to the Liberals for reasons of U.S. national security.<sup>12</sup> The beginning of the U.S. Civil War put an end to the American menace to Mexican territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Between 1861 and 1862, an avalanche of events pushed the two governments to reconsider their positions toward each other. On January 11, 1861, Benito Juárez seized Mexico City defeating the Conservatives. A month later, the Confederation of American States was created and by April, the Civil War had begun in the United States. In January 1862, Spanish, British and French forces invaded Veracruz after Juárez's default on Mexico's debt payments. Spain and Britain would withdraw but France would insist on this attempt to support the Conservatives and establish a monarchy under Maximilian of Habsburg. The diplomacy of the two U.S. and the two Mexican governments led to a progressive line-up of the Liberal administration in Mexico and the Union in the United States. When the Civil War was over, the U.S. government demanded the French leave Mexico under the tenets of the Monroe Doctrine.<sup>13</sup> It also threw its support to the Mexican republican government.

Domestic divisions and the presence of a monarchist government under the auspices of a European power across the southern border made the Americans realize that they had to strengthen a nationalist regime in Mexico with American-style institutions without demanding more territorial gains. Mexican liberals could now proceed with their project without giving way to United States interests. A new partnership of convenience emerged between the two countries. **NM**

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This work was carried out under the auspices of the Mexican Association for Culture.
- <sup>2</sup> Edmundo O'Gorman, *La supervivencia política novohispana. Reflexiones sobre el monarquismo mexicano* (Mexico City: Fundación Cultural Condumex, 1969), Chapter 6.
- <sup>3</sup> Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, *México y el mundo. Historia de sus relaciones internacionales* vol. I (Mexico City: Senado de la República, 1990), pp. 45-49.
- <sup>4</sup> Carlos Bosch García, *Historia de las relaciones entre México y los Estados Unidos 1819-1848* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1961), Chapters 1 and 6.
- <sup>5</sup> Thomas Benjamin and Jesús Velasco Márquez, "The War Between the United States and Mexico. 1846-1848," Jaime E. Rodríguez O. and Kathryn Vincent, eds., *Myths, Misdeeds, and Misunderstandings. The Roots of Conflict in U.S.-Mexican Relations* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1997), p. 105 on.
- <sup>6</sup> Jesús Velasco Márquez, "Regionalismo, partidismo y expansionismo. La política interna de Estados Unidos durante la guerra contra México," *Historia Mexicana* vol. 48, no. 2 (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1997), p. 311 on.
- <sup>7</sup> Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, comp., *De la rebelión de Texas a la guerra del 47* (Mexico City: Nueva Imagen, 1994), pp. 15-21.
- <sup>8</sup> David J. Weber, *La frontera norte de México, 1821-1846. El sudoeste norteamericano en su época mexicana* (Mexico City: FCE, 1988), Chapter 10.
- <sup>9</sup> Jesús Velasco Márquez and Thomas Benjamin, op. cit., pp. 151-154.
- <sup>10</sup> David Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation. Texas, Oregon and the Mexican War* (Columbia, Missouri: The University of Missouri Press, 1975), p. 540 on.
- <sup>11</sup> Josefina Zoraida Vázquez and Lorenzo Meyer, *México frente a Estados Unidos (Un ensayo histórico, 1776-1993)* (Mexico City: FCE, 1994), pp. 67-72.
- <sup>12</sup> Lorenzo Meyer, "Las crisis de la élite mexicana y su relación con Estados Unidos. Raíces históricas del Tratado de Libre Comercio," Gustavo Vega, *México-Estados Unidos. 1990* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1992), pp. 80-90.
- <sup>13</sup> Julius W. Pratt, Vincent O. De Santis and Joseph M. Siracusa, *A History of United States Foreign Policy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1955), pp. 155-156.



# Lobbying and U.S.-Mexican Relations

*Alejandro Becerra Gelóver\**

Probably no other relationship between countries is as special as the one between Mexico and the United States. Its uniqueness lies in its being a relationship between the world's leading power and a developing nation and their sharing one of the longest borders in the world (1800 miles). This geographical proximity forces them to deal with each other. Despite this interdependence, the relations are unequal.

As a world power, the United States possesses a capability of persuasion that it exercises globally; by contrast, Mexico's international influence is regional in scope. A developing nation's ability to influence the decisions of the U.S. government is limited, pushing it to use other kinds of mechanisms, such as lobbying.

Lobbying is one of the most widely used political practices in the United States; its aim is to influence decision making, particularly in Congress, both on domestic and international matters. Lobbying consists of public relations activities carried out by firms or groups of professionals, including the U.S. government, on behalf of corporations, society or of other governments, to promote positions that favor private economic or political interests, to foster certain solutions to

For many years  
Mexico's government  
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and associated it with  
negative effects on national  
sovereignty.

specific problems or steer U.S. legislation in a particular direction.<sup>1</sup>

Lobbying as a political activity originated in the United States in the early nineteenth century and spread to countries like Spain, France and Germany. Initially, lobbying was a secret practice limited to influential minorities in the United States aimed at supporting bills before Congress or to impede their approval. In 1877, some states made it illegal, given the increasing number of cases of corruption, political pressure, bribery and intimidation associated with it.

As interest grew in enriching and achieving productive results from perma-

nent communication between the public and the government, it became necessary to regulate lobbying activities to avoid their damaging effects and protect democracy.<sup>2</sup>

From a positive point of view, lobbying has the advantage of effectively influencing the internal and external affairs of the U.S. government. This means that all nations with relations with the United States consider it a valuable foreign policy tool.

Nevertheless, lobbying is perplexing to foreign governments: they cannot lobby directly because of their lack of knowledge about how a decentralized political system like that of the United States works, their lack of appropriate governmental and business relations to promote their interests and the difficulty of knowing congresspersons' electoral commitments to their constituencies.

Despite this, many countries' need to improve their relations with the United States has led some foreign governments—like Mexico's—to hire professional lobbyists to promote their interests in Washington.

Mexico and the United States have a complex, asymmetrical, interdependent relationship, and for that reason, for many years our government spotlighted bilateral relations between the two chief executives without considering lobbying as an option. Among other reasons, this was

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**TABLE 1**  
**PAYMENTS TO FOREIGN AGENTS BY MEXICAN INTERESTS (1978-1990)**  
**(U.S. DOLLARS)**

<b>Aim</b>	<b>1978</b>	<b>1983</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1986</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1988</b>	<b>1989</b>	<b>1990</b>
Public Relations, Contacts and Transactions With Public Sector	72,869	44,498	67,229	482,143	296,935	295,765	185,682	3,062,125
Percent of Total	0.86	0.66	0.48	1.80	2.08	2.16	1.19	8.74
Public Relations, Contacts and Transactions With Private Sector	169,190	115,742	228,822	86,897	233,259	582,897	255,370	868,565
Percent of Total	2.01	1.73	1.65	0.33	1.64	4.25	1.64	2.48
Technical Services For Public Sector	17,607	298,720	107,615	310,391	12,737	65,382	0	82,801
Percent of Total	0.21	4.46	0.78	1.16	0.09	0.48	0	0.24
Technical Services For Private Sector	156,525	493,613	375,398	486,515	354,439	110,886	205,492	2,375,862
Percent of Total	1.85	7.37	2.70	1.82	2.49	0.81	1.32	6.78
Promotion of Tourism	8,064,007	5,742,322	13,106,309	25,357,006	13,364,884	12,668,021	14,944,138	28,644,227
Percent of Total	95.09	85.77	94.39	94.89	93.71	92.31	95.85	81.76
Total	8,480,198	6,694,895	13,885,373	26,722,952	14,262,254	13,722,951	15,590,682	35,033,580

**Source:** Registry of Foreign Agents, Department of Justice (Published in Todd Eisenstadt, *Este País* 15 [June 1992]).

**TABLE 2**  
**PAYMENTS TO FOREIGN AGENTS BY SELECTED LATIN AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS (1978-1990)**  
**(U.S. DOLLARS)**

<b>Public or Private Sector</b>	<b>Mexico</b>	<b>Brazil</b>	<b>Bahamas</b>	<b>Nicaragua</b>	<b>Venezuela</b>
Public Relations, Contacts and Transactions With Public Sector	3,062,125	0	695,993	461,944	246,304
Percent of Total	8.74	0	12.27	56.37	7.19
Public Relations, Contacts and Transactions With Private Sector	868,565	388,678	77,488	59,278	482,208
Percent of Total	2.48	20.22	1.37	7.23	14.08
Technical Services For Public Sector	82,801	816,760	0	298,274	2,326,071
Percent of Total	0.24	42.50	0	36.40	67.91
Technical Services For Private Sector	2,375,862	716,246	37,500	0	370,780
Percent of Total	6.78	37.27	0.66	0	10.82
Promotion of Tourism	28,644,227	0	4,860,653	0	0
Percent of Total	81.76	0	85.70	0	0
Total	35,033,580	1,921,684	5,671,634	819,496	3,425,363

**Source:** Registry of Foreign Agents, Department of Justice (Published in Todd Eisenstadt, *Este País* 15 [June 1992]).



because it mistrusted lobbying and associated it with negative effects on national sovereignty.

The Mexican government first approached Washington lobbyists during the administration of Luis Echeverría in 1974, with the aim of improving Mexico's image, which had suffered because of Echeverría's Third Worldist policies. In 1978, there was a second contact under the administration of José López Portillo, as part of an attempt to raise financial support for Mexico. These first contacts were important for Mexico's negotiating ability since they showed a change of attitude regarding using non-traditional mechanisms to promote its interests north of the Rio Grande.

During the administration of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), bilateral relations hit one of their all time lows with the 1985 murder in Mexico of DEA agent Enrique Camarena. In those years, drug trafficking began to be a more important part of the bilateral agenda, and differing perceptions about the way to handle this problem caused friction between the two countries. In that context, the De la Madrid administration opted to seek the help of professional lobbyists to fight the negative image that the Mexican political system had in Washington, particularly regarding its fight against drugs and reputation for corruption.

The big turn-about in Mexico's attitude regarding lobbying took place during the Carlos Salinas administration in the framework of the negotiations for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This is reflected in the U.S. Justice Department's Registry of Foreign Agents, which indicated that Mexico's tab for lobbying increased a little more

than four fold between 1978 and 1990, going from almost U.S.\$8.5 million to more than U.S.\$35 million.

The Mexican government's priority on trade negotiations with the United States was so important that the Salinas administration "contracted the services of experienced politicians from both parties, specialized advisors in commercial and legal matters and the important public relations firm Burson-Masteller to head up a multi-million-dollar campaign targeting the U.S. public."<sup>3</sup> Along these same lines, Mexico also hired the services of important firms like Shearman-Sterling (attorneys at law), Fleishman-Hillard (public relations, contacts and business transactions), The Brock Group, Ltd. (trade advisory services), Public Strategies, Washington, Inc. (political advisors) and TKC International (contacts and business transactions).<sup>4</sup>

According to Todd Eisenstadt, Mexico's strategy was so effective that it overcame the opposition of several groups to NAFTA, particularly labor and environmental groups like the AFL-CIO, Ralph Nader's Public Citizen and the Sierra Club. As everyone knows, the strategy culminated in NAFTA coming into effect January 1, 1994.

The usefulness of lobbying for influencing U.S. decisions proved an effective alternative for Mexico in negotiations with its northern neighbor. It was expensive, which meant high fees for the 30 firms employed: the Mexican government's lobbying bill came to between U.S.\$75 million and U.S.\$100 million in 1991 alone.<sup>5</sup> By the end of the trade negotiations, our country was the Latin American nation that had spent the most in this kind of fees, although,

thanks to this and other factors, it was also the only one that achieved a trade agreement with the world's foremost power.

With the signing of NAFTA, Mexico and the United States formalized a trade relationship which had been developing rapidly in the second half of the twentieth century. Undoubtedly, lobbying contributed to this and also increased Mexico's ability in general to negotiate with the United States, even though the current administration of Ernesto Zedillo has not expanded in this area.

In future, our two countries' interdependence stemming from the great number of formal and informal links between us could well be the factor which, together with lobbying, propitiates better promotion of Mexico's interests in the United States. ■■■

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this case, public relations on behalf of another country is lobbyists' most common international assignment, including most frequently the creation of a positive public image, talks with members of Congress, forging alliances with the business community and legal advice.

<sup>2</sup> The Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1930, the Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act of 1946 and the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are the pieces of legislation that have regulated lobbying.

<sup>3</sup> Todd Eisenstadt, "Cabildeo y relaciones públicas en Estados Unidos," *Este País. Tendencias y opiniones* 15 (June 1992), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Todd Eisenstadt, "El TLC o los límites del cabildeo," *Este País. Tendencias y opiniones* 30 (September 1993), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Todd Eisenstadt, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

# The United States and Certification

*Silvia Vélez Quero\**

The longest and least fruitful war fought by the United States, the war against drug trafficking, has gone through alternate cycles of acceptance and rejection of drug consumption, always repressing supply and tolerating demand.<sup>1</sup> From their origins at the beginning of this century, this war's policies have been oriented outward; they have been racist,<sup>2</sup> uncoordinated, without any scientific basis and more founded on policing than public health concerns.<sup>3</sup> Today, despite the change in the international situation and the essence of all international relations, the United States still applies strategies that hark back to the Cold War, stepping up demands for foreign cooperation<sup>4</sup> and increasing spending on this failed battle.<sup>5</sup> Given the intensification and versatility of drug trafficking, the Clinton administration has increased its unilateral covert activities and pressure on foreign governments without reducing it.

Together with migration, the war against drug trafficking is the main irritant in the increasingly intense, complex relationship between Mexico and the United States. Tensions rise annually for Mexico when two branches of the U.S. federal government, the executive and the legislative,<sup>6</sup> must decide to certify or not the performance of 30 or so coun-

tries around this issue, based on the 1986 U.S. law.<sup>7</sup>

This decision was born as a means for the Congress to pressure the president, due to "distrust of the executive itself,"<sup>8</sup> to force Ronald Reagan to report on the use and effectiveness of the extensive resources put into the so-called War against Drugs.<sup>9</sup> To shift responsibilities, Reagan transferred the weight of this law to producer and transit countries by threatening to suspend all U.S. aid, except that considered humanitarian or directed against drug trafficking, as well as withdrawing U.S. support of international agencies like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to block loans to countries which, in the opinion of the United States, did not "cooperate" appropriately in the war against drugs.

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Domestically, the certification of foreign governments is an outstanding moment in the relationship between the U.S. executive and Congress given that often it is a pretext for the legislators to call in favors or lash out at the president at the same time that they advance their own political careers by presenting themselves as the paladins of the public, which demands an end to drug use. In practice, this behavior creates no specific commitments for congresspersons, and it does get them a considerable number of votes. For this reason, certification is a political asset of the first water which makes it very improbable they will give it up, despite the irritation it provokes.<sup>10</sup>

Internationally, because of its proximity, long border and asymmetrical economic relationship with its northern neighbor, Mexico is the country which has been the most involved in this conflict. These reasons are deepening today as its ties to the United States increase and become closer. The current free trade opening, the North American Free Trade Agreement and Mexico's foreign policy shift that now sees the United States as a partner and not a threat all increase the possibility of successfully trafficking in the drugs so highly prized and priced in the United States.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the annual threat of decertification, as a general rule, Mexico has

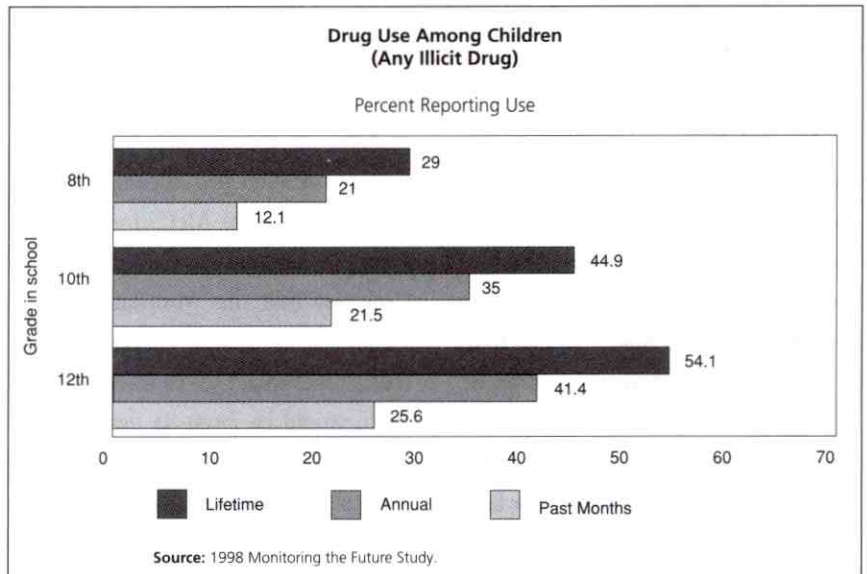
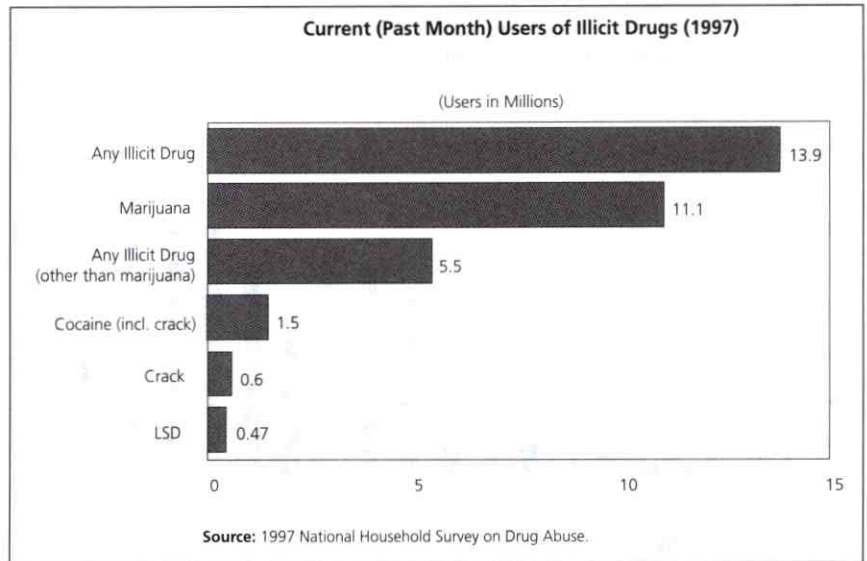
\* Researcher at CISAN.



always been certified, perhaps because of its strategic proximity or because of the possible economic consequences for U.S. capital invested in Mexico, or even the undesirable results for the U.S. that would come of economic, political and/or social instability on its southern border. General McCaffrey declared that “the decertification of Mexico would be devastating.”<sup>12</sup>

The 1999 certification process brought with it some new elements, important for Mexico: U.S. government recognition of the sheer size of consumption, that the corruption inherent in drug trafficking also affects U.S. agencies and departments<sup>13</sup> and the Canadian border as an area of high intensity trafficking. Also important is the loss of clout of the High Level Contact Group since it moved from the aegis of Mexico’s Foreign Relations Ministry and Attorney General’s Office to the Ministry of the Interior, particularly with regard to the decisions and implementation of Mexican anti-drug policy. This becomes clear with the new strategy to “seal” the country up by military means and high technology,<sup>14</sup> previously out of reach because of cost and U.S. national security restrictions, problems which have both been miraculously solved. There continues to be a problem, in contrast, in broadening out the armed forces’ attributions and share of the job.

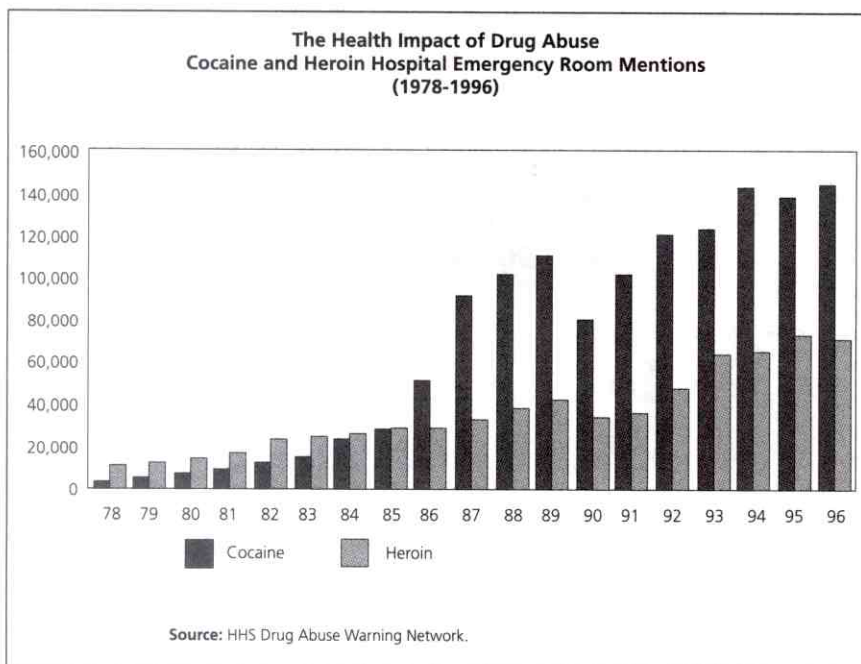
For their part, the Latin American governments reject certification dubbing it “unilateral, unfair and the source of tensions.”<sup>15</sup> The Interamerican Committee Against Drug Abuse (CICAD), meanwhile, proposes the Organization of American States’ Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) as “the only valid cer-



tification process in the hemisphere,”<sup>16</sup> since, although it does not include sanctions, thus prompting distrust on the part of the U.S. government, the Latin Americans give it moral and political weight.<sup>17</sup> They hope that this multilateral instrument will make it possible to bury U.S. certification by the year 2003.

This year, even with the unfavorable opinion of some of the agencies under his authority, President Clinton certified Mexico’s complete cooperation, a deci-

sion not shared by Congress. The congressional decision stipulated that the sanctions required by law would not be applied “if at *any time* after the date of the enactment of this joint resolution the President submits to Congress a determination and certification ... that *the vital national* interests of the U.S. require that the assistance withheld... be provided for Mexico... and that the U.S. not vote against multilateral development bank assistance for Mexico.”<sup>18</sup> This



means that Mexico is certified only because of U.S. national interests and therefore will not be sanctioned as stipulated by law for its supposed lack of cooperation. This, when we have now become the United States' second trade partner, when the Mexican government, among other things, has extradited Mexicans, creating a special category of temporary extradition, when Mexico has been 1998's greatest eradicator of marihuana and poppies, when it agreed to militarily "seal" our borders, stimulating military cooperation until recently unthinkable that displaced Foreign Relations Minister Rosario Green (not well liked by U.S. officials due to her firm demand for parity in bilateral dealings, for daring to talk about the possibility of demanding the extradition of Treasury Department agents, suspected of breaking Mexican laws while carrying out, without consultation, their long, unilateral Operation Casablanca,<sup>19</sup> and more recently for having told them, "No certification, no cooperation").

Now, will it be possible to repeal the U.S. certification law? According to U.S. drug czar General McCaffrey, if President Bill Clinton's government can show Congress that this Multilateral Drug Evaluation Mechanism proposed by the OAS is functional, U.S. certification legislation would be given its death certificate.<sup>20</sup> However, we believe that the U.S. political system will not give up this instrument for bringing pressure to bear, so very useful for its politicians, and because the MEM "has no teeth," meaning it includes no sanctions.

With regard to this last consideration, it might be pertinent to recall the words of the current U.S. ambassador in Mexico, Jeffrey Davidow, when in 1997, as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, he told the Joint Hearing Before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control and the Committee on Foreign Relations,<sup>21</sup> "But I also want to stress, and make this perfectly clear, that certification is the law of the land.

We are committed to it. It is not a perfect instrument, as Senator Grassley said, but it is a useful instrument. *What we are trying to do with multilateralization, in getting other countries to cooperate with us, is designed to complement our national legislation, including certification, not to replace it or other laws that we have.*"<sup>22</sup> **MM**

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Miguel Ruiz-Cabañas, "La campaña permanente de México: costos, beneficios y consecuencias," Peter H. Smith comp., *El combate a las drogas en América* (Mexico City: FCE, 1992), p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> Among other pieces of data, "More than 62.5 percent of the inmates in the federal prison system in 1997 were sentenced for drug offenses....A March 1997 study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) found that African-American men were nearly twice as likely to be incarcerated in their lifetime (28.5%) as Hispanic men (16.0%) and six times more likely than white men (4.4%)." *National Drug Control Strategy 1999* (Washington, D.C.: ONDCP, 1999), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> In 1979, when drug use was very high, 14.1 percent of the population, or 25 million people, used drugs regularly. The number of drug-related hospital emergencies for that entire year nationwide was 5,000 (cocaine) and 10,000 (heroin). Paradoxically, in 1997, when official statistics put regular drug use lower, at 6.4 percent, or 13.9 million people, the number of hospital emergencies reached 514,347. *Ibid.*, pp. 2 and 10. Nevertheless, 30 percent of the budget for the war against drugs goes to prevention and 70 percent to law enforcement.

<sup>4</sup> In terms of eradication of crops, confiscation, searches, arrests, extraditions, etc.

<sup>5</sup> In the 1993 fiscal year, the United States spent a little over U.S.\$12 billion just on the federal level; in 1999, it will spend U.S.\$17 billion. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> The executive branch must make its decision before March 1 of every year and the legislature, 30 days later.

<sup>7</sup> That law is based on the precepts of paragraph 490(b) of the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act.

<sup>8</sup> See the declarations of General Barry McCaffrey, U.S. drug czar, in "Avizoran el fin de la certificación," *Reforma* (Mexico City), 8 March, 1999, p. 10A.

<sup>9</sup> Here, we should remember the murky Iran-Contras episode.



<sup>10</sup> An additional detail is that until now there is no instrument for verifying the effectiveness of the economic and policing measures established by the Certification Act in curtailing drug trafficking .

<sup>11</sup> "Americans Spend \$57 Billion on Illegal Drugs Each Year," *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 27 February 1999.

<sup>13</sup> *Drug Control. INS and Customs Can Do More to Prevent Drug-Related Employee Corruption* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Accounting Office, March 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Upon his return from an unexpected personal visit to the United States to negotiate the purchase permits, former Minister of the Interior Francisco Labastida, currently running for the PRI presidential nomination, said on a popular Mexican television interview program, *For Starters*, that the high-tech equipment includes mobile X-ray units and cutting-edge technology for satellite monitoring of Mexican territory with a 900-km.-radius radar system and 300 simultaneous channels with both visual and audio signals.

<sup>15</sup> Uruguayan Alberto Scavarelli, president of the Interamerican Committee Against Drug Abuse (CICAD), said, "We cannot allow anyone to be judge and jury in the certification process. The country where drug traffickers operate easiest, because that is where the drugs are consumed, is attempting to impose an unfair system of economic sanctions instead of supporting government cooperation programs in the fight against drug trafficking. "Busca la OEA terminar en 2003 con el proceso de certificación," *Reforma* (Mexico City), 7 May 1999, p. 26A.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> To make the mechanism one of assistance and not punitive, they propose creating an OAS controlled and monitored fund to support national law enforcement offices. They would also seek the collaboration of and coordination with other regions, international organizations and the United Nations. *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, (introduced in the House), 106 Congress, First Session, H.J.Res.35, in the House

of Representatives, March 2, 1999, H.J.Res.43, March 24, 1999. Sections 1 and 2. Enacted within 30 days after February 26, 1999. [Author's emphasis.]

<sup>19</sup> Operation Casablanca included a series of Treasury Department covert operations involving officials' and drug traffickers' money laundering in several of Mexico's most important banks, during which signed agreements, joint declarations, etc., that "guaranteed" permanent, timely bilateral information exchange were violated. The investigation lasted more than three years and the Mexican government found out about it only hours before it ended.

<sup>20</sup> "Avizoran el fin de la certificación," *Reforma* (Mexico City), 8 May 1999, p. 10A.

<sup>21</sup> United States Senate, 105th Congress, First Session, October 29, 1997.

<sup>22</sup> "U.S. and Mexican Counterdrug Efforts Since Certification," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998), p. 42. [Author's emphasis.]

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# Environmental Advocacy In Canada

*Sofia Gallardo\**

**E**nvironmentalism has developed considerably in the last 100 years. This can be seen in the increasing ecological awareness of the peoples of the world, the variety of issues, the important public policy changes and the incorporation of a great many new participants in the movement. Change is also visible in the broad gamut of activities that range from attempts to foster rational use of natural resources to the prevention of contamination, the minimization of waste and the inclusion of third generation environmental issues like acid rain, global warming and desertification. Evolving forms of participation have also accompanied and promoted these changes: the late nineteenth century's elitist style has given way to democratic, participatory forms in the current decade. As a result, the debates on environmental questions in the 1980s and 1990s have gone from a list of simple discussion topics to the creation of an agenda for developing, implementing and evaluating public policies locally, nationally, regionally and globally. During this period, the focus on ecological issues has shifted from a scientific approach to an ethical concern.

Although it existed from the beginning of the century, awareness about the

quality of the environment in Canada has reached significant proportions since World War II, particularly between the 1960s and the 1980s, giving rise to new social movements. The impact of these movements has reoriented society's perceptions, attitudes and behavior. They have sought to define their strategies in

**Environmental advocacy in Canada mainly takes the form of political lobbying and media and legal work. The first and most important is legal advocacy that takes cases through the courts or environmental reviews.**

the sphere of power, acting in general outside political institutions and the established party system. Civil society has overwhelmed the state in moments of crisis and shown its ability to creatively mobilize and effectively self-organize in emergencies. Environmentalists think that new orientations for the future are needed in the entire governmental machinery,

orientations which transcend short-term decisions framed in electoral cycles.

In the broad sense, environmental groups are organizations for social advocacy. They share characteristics with other organizations like those of the women's, human rights, peace and ethnic movements. In this article, social advocacy is defined as a positive, pro-active form of protest carried out by a particular group or social network. Social advocacy challenges dominant values and beliefs by means of protest. It provides itself with new scientific and cultural knowledge that promotes varying forms of political commitment. Advocacy is a greater communicative process in modern democracies, making it possible for alternative forms of knowledge to contribute to the construction of society. Environmental groups are extra-parliamentarian, but non-violent; they combine activities to create awareness and gain political strength in order to question legislatures in the name of the public good.

The Canadian environmentalist movement is very diverse. Its approximately 2,000 groups range from large, self-financed organizations with million-dollar budgets to small local groups with concrete causes. About 400 of them are located in the province of Ontario, including most of those with economic resources and public recognition like Greenpeace, World

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Wildlife Fund Canada and an affiliate of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature.

The action strategies used by these groups are mainly based on “coopted advocacy.” This means that the membership of most advocate organizations is too small for them to be autonomous and therefore they must depend directly on government financing. Others obtain financial support from consulting contracts with the government. Even in these cases, such as the Pollution Probe, they cannot be sure of a steady annual income, particularly in times of economic recession. In such a context, advocate groups often dedicate most of their time fighting recurring financial crises. Greenpeace is an exception; after the lean years in the early 1980s, it now manages to support itself completely by member donations.

All environmental advocate groups, including Greenpeace, suffer from high staff turnover. Greenpeace has controlled this by separating its executive council from its day-to-day committees for fund raising, telephone outreach and local action. But other advocate organizations’ resources are too scarce to adopt this solution. Its executives are responsible for all aspects of mobilization and constantly have to choose between different activities: research or fund raising, public education through publications or political opposition, organization of community activities or networking with other environmentalist organizations. The eternal problem is being on top of the main demands of organizational survival to maintain their position as effective lobbyists. Scarcity of funds, over-commitment and the aspiration for better salaries and working conditions are a powerful combination spurring constant staff turnover. As

might be expected, this situation tends to reduce all the advocacy organizations to key actors. Between 25 and 50 social actors keep the “coopted” organizations together.

Environmental advocacy in Canada mainly takes the form of political lobbying and media and legal work. The first and most important is legal advocacy that takes cases through the courts or environmental reviews. This is necessary because common taxpayers cannot follow a case against big corporations and because individual action against air pollution and other environmental questions is still not allowed. For example, the Canadian Environmental Law Association estab-

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lished the Environmental Defense Fund which helps grassroots organizations overcome the disadvantages of their size to be able to deal with local cases before the courts. Its aim is to create legal precedents in environmental review criteria to contribute to establishing future strict accountability about environmental sustainability in Canada.

The second main activity is political lobbying of provincial, federal and international agencies. Responsibility for environmental policy is divided between the federal and provincial governments. This divided jurisdiction is complicated by the disputes among the ministries and departments in Ottawa that actively resist any possibility that Canada’s Ministry of the Environment become a super-ministry capable of monitoring government policies’ compatibility. The National Round Table on Environment and the Economy, and the provincial round tables were established in 1988 to allow Canada to fulfill its commitment to the Brundtland Report prepared for the United Nations.<sup>1</sup> The round table is based on the principle of association for sustainable development, which means a tri-partite decision making process involving environmentalist groups, governments and corporations. However, the government adoption of sustainable development and the principle of association have been two-edged swords for environmental advocacy. The environmentalists consider the round table deliberations extremely slow, to the point that they often say their participation is only rhetorical.<sup>2</sup>

This is why Canadian environmental groups often operate in opposition to government policies instead of associating themselves with them. Clearly the strategy of coopted advocacy that makes them depend on government financing is not translated into unconditional political support. Canadian environmental movements generally have no difficulty in deciding on an opposition tenet. They do, however, find it difficult to present a unified platform. This is due in part to the fact that its members, mainly from middle

class backgrounds, have different political viewpoints, ranging from social democratic, Marxist and anarchist to center right. Their most common opponents are the neoconservatives who identify on a national level with the Conservative Party and their “support councils” associated with business interests; the Reform Party; the Nationalist Citizen Coalition, a group of populist businessmen; and a broad variety of think tanks like the C.D. Howe Institute.

The third form of advocacy is channeled through the media. David Suzuki has been the most widely known intellectual of the environmentalist movement because of his influence through newspapers columns and television. He has been a peace activist and a leader of ecologist thinking. His television series *The Nature of Things* has supported cases of indigenous groups and opposed projects like the James Bay Two hydroelectric plant. Suzuki’s protagonism has involved the change from cognoscitive to symbolic practice as the predominant form of knowledge in Ontario. His appearances in the media (especially television) are crucial because they span Canada’s political space and make an important contribution to the holistic formation of the environmentalist movement.

Similarly, almost from its founding, Greenpeace has organized symbolic activities, linking the media to its organizational objectives. Its main aim has been to testify to a series of unsustainable situations, pointing to them in the most dramatic way possible to make otherwise hidden effects of ecological degradation visible. Recently, Greenpeace has gone from real eco-dramas to the simulation of eco-dramas, which is why its members

have stopped making incursions against armed ships and begun scaling towers and bridges to hang protest signs. The new strategy is very effective because it presents complex environmental issues very strikingly. Environmentalists have learned from Greenpeace’s successes in this field.

Parallel to these three forms of advocacy, we can identify three main political orientations among members of environmentalist organizations: conservationist, radical and indigenous (First Nations) activist. The first is characteristic mainly of pragmatic reformists: the Canada Environmental Network, the World Wildlife Fund Canada (WWFC) and the Conservation Council of Ontario are exam-

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ples. The WWFC’s number of full time staff and level of professionalism means it can be compared with a successful business. It has a clear sense of power, of the status quo, which is why it is willing to be lenient with companies if that leads to positive action on environmental issues.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes the tensions of red tape, government inactivity and industry’s prag-

matic cover-ups affect environmentalist groups’ organization. The most notable case was the Pollution Probe, whose director, Collin Isaacs, decided to support the green consumption campaign launched by Loblaws, an important supermarket chain. Pollution Probe members demanded his resignation, after which they reorganized and totally reoriented. Even though it still continues to do research as part of its political function, the Pollution Probe now pays more attention to information dissemination to the public.

The Conservation Council of Ontario is an umbrella organization that includes 31 groups dedicated to environmental planning. In contrast with other pragmatic reformist groups, it has very little contact with, and even less interest in, ordinary citizens. Council members are basically representatives of the status quo who seek to reduce the influence of grassroots environmentalist groups, making proposals to the centralized decision making process through cabinet ministers.

Canadian universities are an important source of intellectual resources for the movements. They play a more prominent role in public policy research and social advocacy than in the United States, where environmentalist group activities are supported by professional lobbyists. The Canadian university supports some advocate organizations like Pollution Probe, Probe International and the Coalition Against Acid Rain. Its links to the grassroots environmentalist movement have been weak given that the system of donations for environmental action favors the association between universities and corporations.

Greenpeace Canada represents the radical position. It is radical in the sense that




it is constantly challenging the existing relationship between government and businesses, asking that the government recognize the need for public involvement. The demand for public involvement is common to radicals and conservationists and is expressed through the Canadian Environmental Network.<sup>4</sup> The radicals demand that the government commit itself to 1) public support for environmental groups; 2) establishing committees to supervise the impact of existing public policies and environmental agreements; and 3) keeping an eye on individual companies or cabinet ministers who refuse to act in accordance with environment-related decisions.

For a time, Greenpeace was divided between radical advocacy and militant activism. In 1993, one of its founders, Paul Watson, together with animal rights organizations organized a campaign to ban sailing in Newfoundland's coastal waters.<sup>5</sup> Despite the campaign's being a success for Greenpeace in the European Community, it was a disaster in Canada and led to Watson's resignation a few months later. He later founded the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society which, among other things, vehemently opposed vivisection. Later, Watson moved to the United States where he organized Earth First!, a political action group that has assumed responsibility for several acts of ecological sabotage, carried out in the name of ecological advocacy.<sup>6</sup>

Lastly, the indigenous activist orientation links environmental movements with First Nations' territorial demands. This is a special trait of the environmentalist movement in Canada. In British Columbia and Quebec, for example, the relationship between the two has made for

some successes. In the case of the South Moreby dispute in British Columbia, relations between the logging industry and the provincial government broke irretrievably in May 1990.

In Ontario, joint action is shaky and generally poor given partly to the First Nations' lack of a unified environmentalist policy and partly to personality and cultural aspirations clashes between environmentalists and indigenous leaders. This was clear in the Temagami Wilderness Society (TWS) protest when Chief Gary Potts of Tema-Awaugame organized two independent blockades. His argument for acting this way was that TWS had only been concerned with protecting Crown



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land trees, while his group wanted to protect all their natural resources.

These three political orientations are a challenge to coexistence in the Canadian environmental spectrum. Some of the tactics of the more radical group are disliked by the conservationist groups and vice versa. Nevertheless, they increasingly realize that both have contributions

to make to environmentalist aims. For example, radical groups like Greenpeace and Earth First! and activist organizations like Friends of the Earth and Energy Probe are considered necessary because they make harsh criticisms of governments and industries that have not complied with environmental programs. Similarly, environmentalist groups like Pollution Probe and the Institute for Research and Public Policy are considered necessary because they participate in discussion fora and question the Ministry of the Environment and the other ministers. The concern for clean urban communities, natural reserves and green areas reflect sentiments shared by conservationist, environmentalist and ecologist groups. Even initiatives linking economic and environmental issues have won broad approval throughout the entire spectrum of the movement.

Within the environmentalist movement, tendencies toward greater convergence are countered by a realistic understanding of the forces that cause conflict. There are, for example, differences of opinion in the environmentalist community about specific actions or strategies around two issues.<sup>7</sup> The first is collaboration with corporations: access to business funds helps level the groups' financial playing field, but at the same time generates the constant threat and fear of cooptation. The most often noted case is the Loblaws-Pollution Probe, as was already mentioned. The second is the debate around reform or social change. The environmentalist movement is multi-class because class divisions accentuated by segregation and marginalization and induced by processes of environmental degradation have not been erased.

The great variety of demands and the expression of different social groups' particular interests make the constitution of a civil society movement in solidarity with the environmental cause difficult.

Canada's environmentalist movement has clearly shown that it is not monolithic, either ideologically or organizationally. A surprising thing about it is that serious environmentalists may be found along the entire political spectrum, from left to right. Putting to one side discordant political orientations, different environmental advocate groups have avoided competing for resources and created a network that links the larger groups to the smallest ones with more limited agendas. These local movements are close to a series of universal values (life, peace, equality, justice, freedom, autonomy and human dig-

nity) that tie their particular demands to general consensuses through symbolic effectiveness and the potential that shared moral values have for bringing people together. Relations among environmentalist groups shift constantly. Through social advocacy, they enter into processes of growing cooperation and conflict at the same time that they make an effort to attain financial stability and organizational maturity. This is, in turn, a reflection of the movement's rapid, dynamic growth in the last decade. **MM**

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Brundtland Report or *Our Common Future*, prepared by Gro H. Brundtland for the U.N. World Commission on Environment and Development (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> In many cases, the activists have been burned out by the delays and the dearth of answers from the government ministries.

<sup>3</sup> It is public knowledge that some of Canada's biggest polluters give the WWFC-founded Wildlife Toxicology Fund important donations.

<sup>4</sup> The Canadian Environmental Network has protested because Canadian governments consult behind closed doors with the big interests before making any important decisions. In theory, Canadians live in a democracy, but in practice, like in most democracies, the concentration of economic and political power limits the public's ability to participate in its own government, including the protection of the environment.


<sup>5</sup> Off Newfoundland's coast is one of the world's largest and best fishing areas, the basis for the family industries of its inhabitants, predominantly indigenous people, particularly Inuits.

<sup>6</sup> Earth First! operates basically in the United States and British Columbia, but has some support in Ontario universities.

<sup>7</sup> For example, no agreement was reached about whether environmentalist groups should have refused to participate in negotiations about climatic change with the federal government in the early 1990s.

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Adam T. Sellen

Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada.

# Authenticity Testing In Canadian Museums

Adam T. Sellen\*

Museums throughout the world share a common problem: fakes in their collections. Often these forgeries go undetected, consequently sharing the same exhibition

\* Archaeologist. Member of the pilot project to determine authenticity and provenance of Zapotec urns.

space as genuine pieces. This can damage a museum's reputation, dupe the public at large and create havoc with serious research.

This year, a group of researchers from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) teamed up with two Canadian institutions, the Royal Ontario

Museum (ROM) and the George R. Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art, both in Toronto, Canada, to ferret out fakes among their Mexican collections.<sup>1</sup>

In particular, the UNAM study focuses on Zapotec funeral urns, poorly understood art and ritual objects usually found in tombs. Most of these tombs are locat-



Reprinted by permission of the ROM

Genuine piece. ROM: cat. HM 1399.



Adam T. Sellen

Fake. Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin: cat. 39.741. The museum has only one of this type.



Adam T. Sellen

Fake. Museum of Man, Paris. Four identical pieces in the collection.



ed in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca. The artifacts are made of clay and formed by adhering an effigy to a vase; they can be as small as a coffee cup or up to a meter in height. Clearly, the urns are funeral pieces, but their specific function remains unknown and many of the effigies are still unidentified. The ROM has a very large collection of these objects, approximately 200. The Gardiner, a smaller, specialized ceramic museum across from the ROM, has only five pieces, but all spectacular examples of Zapotec artistic expression.

The principal aim of the project is to distinguish the fakes from the genuine article in the museums' collections, but a secondary concern is to fully document still unpublished Zapotec treasures. To reach the first goal we intend to apply a series of scientific tests which will reveal the chemical composition of the clay bodies of the urns, thereby giving us a better understanding of when and where they were produced. Through these tests we also hope to find out about the nature and origin of the forgeries from Oaxaca; products of a clandestine industry that has injected great quantities of fakes into the world market.

Genuine Zapotec urns have a particular quality that makes them difficult to separate from the hundreds of forgeries in existence. In ancient times, many of the urns were copied in series and placed in a row in front of the tomb door or inside the tomb itself. These series of urns could consist of two or three objects or up to seven or eight. Collectors who came to possess a series of urns would often separate the group and sell the individual pieces, dispersing them throughout private collections and museums alike.



Constantine G. Rickards.

Unfortunately, the forgers also copied the serial urns by fashioning their molds from the original's details. This makes the task of visual identification virtually impossible, precisely because one is unsure if the piece is part of the original arrangement or a contemporary copy.

An original urn in the ROM collection illustrates this problem. The piece was reportedly found in a tomb with three other identical copies, though the whereabouts of these is unknown. However, European museums have a number of contemporary copies of the piece, only recently identified as fakes by scientific methods.

Visual identification continues to be the most common way of identifying fakes. However, for Zapotec urns, given their serial nature and the often excellent quality of the forgeries, this method is inaccurate. Scientific tests yield much more precise results. Why, then, do we not just routinely test every object? In a perfect world that would happen. How-

ever, tests are expensive, and to test hundreds of pieces is beyond the budget of most cash-strapped institutions. For this reason it is important to begin with a clear objective when proposing authenticity testing for a collection. This includes selecting key pieces for study, as it would be a waste of resources to test pieces that are obviously genuine.

Before testing begins, it is also important to obtain as much historical information about a collection as possible to establish a context. Two points are significant here, both results of a historical process. The first is, as Kurz said, "Fakes hunt in packs,"<sup>2</sup> meaning that when you find one forgery in a collection you will undoubtedly find another. At certain times enthusiastic collectors abound and usually they have more money than sense. Given this, and taking into account the law of supply and demand, archaeological forgers also flourish. It follows, then, that the time frame when the pieces were collected is important. Conventional wisdom has held that the older a collection, the more likely it will contain authentic pieces. However, we now know that many skilled forgers of Zapotec urns were active early in the century; therefore, older collections are more likely to contain fakes. The story behind the ROM collection illustrates both these points, and serves as a very probable model for how many Mexican collections of pre-Hispanic artifacts ended up in foreign museums.

The Zapotec urns at the ROM were collected by Constantine G. Rickards in the state of Oaxaca around the turn of the century. Rickards was a Mexican born of English parentage; he owned a gold mine, worked as a lawyer and was vice-consul at the British Consulate in





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Rickard's collection in his house in Oaxaca, circa 1917.

the city of Oaxaca. His passion for pre-Hispanic history took him on mule trips throughout Zapotec country, principally the Central Valleys of Oaxaca, where he bought antiquities from the locals or unofficially excavated tombs. At its height, his collection numbered over 1,500 pieces, from large effigy urns to small implements of gold and jade.

When the Mexican revolution broke out in 1910, Rickards' fortunes ended, his mines were confiscated, and he was forced to flee to Mexico City. His new economic situation forced him to put the collection up for sale. It was first offered to the National Museum<sup>3</sup> in Mexico City, but for some unknown reason they declined, despite recognizing its unique value.<sup>4</sup> By 1919 Rickards had contacted another buyer, C.T. Currelly, the director of the ROM in Canada. In April of that same year, Currelly and a sidekick, Col. J. H. Elliott, braved Pancho Villa's raiding parties and traveled to Mexico to inspect the offer. They were immediate-

ly impressed and bought almost all of it, except, as Currelly states in his memoirs, for a few pieces which the Mexican Museum did not want to let go.

The removal of such a large quantity of archaeological objects from Mexico was a delicate issue even in those early days. The affair caused a mild scandal in the media when it was characterized as "loot" by a loose-lipped Elliott. His verbal slip was soon glossed over by newspaper articles emphasizing the gift of some plaster casts the Mexican National Museum had presented to the ROM, including a reproduction of the head of Coyolxauhqui and three copies of relief carvings from the Temple Cross at Palenque. Curiously, in the news clippings of the day the real prize of the expedition was hardly mentioned, namely the Rickards collection, consisting of over 800 pre-Hispanic artifacts. Currelly referred to it in one Canadian newspaper article as "a number of objects" he was allowed to purchase.<sup>5</sup> A month later, that same newspaper arti-

cle was translated verbatim in a Mexican daily.<sup>6</sup> However, the part where Currelly was reported as saying "a number of objects" was translated in Spanish as: "a number of duplicated objects of indigenous art from tradesmen in that business."<sup>7</sup> It is not entirely clear if the Mexican Museum knew the collection contained a large number of fakes. Certainly Currelly did not know or he would not have bought it.

Sixty years later many of the lingering suspicions regarding the collection were confirmed. In 1978, Phillippa Shaplin, an American art historian studying Zapotec iconography, applied a new technology called Thermoluminescence (TL) to 36 of the ROM's urns. Briefly, a TL test measures the amount of radiation that a piece has collected over the years. Ceramics that have been buried for thousands of years will register a much higher amount of radiation than those recently fired. To measure this radiation a small amount of material from the piece is burned and the



light it produces analyzed: an older item will produce a brighter glow than a recently-made piece. Unfortunately, in the case of the ROM urns, only 4 of the 36 tested were proven to have been fired in antiquity. This was a blow to the museum that had many of the pieces on display as originals; they were unceremoniously packed up in boxes and shelved.

Since that time the Rickards collection has not received much attention except for the important Mixtec codex which is part of it. Shaplin's tests seem to have left an unfair impression. However, it must be pointed out that for the purposes of her analysis she chose pieces that she thought were fake or doubtful, and since she had a good eye, she was easily vindicated by the test. Unfortunately, her method of selecting her sample gives the impression that the rest of the collection is the same. In fact, the opposite may be true, and many of the pieces are probably genuine. To prove this, the researchers at the UNAM decided to test a much greater number of pieces, and in March of this year, over 100 samples were taken from the urns at the ROM as well as the Gardiner Museum.

It may sound contradictory, but the ROM collection is attractive for our research precisely because we know it contains fakes interspersed with genuine material. Applying a series of tests to a mixed collection will help us design more robust techniques for future authenticity analysis. One such test is based on nuclear physics and is known as PIXE, or Particle Induced X-ray Emission. In this test a small sample of clay is placed in front of an ion beam produced by a particle accelerator. The beam bombards the sample with ions which in turn are measured by a computer. The result is a characteriza-



ROM storage, present location of the Rickards collection.

tion of the basic elements in the clay body. By comparing these elements with other samples of clay, from excavated sites and from clay sources in Oaxaca, it may be possible to pinpoint the original provenance of an artifact. Also, the PIXE test can corroborate authenticity if, as we hypothesize, the clay bodies used in the twentieth century do not contain the same components as those used 2,000 years ago.

The high technology necessary to carry out these tests is available at the UNAM. Perhaps more importantly, the personnel who understand both the process and the special handling of archaeological material are also here. One of those people is the scientist responsible for introducing PIXE technology to Mexico, the eminent Mexican physicist, Dr. George Rickards. If his name sounds familiar it is because his grandfather was Constantine Rickards, the famous Oaxacan collector. This is the result of a fortunate coincidence that will help unite the past with the present in more ways than one.

The participation of Dr. Rickards and Dr. José Luis Ruvalcaba, both of the Institute of Physics, and of Oaxacan archaeologist Edith Ortiz and chemist Luz Lazos of the Institute for Anthropological Research shows the true interdisciplinary nature of the project and guarantees its success. At present we are at the stage of analyzing the samples taken from Canada and of collecting clay samples from Oaxaca for comparison. We hope the results of our study will not only define more accurately the pre-Hispanic collections in Canada but also be a step toward further understanding the complex problems associated with Zapotec ceramics. The overall result of this process will serve the museums and the public and significantly advance academic research. **MM**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Funding for this project was received from a joint Canada-Mexico program, Banco de Misiones, and from the museums themselves. We would like to thank both the ROM and Gardiner for generously opening their doors and allowing us unimpeded access to their collections.

<sup>2</sup> Kurz, *Fakes*, 1967: vi.

<sup>3</sup> Now called the National Museum of Anthropology and History.

<sup>4</sup> Report by Dr. Sologuren, AGN, c. 158, exp. 33, f. 4.

<sup>5</sup> "Mexican Gift to Ontario," *The Toronto Star* (July 1919), ROM archives.

<sup>6</sup> "Lo que opina de México un verdadero arqueólogo," *El Universal* (13 August 1919), ROM archives.

<sup>7</sup> The whole line reads, "Nos fue también permitido por el Departamento Arqueológico, dependiente de la Secretaría de Fomento, la compra de varios objetos duplicados de arte indígena a los comerciantes que se dedican a este negocio, los cuales, después de ser revisados y fotografiados, se remitieron a Ontario."





Photos by Jorge Bautista and Adrián Salinas.  
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CONACULTA/INAH/INEX

An overview of Monte Albán.

# The Cultural Development Of the Valley of Oaxaca

Jorge Bautista Hernández\* Adrián Salinas Contreras\*\*

## GEOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK

The confluence of the Etna, Zimatlán and Tlacolula Valleys surrounded on four sides by large mountain ranges makes up the central part of Oaxaca state. The great plant and animal wealth of the Oaxaca region, the fertility of the soil, the climate and the existence of numerous water sources were undoubtedly central factors in indigenous peoples like the Zapotecs and the Mixtecs settling the

area. These peoples reached an advanced state of cultural development before the Spaniards arrived and founded cities like Dainzú, Monte Albán, Lambityeco, Yagul and Mitla. In pre-Hispanic Mexico, this land, its flourishing arts, medicine and writing, nurtured painters, goldsmiths, weavers, cutters of precious stones and architects.

## THE PRE-HISPANIC ERA

The oldest vestiges of Man in the region are to be found in the Tlacolula Valley: a grooved arrowhead found near the San Juan Guelavía community testifies to the hunting of big game such as mammoth

and mastodon by paleolithic peoples who lived in the area approximately 10,000 years before Christ.<sup>1</sup> Between Yagul and Mitla are numerous caves and rocky overhangs that were used as homes and refuge for hunting and gathering bands of nomads. Here, stone instruments, organic remains, wall paintings and the first evidence of the domestication of plants have been discovered, dating from about 8000 B.C.<sup>2</sup>

Around 1500 B.C. a substantial change can be observed in the way of life of the inhabitants of the valley: the first villages were founded near the fertile alluvium, next to water sources like wells, rivers and streams. In this period, the most important villages were San José

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\*\* Archeologist, currently working in the Monte Albán archeological site.







CONACULTA / INAH-MEX

Monte Albán's ball game court.

Mogote, Tierras Largas and Hacienda Blanca, Abasolo, La Experimental, Barrio del Rosario (Huitzo) and Tomaltepec. The first pyramid bases, palatial residences and temples are to be found there, evidence of the division of the society into classes and the existence of leaders. Trade was beginning to become important and ceramic, shell, obsidian and jade objects brought from far-off regions like central Mexico, the gulf coast and the Mayan lands have been discovered there.

Around the year 700 B.C., Dainzú emerged as one of the leading centers of the Tlacolula Valley. It boasts constructions like mounds, platforms, palaces and a ball game court. A monumental tomb decorated with jaguar jaws speaks to the cult of the dead and how they were held sacred, which later culminated in the elaborate burials of Monte Albán and Mitla.

After 500 B.C. there began to be a notable contrast in the social dynamic of the village peoples, and Monte Albán



CONACULTA / INAH-MEX

Tablet depicting a dancer at Monte Albán.

was founded atop a mountainous mass where the central valleys meet. The hill-top was leveled to make a large esplanade, around which the first monumental buildings were erected. The population grew rapidly and a great construction program began. Between 500 B.C. and 100 B.C., period I, the first stones carved showing nude individuals with Olmec traits, possibly captives, accompanied by glyphs

and numerals, were put up. Some authors argue that this is unequivocal proof of Monte Albán's military expansionism aimed against other lesser ranked centers.

By this time there was significant exchange of local and outside products. Clay receptacles in the shape of effigies similar to those found in other locations of the Mixtec Highlands like Monte Negro and Yucuita appeared in Monte Albán. Similarly, there is an entire sampling of ceramic items for domestic and ritual use, outstanding among which are little boxes, plates, pots and glasses.

From its founding, Monte Albán shows a clear tendency to portioning off areas related to different craft, public, religious, residential and funeral activities. Next to the ceremonial buildings are palaces, houses with tombs and offerings to accompany the dead, clear examples of an urban class society.

During period II, from 100 B.C. to A.D. 250, other buildings used for astronomical observation and time keeping were built in the great plaza, the heart of the Zapotec city. These are known today as monument J and building P. Inscriptions in stone continued to be a feature, but now accompanied by an abundance of the so-called "conquest tablets" that decorate building J, with a change in style in the carvings, referring to glyphs and numerals probably linked to the names of places dominated by Monte Albán.

By period III (A.D. 250 to A.D. 600), the city reached its greatest size, covering an area of 6.5 square kilometers. It covered all the surrounding hills, such as Gallo, Atzompa and Plumaje Hills. On





each hilltop, bases of pyramids are covered with temples comprised of open spaces like patios and plazas. A great many residential terraces were built at the foot of each hill. The population increased a great deal, going as high as 30,000 inhabitants.

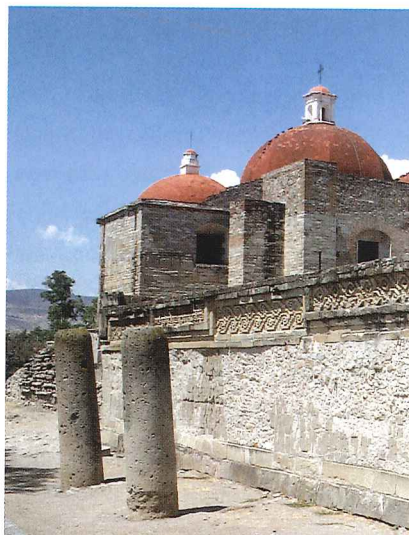
At that time, the city had roads, hydraulic works, walls, contention walls and storage shafts perhaps used to stock grain and seed. The society had specialized craftsmen, and trade increased significantly, particularly with Teotihuacan in central Mexico.

It was in this period that the most elaborate tombs were built under the patios of the houses in the form of stone boxes covered with stone slabs. In the environs of luxurious palaces, tombs have been found painted with ritual scenes of what may be priests or authorities, richly costumed, and glyphs and numerals narrating rituals or historic events. Human burials were accompanied by simple or sumptuous offerings according to the social rank of the individual, but one constant is the presence of funeral urns, clay boxes with images of people or gods, particularly Cocijo, the god of water.

After A.D. 800, Monte Albán was abandoned and construction ceased. It is not quite clear why the city was abandoned, but theories speculate that it may have been due to domestic strife, the depletion of natural resources, the authorities' loss of political and economic power, changes in trade routes and even incursions of enemies from the North. While by this time Monte Albán had stopped being the hegemonic center that for



Mitla's buildings are elaborate examples of pre-Hispanic architecture.



Spanish domination left its mark on Mitla.

centuries had dominated the region, it continued to be the object of minor occupations by groups of Mixtecs who utilized the ancient Zapotec tombs to bury their own dead; the clearest example is tomb 7.

The fall of Monte Albán made for the migration of its inhabitants who may have moved to other nearby places and founded new population centers, among

them Lambityeco, Zaachila, Macuilxóchitl, Teotitlán, Yagul and finally Mitla.

Mitla's buildings are very elaborate examples of pre-Hispanic architecture, in a class with Mayan rooms and palaces. The site is located in the eastern part of the Valley of Tlacolula and south of the natural limit formed by a system of hills and rough terrain. Mitla was at its splendid peak during the late post-classical period (A.D. 1200-1521) and its inhabitants witnessed the arrival of the Spaniards. The beauty of Mitla's monuments and its elegantly decorated mosaic fretwork has sparked the interest of locals and outsiders alike since then. It was not until the nineteenth century that an important number of travelers and explorers, mainly Europeans and Americans, began to visit Mitla.

Mitla's rooms are grouped around central, quadrangular patios, normally with entrances at the corners, making for private, restricted spaces, the administrative seat of kings and authorities. But it







Replica of Monte Albán's tomb 104. National Museum of History and Anthropology, Mexico City.

CONACULTA/INAH-MEX

also has other groups of constructions consisting of foundations and platforms creating open spaces like plazas for ceremonial use. Mitla's greatest achievement is undoubtedly the stone work. Enormous monoliths, lintels, columns and blocks were brought from several kilometers away to build the monuments. This indicates planning, the use of specialists and the existence of a leading class.

The finest and most elegant work was used in decorating the buildings: small cut stones were individually placed making fretwork friezes without using any mortar at all. In what is called the Column Group, practically all the walls are covered with fretwork designs, mainly geometric. The ornaments were also covered with lime plaster and painted red. The rooms in the Northern Group hold the remains of a multicolored mural similar to the Mixtec Codex, testifying to the influence of this ethnic group in Mitla.

Fretwork was not restricted to civic architecture; stone tombs underneath dwellings were also decorated with frets, but here, carved in. Tombs in the Mitla-style form of a cross have been found scattered over quite a large area; the tombs of Xaagá and San Lorenzo Albarradas are the clearest examples.

In the sixteenth century, Mitla witnessed the arrival of the Spaniards. Spanish domination left a deep mark on the city; the most direct consequence was the imposition of Catholicism in substitution of the indigenous gods. Some buildings of the old Zapotec center were dismantled to build a church dedicated to Saint Paul.

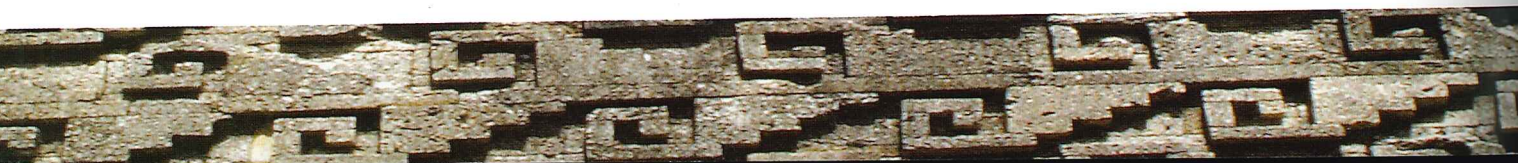
Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, parts of the pre-Hispanic sites were still occupied by the priest's house attached to the San Pablo church. In contrast to Monte Albán, Mitla did not die; it only changed, undeniable proof of the cultural continuity of the Zapotec people. **NMM**

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Marcus Winter, "La arqueología de los Valles Centrales," *Arqueología Mexicana* 5, no. 26 (Mexico City) (July-August 1997), pp. 6-14.
- <sup>2</sup> Kent Flannery and Guilá Naquitz, *Archaic Foraging and Early Agriculture in Oaxaca, Mexico* (Michigan: Academic Press, Inc., 1986).

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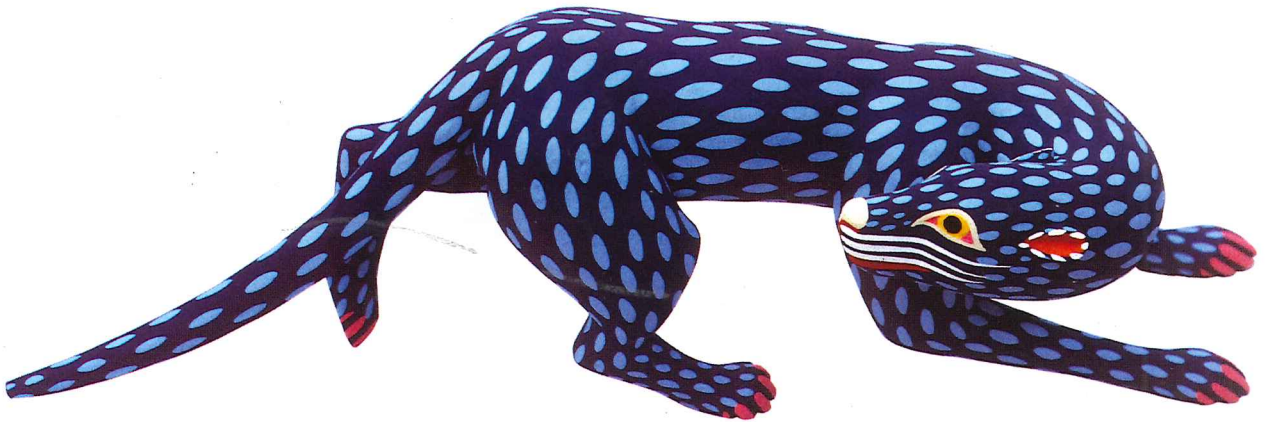




# Alebrijes

## Folk Imagery

David Malpica Uribe\*



For more than 40 years, several indigenous towns near the capital of the state of Oaxaca, following a tradition that dates from time immemorial when they carved ritual masks, toys and gods, have been creating enigmatic objects of extraordinary artistic quality. With sensitivity and skill, men, women and children infuse wood with their way of life. They do it for sale, but also for the pure pleasure of creating. Cutting the aromatic wood used by their ancestors in rituals lost in time, carving and smoothing their forms, polishing, painting and decorating with vivid colors both figures and symbols yield forms and images that simultaneously inhabit the worlds of reality and fantasy.

Animal-objects materialize in multiple forms and meanings. Their nature is as infinite as the imagination of their creators: angels and demons, virgins and saints, and *naguales* —mythical beings who populated the pre-Hispanic world and whose influence can still be felt among these people.<sup>1</sup> Sirens, dragons, pink giraffes, heart-eating jaguars with purple coats and yellow spots; dancing armadillos, dressed chicken sensually dancing, reptiles whose scales have become symbolic, geometric stylized lines. Other figures that seem to come from the far-flung corners of the universe are actually reproductions of toys that entertained the children of Monte Albán and Mitla many centuries ago.

*Alebrije* carvers are indigenous people of Mixe, Zapotec or Mixtec blood who, just like their forebears, work the land for a living and as a form of worship of the land and nature. Heirs to a rich cosmog-

nic and religious culture, with profound knowledge about their surroundings, they also have great ability and proficiency in their art. Nature in Oaxaca helps them with the spectacular colors of its sunsets, the profile of its mountains and its pure air that, when it blows, makes you feel that life is worth living.

Day after day, these indigenous peasants create objects renowned the world over. Museums and galleries in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Cleveland, Manhattan or the southwest United States exhibit their work, and elegant boutiques sell sculptures by artisans like Manuel Jiménez for hundreds of dollars each. Many pieces can be found in bazaars throughout the world or in private collections. Institutions like the Smithsonian have carried out research projects and produced a vast amount of documentation about this work in their scientific publications.<sup>2</sup> In Oaxaca, however, we

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All *alebrijes* are by Don Manuel Jiménez, a pioneer of this craft, who lives in Arrazola, Oaxaca.

Photos by Dante Barrera.



can still find *alebrijes* signed by well known artisans for U.S.\$2.50 for a small piece to U.S.\$20.00 for the medium-sized pieces.

*Alebrijes* form part of the sophisticated cultural world thanks to the originality of their designs, their expressive force and their refinement. The infinite variety of forms, lines and colors can only be suggested by the imagination and fantasy nourished by the life force. Allegories that tell stories through sculpture: games, fights, weddings, rites, magic, religion, traditional healing and daily life. The most captivating thing about this art is its close contact with the life of its creators. For them the *naguales* they fashion are not supernatural, the product of the minds of old men, but beings who wander through their towns, ravines and hills; they may belong to another dimension and have other ends, but they are as real as a reality full of wonder and fantasy.

Wood gives the *alebrije* its body, and the one that best provides a reflection of its soul is the copal tree or *copalillo*. Since pre-Hispanic times, this tree has had ritual-ceremonial value; it was burned in the Zapotec terra cotta incense burners and urns. When wounded with the machete, the copal weeps its resin, which is burned in a purifying fire. Its aroma produces

states of profound mysticism. Even today, copal resin is burned on the Day of the Dead.

This wood has been obtained for centuries in the hills and mountains of Oaxaca. It has to be cut daily because it must be worked "when the time is right," as though it were an invocation, to make contact with the sacred material. The men carve the forms and the women and children paint and decorate them with dazzling colors and designs.

One of the towns where *alebrijes* are made is Arrazola Xoxocotlán, where Manuel Jiménez, known as the father of this folk art, is from. Other towns are San Martín Tilcajete, La Unión Tejalpan and, hidden in the Sierra de Oaxaca, San Pedro Tapiche. They are also made in some Mixe towns. With a sense of community, their creators divide their time between the cultivation of corn and beans and the carving of their images, for which they use different types of wood. The Mixe communities continue to use the wood called *palo torcido*, or "twisted stick," and cedar found in their deepest

mountain ranges, more appropriate for masks and toys because of their hardness. In Arrazola, they carve in copal; but Manuel Jiménez, a man of forceful character and a natural leader, stopped using copal and now exclusively uses cedar because of its durability. In Tilcajete, they stamp their own personalities on the wood for centuries using *parota* and juniper to make masks and toys for ritual and play. They also use copal cut with a machete and carved with a kitchen knife and the blade all indigenous men carry with them.

Another key is that they only use aniline, vegetable, water-based dyes, following Manuel Jiménez' lead.

The symbolism of color represents the vitality of Oaxaca and remits us to the scenery, to the tones and shades of the Sun over valleys and mountains, to limpid or stormy seas and skies. These artisans see with the eyes of great painters, like



thousands of Tamayos; that is why these delirious forms, product of a conscious overflowing of what is real, are not simple objects, but the very meaning of life.

These men say that *alebrijes* do not represent things, not even animals or real beings. Fabián Ventura, the creator of dancing chickens, says, "They are not chickens. They are *naguales*,"<sup>3</sup> made of the same stuff as our dreams and they exist in their own world and according to their own nature, even though they belong to us a little because we are part of a whole and must respect them. As Pedro Linares said when he stopped making *alebrijes*, "It's just that soon I will go to live with them and I don't want to offend them anymore."<sup>4</sup>

In the Mexico City of the 1930s, Pedro Linares, delirious from a serious illness, dreamed of strange creatures that made noises that seemed to say "alebrijeje."<sup>5</sup> Pedro was a master at making cardboard figures and made the Judas dolls and devils that are traditionally filled with gunpowder and blown up on Easter Saturday in Mexico. This trade, using cardboard, paper, glue and bright lacquer paints dates from the colonial period. Manuel Jiménez borrowed it, but the two virtuosos, Linares and Jiménez, are simultaneously the same and different, just as Mexico City and Oaxaca are different.

*Alebrijes* are closer to angels and playful spirits than monsters or truly diabolical, malignant beings. They are related to the beings in pre-Hispanic stories and adages, or to Asian or even European myths; perhaps to those animals of African fables, like the clever hare, or even the hybrid half-cat-half-sheep or the "animal-object, similar to a spindle," both

included in Kafka's famous *Bestiary*. Indigenous stories include, like in African fables, duels between clever characters. The coyote represents the *ladino*<sup>6</sup> trying to fool the rabbit, who ends up being the more clever of the two. In many regions, mestizos are called "coyotes"; the rabbit's sagacity can be interpreted as what indigenous people do not to be devoured.<sup>7</sup> This shows the artistic profundity of *alebrijes*.

As Bajtín would say, in this ornamental game, an exceptional freedom and lightness can be seen in artistic fantasy; also, the freedom can be conceived of as a lucky joy, smiling chaos. In true folk art, like in single-cell organisms, death does not exist, but is identical with the propagation of the species. "Death is pregnant; all things limited, fixed and perfect merge to be born again."<sup>8</sup>

To conclude, I will quote Octavio Paz. "There are two types of artists: some use materials; others are its servants....The indigenous person transforms matter into something different, sensual or fantastic, but always surprising."<sup>9</sup>

Through their forms, designs and colors, simple contact with these magical objects remits us to a world full of freedom; freedom to imagine, but above all, to live. ■■■

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Some peoples in Mexico believe that a circle must be drawn around the house of a newborn baby, and the animal or object which first crosses the circle will be the *nagual* or *nahual* that will be the baby's inseparable companion all his or her life, his/her double and protector. The name of the *nagual* even becomes the person's middle name, or *tona*. This name may be known only by those closest to him or her since if a stranger knew it, it would make the individual vulnerable to dangers and evil intentions. The term *nagual* can also refer to a warlock or wizard whose eyes shine brightly and who has the ability to transform himself into a dog or a coyote. [Editor's Note.]

<sup>2</sup> For example, the research of Shepard Barbash in a 1980 issue of *Smithsonian*.

<sup>3</sup> Interview of Fabián Ventura by Shepard Barbash published in the *Smithsonian* magazine, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> "El creador de los alebrijes," taken from Internet, <http://www.eureka.com.mx/ecs/ga/alebrije/alebrijes.htm>.

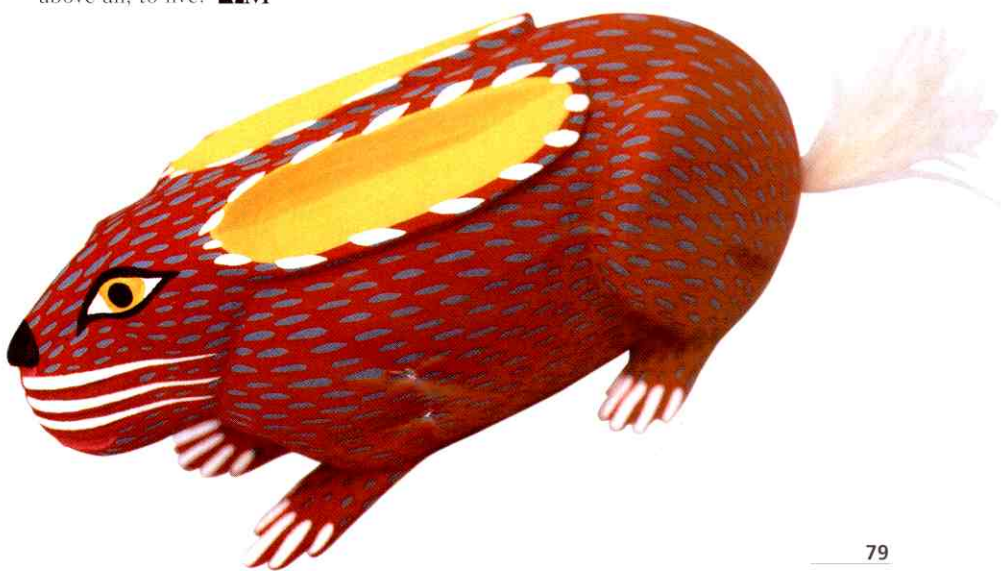
<sup>5</sup> The word "*alebrije*" began to be used to refer to Pedro Linares' figures and later was applied to the figures made in Oaxaca, despite the difference in the materials used. [Editor's Note.]

<sup>6</sup> The word *ladino* means literally an indigenous person who has left behind his/her indigenous culture and adopted that of the Europeans; for historical reasons, in common parlance, it has come to mean someone sly, dishonest or crafty. [Translator's Note.]

<sup>7</sup> Carlos Montemayor, *Arte y trama en el cuento indígena* (Mexico City: FCE, 1998), p. 113.

<sup>8</sup> Mijaíl Bajtín, *La cultura popular en la edad media y el renacimiento* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1974), p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Octavio Paz, *Los privilegios de la vista* (Mexico City: FCE, 1989), p. 102.





Hay pasiones que desconocen el tiempo...

10 AÑOS • 50 PREMIOS • 45 NÚMEROS

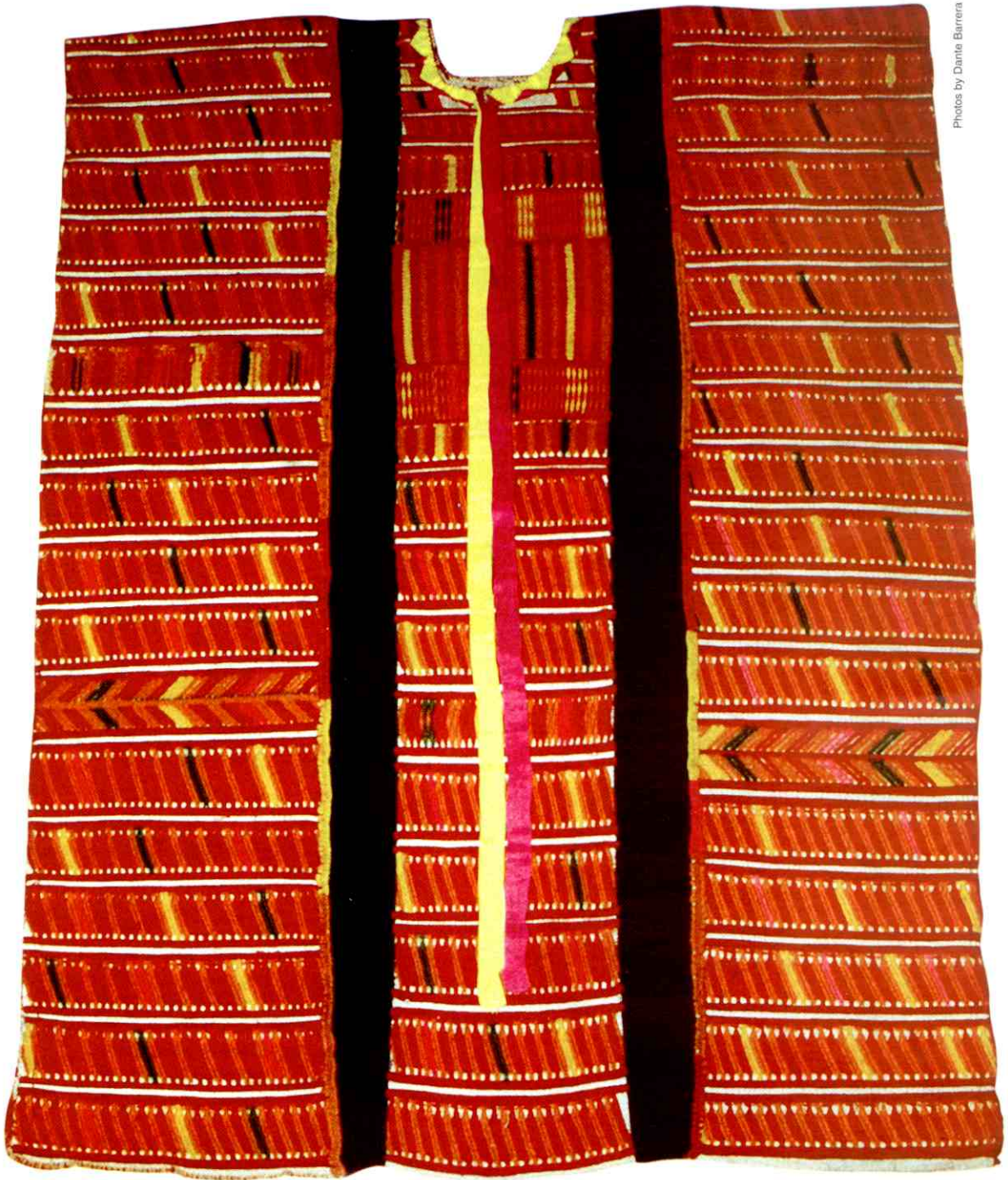
*Artes de México* cumple diez años y, como aquel día en que reinició su vida editorial, su vocación se alimenta de las mismas pasiones:

*fascinación* por los enigmas, *complicidad* con la innovación, *debilidad* por la belleza

*La pasión se comparte*

ARTE  
DE MEXI





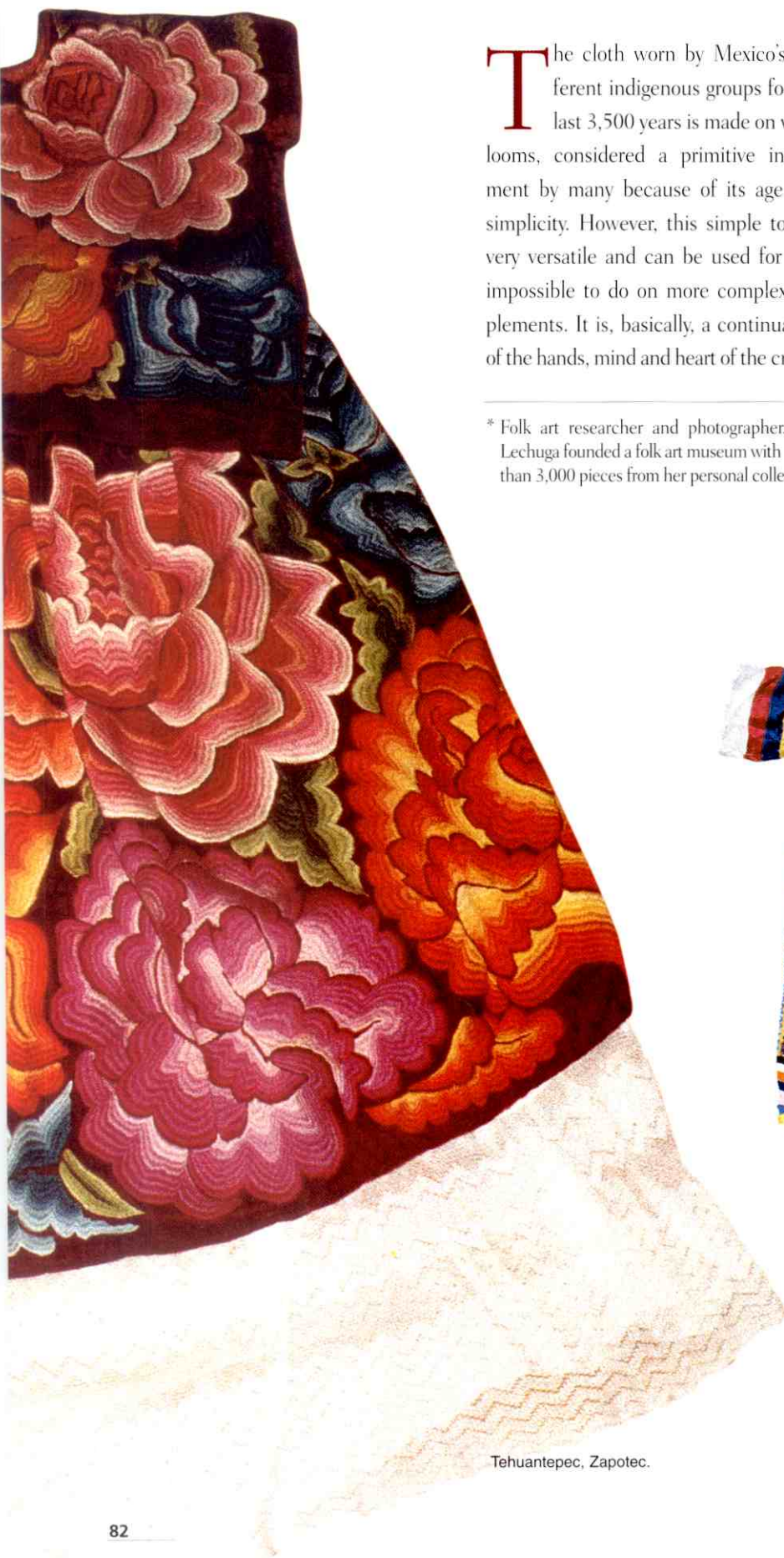
Photos by Daniele Barrera

San Martin Itunioso, Trique.

# Oaxaca's Dazzling Textiles

*Ruth Lechuga\**





The cloth worn by Mexico's different indigenous groups for the last 3,500 years is made on waist looms, considered a primitive instrument by many because of its age and simplicity. However, this simple tool is very versatile and can be used for jobs impossible to do on more complex implements. It is, basically, a continuation of the hands, mind and heart of the crafts-

\* Folk art researcher and photographer, Ms. Lechuga founded a folk art museum with more than 3,000 pieces from her personal collection.

Tehuantepec, Zapotec.

women who use it to produce the enormous variety of fabrics and designs that flow from each people's tradition. From time immemorial, women have been responsible for clothing themselves and their families.

On the other hand, the colonial or pedal loom, introduced by the Spaniards, is operated by men. On it they make overcoats, serapes, blankets, fabric for tablecloths and other items of clothing, many of which are made with wool, also brought originally from Europe. This division of labor continues today.

The state of Oaxaca boasts the greatest number of ethnic groups in all of



Usila, Chinantec.

Mexico: 15 languages are spoken, with numerous dialects derived from them. A great many of these groups conserve their traditional dress, which varies from one town to another.

Some items of clothing which are still used are of pre-Hispanic origin. Women habitually wear a *huipil*, an *enredo* and a



girdle. The *huipil* is a piece of fabric with an opening in the center for the head, which covers the torso. Usually it is sewn at the sides underneath the arm hole, making a sort of tunic differing in length according to the region. The *enredo* is a rectangle of cloth wound around the waist, kept in place with a girdle.

In some places, a blouse has substituted the *huipil* and a skirt, the *enredo*. A shawl or other length of cloth is often used as the finishing touch for the outfit.

The most widely known Oaxacan apparel is the dress of Zapotec women from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Formal attire consists of an embroidered *huipil* that reaches to the waist and a wide skirt, decorated to match the *huipil*; the skirt has a white lace flounce along the bottom, pleated and heavily starched. When the railroad was completed in 1907, silk, velvet and other lavish imported fabrics began to arrive in the isthmus, and the women stopped using their waist looms, turning their hands to embroidering their clothing. At first, they imitated the way the *huipil* was made with three panels and two vertical embroidered bands. Soon another horizontal line was added, near the edge of the *huipil*. The embroidery on both *huipil* and skirt gradually enlarged until today, when they cover almost the entire garment. The designs are floral or geometric; the latter all have names and new ones are often invented. They are done by hand or on a sewing machine, and the women have become enormously skilled in this technique.

For large parties and going to church, the *huipil grande*, or "large *huipil*," made of lace, with a gathered flounce around the neckline and another at the hem, used to be worn. This was used to cover the

head in different ways, according to the occasion. This garment is almost unknown now, but an 1831 drawing shows a woman wearing a *huipil grande* whose neckline flounce frames her face and falls about her body. It also shows the woman wearing an *enredo*. This kind of *enredo* was still worn by older women in the 1960s and was woven on a pedal loom. Dress *enredos* were woven of cotton dyed blue with indigo for the warp and purple with sea snail for the woof.

Daily dress for *tehuanas*, or women from Tehuantepec, consists of the same kind of *huipil* and a long skirt with a flounce of the same machine-made fab-



Jamiltepec, mestizo.



Zacatepec, Mixtec tacuate.

ric with brightly colored prints, usually in a floral design.

Among the indigenous groups in Oaxaca, it is common to have a party dress and another for daily wear. Bartola Morales, an ethnolinguist of Chinantec origin, says that in her home town, San Lucas Ojitlán, women wear three kinds of *huipiles*: their best, most formal wear for gala occasions, woven exclusively with red fiber, brocaded and embroidered, is worn mainly for weddings. Their second best is worn to parties, almost always has red stripes on a white background and is profusely embroidered with traditional designs. Their daily wear is made out of the least expensive white cotton and covered with designs, many of which represent animals.

In other Chinantec towns, like Valle Nacional, we also find three different kinds of *huipiles*, while in others the women have at least two kinds. Of the Chinantec *huipiles*, special mention should be made of those from San Felipe Usila: after they are made, their beautiful brocade designs are partially hidden with a purple dye called fuchsine.

In the Mixtec region along the coast, women used to go naked above the waist while working in their homes or patios. Since about 1960, perhaps due to the building of the coastal highway and the way the women were mocked because travelers were unfamiliar with this tradition, little by little it has become usual to wear an apron covering the breasts. When they go to the market or any other far off place, they cover themselves with a square piece of cloth, sometimes made of simple broadcloth and, in some towns like Pinotepa Nacional, Pinotepa de Don Luis and Mechoacán, woven on a waist





loom and finely embroidered along the seams. This piece of clothing is called a *huipil de tapar*, or “covering huipil.” An *enredo*, in this region called a *posahuanco*, and a girdle, complete the outfit. The *posahuanco* is one of Mexico’s most extraordinary textiles: the design consists of horizontal blue, red and purple stripes, decorated with small diamonds and zigzag lines. For the finest *posahuancos*, the purple thread is dyed with sea snail, the blue with indigo, and the red is *hiladillo*, a silk fiber that used to be dyed with cochineal. Because cochineal is so scarce today, often the *hiladillo* is dyed with fuchsine.

Silk, introduced by the conquest, was enormously popular during the Viceroyalty, but for different reasons fell into disuse. Mixtec silk, known as *hiladillo*, was considered of a quality equal to Chinese silk, and it is still made in a few Mixtec and Zapotec towns in the mountains.

In the coastal Mixtec region, when a woman gets married, she wears a special *huipil*, completely different from her daily wear. Each town has its own traditional design for these special outfits, but all are extraordinarily beautiful. On her wedding day, the bride puts the *huipil* over her head, but it is only folded over her shoulders: she does not put her arms through the armholes. After

the ceremony, she puts it carefully away and never wears it again. On the day of her death, the same *huipil* is used as her shroud, and only then are her arms put through the armholes. During carnival, however, when a man plays a female character in the traditional dance, he wears the town’s best *posahuanco* and wedding *huipil*.

In this region, men’s dress has been the same for a long time: a wide straight shirt called a *cotón*, a kind of short *huipil* with sleeves, and ankle-length trousers. Both these items are made on a waist loom out of white cotton, although in some places they are made of *coyuchi*, a cotton native to the Americas that comes in different shades of brown without being dyed. Each town’s *cotones* boast some special detail, like thin lines differing in color according to their use. For ceremonies, they are decorated with stripes of a distinctive color, sometimes made of *caracol* cotton or *hiladillo*. In Santa María Zacatepec, men’s clothing consists of short trousers and a very long *cotón* open at the sides with many animals embroidered on the bodice. The



Huautla de Jiménez, Mazatec.

Mazatlán, Mixe.



*cotón* is gathered over the girdle, so it looks like a sort of bag.

The Mixe people live in a large area that goes from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to the cold highlands, and therefore their clothing varies noticeably from one town to another. However, much of the rich variety of this ethnic group's *huipiles* has disappeared and is about to be lost.

The Zapotecs of the Sierra de Juárez mountains, the Mazatecs, the Amuzgos, the Triquis and the inhabitants of the highland Mixtec region, also wear a wide variety of *huipiles* that, depending on their location, are made of thin cotton, cotton with wool brocade or pure wool. For example, in Santa María Cuquila and Ocotepéc, towns located in a cold region, women's daily wear is a wool *huipil*, but for parties, they wear cotton ones. The designs vary widely from one ethnic group to another. In the Sierra de Juárez mountains, clothing is mainly white, and sometimes the only touch of color is a girdle of silk made in San Pedro Cajonos and dyed with fuchsine. The Amuzgos and Mazatecs prefer floral designs, decorated with brocades in the first case and embroidered in the second. The Triquis and the inhabitants of some towns in the Mixtec highlands weave a series of horizontal stripes and a rich variety of figures into their long, wide *huipiles*.

Women from other regions have substituted blouses for the traditional *huipil*. In San Pablo Tlaltepéc the blouses sport a gathered border under the bust, usually embroidered with animal figures. Other blouses have embroidery around the neckline and the sleeves. Special mention should be made of the Chatina women's blouses, embroidered in bright colors, and of the black and mestiza women of the

Mixtec coastal areas who decorate their party blouses with beadwork.

Lastly, we should emphasize the importance of dyes. The Huave women of San Mateo del Mar dye their yarn with mangrove bark and other plants and weave on their waist looms beautiful napkins with pictures depicting their lives and surroundings. The most important dyes are indigo, cochineal and sea snail, all native to the Americas.

Indigo also existed in Europe. However, a large variety is native to our lands and can be cultivated in tropical, sandy soil. After cutting, it is rusted and extracted in special tubs. The result is a sort of intense, stony blue. Artisans who use this dye in far off places never imagine that it comes from a plant.



Pinotepa de Don Luis, Mixtec.



Tehuantepec.

Cochineal, otherwise called cactus lice, is a parasite that nests in the nopal plant. It looks like little white balls that, when squashed, release an intensely red liquid. Only certain kinds of nopal are good for cultivating the cochineal, and they need special care, like protection from rain and wind. The dye is obtained by drying and grinding the insects, but a great many cochineal are needed for dyeing a single garment, making it very expensive and difficult to obtain. During the colonial period, cochineal exports were second only to silver. A large variety of hues can be made, from brick red to purple, depending on the fixer used.

The so-called "snail dye" is obtained from a mollusk that nests in rocks along the Pacific Coast. The dyers take the already spun cotton to the coast and when they find the right kind of snail, they remove it brusquely from the rocks and blow on it; the mollusk excretes a few drops of a colorless liquid that the workmen rub directly onto the yarn. When exposed to the sun, the thread turns yellow, then bright green and finally a very firm purple color. The snail is returned to its place so that the dyers, who travel up and down the coast can return and "milk" the same snails again. They work only from November to February, respecting the sea snail's reproductive cycle to guarantee the survival of the provider of this extraordinary dye.

Oaxacan textiles testify to the enormous creativity and industriousness of the state's artisans, based on deeply rooted ancient traditions. Continuing to wear distinctive clothing is a sign of the firm decision of their makers and wearers to keep their thousand-year-old identity alive. ■■■





Dante Barrera

## SANTO DOMINGO GRANDE

The Dominicans arrived in the province of Guaxaca in 1529, the same year that the first mayor of Antequera, Juan Peláez de Berrio, took office. He ordered Alonso García Bravo, who had laid out Mexico City, to plan Villa de Antequera, now known as the city of Oaxaca. One of the first constructions to go up was the monastery of the preaching friars which would be known as San Pablo or Santo Domingo Soriano. The remains of this building, although substantially modified, are still extant on the eastern side of the city's main plaza.

In 1558, the Dominicans acquired the lands where they built a new monastery, known in the records as Santo Domingo Grande. Since construction work was very irregular, it did not begin again until 1575, but it then continued well into the seventeenth century until the building was finished. When first inhabited in 1608, the building still had no doors or windows, and the cloister's monumental staircase and the choir had yet to be built. Severe, frequent earthquakes in the area rendered San Pablo uninhabitable. The new cloister itself had to be rebuilt three times before 1669 for the same reason.

In the last decade of the sixteenth century, the Dominicans of New Spain had divided into two pro-

vinces. Santo Domingo was the headquarters of the new Dominican province San Hipólito Mártir. Its extensive jurisdiction was soon covered with curacies or houses not classified as monasteries because they had few friars living in them. During the colonial period, the friars had as many as 70 curacies in the two nations of Oaxaca, the Zapotec nation and the Mixtec nation. Santo Domingo Grande was built with the resources of these houses and the allotment of indigenous labor.

From 1812 on, the building was used by the military, although the friars still lived there. The Reform Laws of the mid-nineteenth century turned the building completely over to the military. Under Bishop Eulogio Gregorio Gillow, in 1895, the order recovered the church and the Rosario Chapel from the government. The former cavalry barracks on the southwest corner of the perimeter were built in 1909. The cloister was turned into a museum in 1972, restoration began on the rest of the former monastery in 1994 when the army vacated it to occupy new quarters and, in 1998, it was finally inaugurated as a cultural center. **MM**

*Manuel Esparza*  
**Historian**





Photos by Dante Barrera

## THE SANTO DOMINGO CULTURAL CENTER

*Amelia Lara\* Isabel Grañén\*\* Manuel Velasco\*\*\**

The ex-Convent of Santo Domingo de Guzmán may be the largest and most important colonial building still standing in Mexico and probably in all of the Americas, for its size, artistic value and the role it played as a center for spreading the gospel and culture in what is now the state of Oaxaca. Santo Do-

mingo is part of the historic downtown area of the city of Oaxaca, declared a world heritage treasure by the United Nations in 1987.

Construction began on the convent—in contemporary terms, a monastery—in the mid-sixteenth century and continued until the beginning of the seventeenth. Eventually, it covered 40,000 square meters of land. During the colonial period, Santo Domingo was the center for spreading the Christian Gospel in

a state practically monopolized by the Dominicans.

After independence and the disentailment of church holdings with the Reform Laws, the building's inhabitants were evicted and it was occupied by the armed forces. The church itself was closed for use in 1866 and reopened in 1902, but the monastery building continued in the hands of the Mexican army. Parts of it were gradually given back until the army vacated the building definitive-

\* General Coordinator of the Santo Domingo Cultural Center. \*\* Director of the Friar Francisco de Burgoa Library. \*\*\* Director of the Oaxaca Cultures Museum.



ly in 1993, and it was designated for cultural purposes.

Architectural and furniture restoration, museological planning and historical, anthropological and environmental research was carried out for four years thanks to joint efforts by the state and federal governments, the business community and civil society.<sup>1</sup>

Restoring the original appearance of the building took more than 50 months of work, including the repair of at least 6,000 square meters of construction and 10,000 square meters of surface. Old construction techniques used by the Dominicans in the sixteenth century were recovered, and a series of trades almost completely lost to Oaxacan artisans and workers, like blacksmithing, stonemasonry and plastering, were retrieved from oblivion.

One of the outstanding parts of the restoration of Santo Domingo is the refurbishment of 6,000 square meters of vaults, almost half of the original amount. A large interdisciplinary team was needed to do the job, including archeologists,

architects and historians. They researched both in the Oaxaca and Mexico City archives and by taking samples of the building's walls and floors to see what it was originally like in order to justify historically all the architectural reconstruction that was done.

The Santo Domingo Cultural Center finally opened its doors to the public July 24, 1998. It houses four institutions: the

Oaxaca Cultures Museum, the Oaxaca Historical Ethnobotanical Garden, the Friar Francisco de Burgoa Library and the Journalist Néstor Sánchez H. Publications Library. In addition, the center has areas for lectures, congresses, seminars, temporary exhibits, concerts, etc.

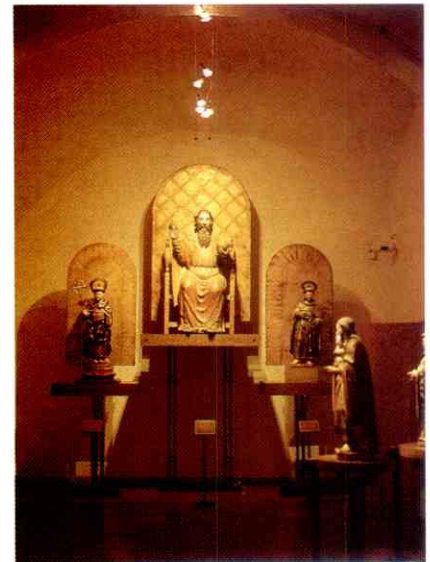
The building's upper floor holds the Oaxaca Cultures Museum. Its 14 permanent exhibition rooms and 13 themat-



Restoring the building took more than 50 months of work.



The Oaxaca Cultures Museum offers visitors a broad overview of the state's history and development.





ic rooms use a new museological language to offer visitors a broad overview of the state's history and development.

In this new area,<sup>2</sup> visitors can see how the permanent presence of indigenous groups has been a determining factor in forging Oaxaca society as it is today. The rooms give us a glimpse of the most outstanding archeological pieces from Monte Albán, Mitla, Yagul, Lambityeco, Dain-

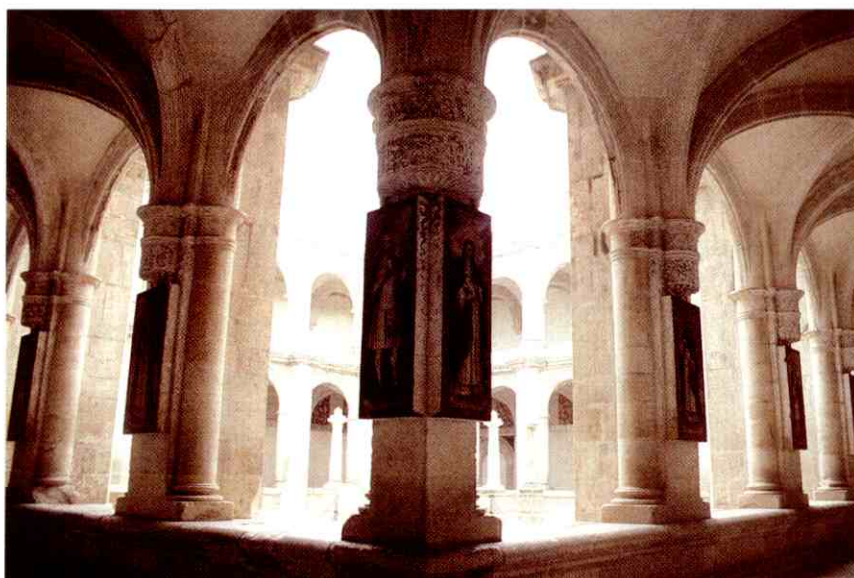
zú, Huijazoo and other pre-Hispanic sites. They also exhibit different objects that show the traits and continuity of the ancient cultures of the Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Mixes, Huaves, Triquis and other ethnic groups of Oaxaca, emphasizing that they are a dynamic part of the state's day-to-day existence.

Organized around a museographical concept that attempts to satisfy the

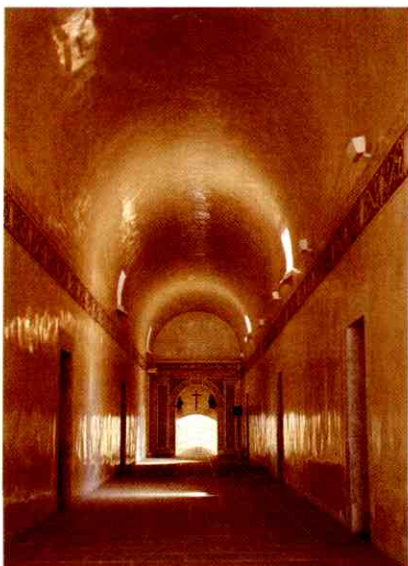
informational requirements of different kinds of visitors (students, tourists, researchers, etc.), one novel feature is the use of computer monitors in the rooms, making going more deeply into specific aspects of Oaxacan history and anthropology agile and even fun.

The museum covers 10,000 years of the state's history, from the rise of the first sedentary settlements and the flowering of the great pre-Hispanic cultures, through the conquest and colonial period, independence and up to the twentieth century. Room three is particularly impressive with its exhibit of the jewelry found in Monte Albán's tomb 7 in the early 1930s, considered one of the most important treasures of all Mesoamerica.

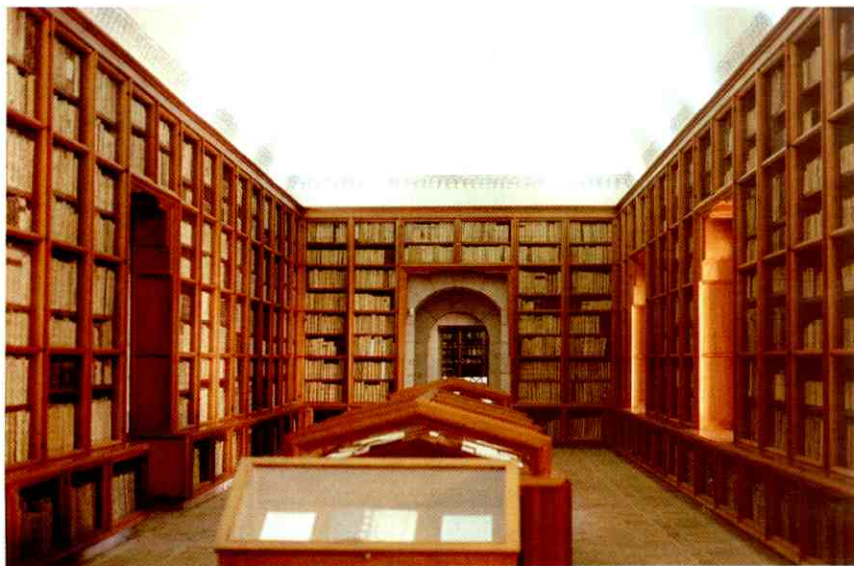
The so-called "interactive rooms" are in rooms five, six and seven, in 13 little cells. Here, the public can touch the objects they are looking at and get more information using multimedia technology. Among the exhibits are different crafts of Oaxaca, like textiles, ceramics, goldsmithing, wood carving and sculpture, tinsmithing, saddlery, etc.; the produc-



Construction techniques from the sixteenth century were recovered to restore the building's original appearance.



The museum's rooms are connected by long hallways.



The library boasts more than 23,000 volumes.



tion of natural dyes, such as cochineal; traditional medicine; music; gastronomy; and the production of beverages like mescal, among others.

The complex also includes the Oaxaca Historical Ethnobotanical Garden that illustrates the abundance and particularities of the state's flora and traditional crops and serves to recover indigenous peoples' knowledge of Oaxaca's flora. (see the "Ecology" section of this issue of *Voices of Mexico*).

Demonstrating in practice the links between biological and ethnic diversity, the garden complements and enriches the Oaxaca Cultures Museum in a relationship unprecedented in Mexico.

Another space in the Santo Domingo Cultural Center is the Friar Francisco de Burgoa Library, which is based on the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca historical collection.

The library occupies what previously was the third order chapel, one of the largest rooms in the ex-monastery. It boasts more than 23,000 volumes, mainly from collections that belonged to different religious orders in Oaxaca, dating from between 1484 and 1940.

These collections were attached in the nineteenth century by the Reform Laws. Among their greatest treasures are 11 incunabula, some Mexican first editions, a manuscript in Latin by Friar Bartolomé de las Casas

and Juan Versor's 1484 Latin work, "Comentarios a la Filosofía de Aristóteles" (Commentaries on Aristotle's Philosophy). It also has large deposits of the papers of Benito Juárez Maza, Matías Romero, Jacobo Dalevuelta and Aurelio Valdivieso, reserved for consultation by scholars.

The Journalist Néstor Sánchez Hernández Publications Library, located in the old cavalry building erected by the Dominican fathers for the Mexican army in 1902 in gratitude for having returned to them the Santo Domingo Church, has two large reading rooms. Here, the reader can consult the main local and national

dailies, as well as publications in other languages. The first room holds magazines and newspapers currently in circulation, and the second, the older ones, outstanding among which are regional newspapers from the mid-nineteenth century.

Center facilities, including an auditorium, are host to exhibits, congresses, fora, concerts, courses, workshops, recitals, performances, book fairs and a wide variety of other activities. A cafeteria and bookstore-gift shop complete the services of a center destined to enrich the artistic and cultural life of the city of Oaxaca. **NMM**



The entrance to the museum.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Participants were the federal government, through the National Council for Culture and the Arts and the National Institute of Anthropology and History; the Oaxaca state government; Fomento Social Banamex, A.C.; and civil society, represented by the Foundation for the Defense and Conservation of Oaxaca's Cultural Patrimony (Pro-Oax). The entire investment came to about 119 million pesos.

<sup>2</sup> Since 1972, part of the ex-convent was used as the Oaxaca Regional Museum under the aegis of the National Institute of Anthropology and History.

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# The Santo Domingo Cultural Center's Historical Ethnobotanical Garden

Alejandro de Avila\*

Since antiquity, plants have been of interest in Oaxaca, which boasts Mexico's most diverse flora. Specialists estimate that the state is host to from 10,000 to 15,000 different plant species. As a point of comparison, all of Europe holds 12,000 species. Oaxaca's botanical personality is also very well defined by its high proportion of endemic genera and species, plants which grow nowhere else under natural conditions. The state's high number of endemic flora and fauna is a reflection of its long, complex geological history. If Mexico is one of the world's most biologically diverse countries, this area in particular has operated as an evolutionary laboratory, one of the planet's "ovens of creation."

The indigenous and mixed ancestry societies of Oaxaca have developed in the framework of this diversity. *Lula'* (in Zapotec), *Nunduwa* (in Mixtec) and *Huaxáac* (in Nahuatl) are different names native to Oaxaca for a very useful tree, the *guaje* (*Leucaena esculenta*), a kind of acacia.<sup>1</sup>

The inhabitants of this heterogeneous, ecologically diverse region learned to deal with a great many plant and ani-

mal species. Archeological evidence points to groups of human beings genetically manipulating several species native to the state for about 10,000 years. In fact, the Western Hemisphere's oldest known vestiges of plant domestication are a few squash seeds found in a cave near Mitla dating from 8,000 years before Christ.

To Oaxaca's natural floristic diversity must be added, then, the genetic diversity that has resulted from careful selection by hundreds of generations of its inhabitants. In addition to keeping an enormous genetic stock alive and evolving in traditional crops, the peoples of Oaxaca possess an extraordinarily rich floristic legacy and an indigenous botany, in some cases just as endangered as the ecosystems they are based on, that has only recently begun to be valued and studied. When indigenous languages and the cultural identity of entire peoples disappear, their vernacular science also dies. This is why documenting and disseminating the botanical knowledge of the cultures of Oaxaca is an urgent need.

The Historical Ethnobotanical Garden was born in the Santo Domingo Cultural Center to do this. Its creation was promoted from 1993 on by Pro-Oax, a civic organization headed by painter Francisco Toledo. With support from the state government, the National Institute of Anthro-

pology and History and Fomento Social Banamex, the garden began to be planted in July 1998. Of the 2.3 hectares that it will eventually occupy, today we have almost one hectare planted with species of Oaxaca's arid ecosystems, including agaves, cacti, yuccas and copal trees, among others. Still pending are species that represent the state's other ecological and cultural regions.

Guided tours of the garden are available for school groups and the general public. It also has a nursery, a herbarium, a library and a lecture/seminar hall. Showing the living links between Oaxaca's biological and ethnic diversity, the Ethnobotanical Garden complements and enriches the Oaxaca Cultures Museum and the Friar Francisco de Burgoa Library. The garden's research, conservation and dissemination projects are also linked to those of Oaxaca's museums. This relationship between a botanical garden and a cultural center is unique in Mexico. ■■■

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> As Manuel Esparza points out, the *guaje* was decisive for the survival of nomads who roamed what is now Oaxaca thousands of years ago: they used its gourds to carry the water they needed to travel long distances. Manuel Esparza, "Doce milenios de historia," *Hechizo de Oaxaca* (Monterrey, Nuevo León: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey-Patria, 1991), p. 19. [Editor's Note.]

\* Director of the Santo Domingo Cultural Center's Historical Ethnobotanical Garden.





Photos by Gerardo Ceballos

A green arboreal frog.  
Many species of frogs are threatened by pollution and the depletion of the ozone layer.

## Mexico's End-of-Century Challenge Preserving Biological Diversity

Gerardo Ceballos\*

“A Mexican named Figueroa... appeared one morning bringing us three superb woodpeckers, magnificent examples of the *Campyphilus imperialis*, extraordinarily large ones. This splendid bird stands two feet high; its plumage is black and white, and the male sports a red crest on its head that stands out particularly against the snow.”<sup>1</sup>

That is how Norwegian anthropologist Carl Lumholtz described the imperial woodpecker at the beginning of the century. Considered the largest woodpecker in the world, this bird lived exclusively in the foothills of Mexico's Sierra Madre Occidental, from Sonora to Michoacán. Unfortunately, it is now only a

memory perpetuated in chronicles of old books and on museum shelves. No longer can anyone enjoy the spectacle of these birds among the pines on lands broken by deep ravines and jagged



Habitat destruction is causing the extinction of species like the black-tailed prairie dog.

mountains. One by one the *pitorreales*—a name they were known by locally—disappeared, exterminated by intense logging and hunting. It is likely that the last imperial woodpecker spent months, perhaps years in an intense, fruitless search for other specimens of his or her kind until one clear morning, like many others in those mountains, it took its last breath. Except for a small group of scientists, the world took no notice of its extinction. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated case, and it is representative of one of the most severe environmental problems in the history of humanity: the loss of biological diversity.

In the last four centuries, more than 400 species of vertebrates and hundreds of invertebrates and plants have become

\* Researcher at the UNAM Ecology Institute.



extinct. These figures speak for themselves, but they pale when compared with today's rate of extinction. Despite there being no precise figures because of the problem's complexity, thousands of species become extinct every year; some approximations put the figure at 50,000. At the same time, thousands, perhaps millions of species are endangered. The overwhelming, seemingly endless list contains several species of every group of plants and animals, and it gets longer every day.

The causes of extinction vary widely, but they all boil down to a single factor: the sheer magnitude of human activity. Its environmental impact in recent centuries has been severe. Global problems like atmospheric warming, the thinning of the ozone layer, pollution, the destruction of forests and jungles, the desertification of enormous expanses of the planet's surface, and the loss of biological diversity are caused exclusively by the population explosion, the most significant event of the Earth's last 65 million years.

This population explosion, practically unknown until this century, is a recent phenomenon. Scientific and technological advances such as the discovery of vaccines and antibiotics caused a considerable drop in the death rate and the population began to grow rapidly. At the beginning of this century, the Earth had about 1 billion inhabitants; 30 years later, that figure had doubled. By 1970, there were about 3.5 billion human beings on the planet, a number that increased by approximately 70 million yearly. Today, there are 5.9 billion of us, and the yearly increment is 85 million. As incredible as it seems, the human population has grown as much in the last 25 years as it did in the time since the first human being appeared millions of years ago.

Mexico is no exception. Its population has also grown rapidly in this century. In 1910, when the country celebrated the first centennial of independence and the total population was nearly 8 million, enormous stretches of land were unin-

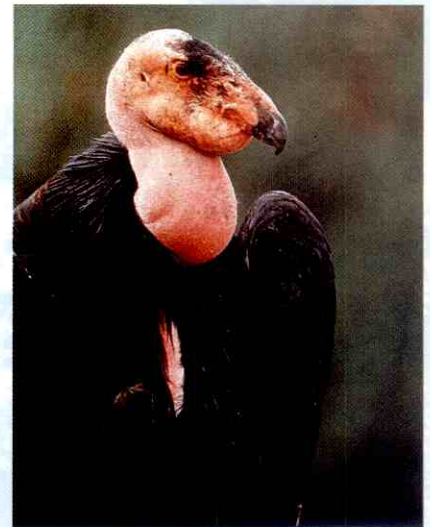
habited. This changed drastically in the following decades. By 1940, there were already 19.7 million Mexicans; by 1990, 81 million; and five years later, 95 million. This makes an increase of over 1000 percent since the beginning of the century. Estimates indicate that this figure will double in the next 25 years, and it is to be expected that the negative impact on the environment will parallel that growth.

The extinction of species has profound biological, cultural and economic implications. The history of the evolution of humanity and the development of rites, art and customs have been intimately linked to nature's diversity. Therefore, the impoverishment of biological resources limits the possibilities for cultural enrichment and diversification. Nevertheless, the importance of preserving biological diversity can only be appreciated in its true magnitude if we look at its role in natural systems and the services it offers to humanity. Biological



Toucans are among the many species of birds affected by illegal pet trade.





The Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) and the California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) became extinct in the wild.

diversity is the basis for the structure and functioning of nature. Each species is like a cog in an extremely complex series of interactions among them and their physical and biological environment. The progressive disappearance of species, that is, of the cogs, first weakens and then impedes the correct functioning of biological systems.

Under normal conditions, human beings gather an enormous variety of benefits—called nature's services—from natural ecosystems. The long list of environmental services includes the maintenance of the proportions of gases in the atmosphere; control of the hydrological cycle that provides fresh water; provision of products for agriculture, food, raw materials, medicine and industrial processes; the purification of the air and water; the mitigation of floods and droughts; the detoxification and decomposition of waste; the generation and renovation of the soil, as well as the maintenance of its fertility; the pollination of crops and natural vegetation; the control of major pests that endanger crops; the dispersal of seeds; the translocation of nutrients; protection

from the Sun's ultraviolet rays; the stabilization of the climate; and the moderation of extreme temperatures, wind and waves. Clearly, the reasons for preserving biological diversity are not only philosophical, moral, religious and ethical, but above all, pragmatic.

Mexico, a country of legendary cultures, described in the nineteenth century by German scientist Alexander von Humboldt as a biological paradise, is suffering today from one of the world's most severe extinction problems. The situation of Mexican flora and fauna is extremely precarious: around 25 percent of all the vertebrates, almost 750 species, are in danger of extinction. Many of them, like the 300 remaining scarlet macaws scattered throughout the Lacandon Jungle, or the perhaps 500 *vaquita* porpoises still swimming in the dun-colored waters of the upper Gulf of California, are at imminent risk of extinction if intensive programs to preserve them are not established.

Like the imperial woodpecker, at least 44 other vertebrate species have become extinct in Mexico during this century, among them the Mexican grizzly bear,

the Mexican wolf, the sea otter, the Guadalupe *caracara*, the California condor, the passenger pigeon and the Salado shiner (Table 1). What is worse, no one knows how many plant or invertebrate species have been lost without even being registered by science.

The anthropogenic causes of the extinction of species can be classified as direct and indirect activities. The former are those that, like trafficking in animal species, illegal hunting and eradication programs, that expressly seek to obtain a species with desirable characteristics like its fur or flesh, or to eliminate "undesirable" species like pests or predators. This kind of activity has caused the extinction of species like the Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) and the Mexican grizzly (*Ursus arctos*).

Indirect activities include pollution, deforestation and fragmentation of natural environments. These activities do not have as their express object any particular species, but they do affect flora and fauna simultaneously and are the main cause of the disappearance of many species world- and nationwide. For exam-





Wood storks are threatened in Mexico.



Many species of reptiles endemic to Mexico, like the skink, are sold illegally in the U.S. and Europe.

ple, the deterioration of the environment precipitated by the destruction of enormous stretches of natural habitats with the rapid advance of the agricultural, forest, cattle raising and urban frontiers, seriously endangers the perpetuation of entire ecosystems and thousands of plant and animal species. It is estimated, for example, that approximately 700,000 hectares of land are deforested every year in Mexico, putting it among the countries of the world with the highest rates of deforestation.

More than three decades ago, celebrated naturalist A. S. Leopold summed up the situation, saying, "Mexico is facing an enormous and difficult problem in the conservation of its resources. No palliative measure will solve it. What is required is a nationwide effort... The conservation of wild fauna is impossible without paying attention to other resources—soil, forests and water... The future... will be determined in the final analysis, by the country's response to the challenge of conservation."<sup>2</sup>

Leopold's appreciation was correct. Actually, conservation of biological diver-

sity should be the priority in Mexico's natural resource management. Conservation and development should not clash since there can be no long-term harmonious development if natural resources deteriorate. The conservation of Mexico's biological riches is important for philosophical, ethical, moral, biological, cultural, economic and social reasons. This wealth represents an enormous source of economic resources which can be transformed into noticeable improvements in the quality of life and well being of all Mexicans. However, conservation of Mexico's natural resources is only being carried out thanks to the efforts of a small group of people and institutions and is insufficient. For example, only between 3 percent and 4 percent of Mexico's territory is included in the National System of Protected Areas. Despite some advances in the last six years, the situation in protected areas is critical: most reserves have severe problems of land tenure, human settlements, illegal logging, fires, hunting and lack of infrastructure.

Government and society must join forces to create a national plan for the con-

servation of biological diversity. A plan of this kind would make it possible to know in detail the country's biotic resources and determine development strategies compatible with the conservation of these resources, particularly with the long-term maintenance of endangered species. This would be only the first step in consolidating conservation efforts and in demonstrating that despite a complex environmental situation, the necessary vision exists to adopt measures aimed at correcting the problems. The federal government's development model requires profound revisions to minimize damage to the environment and harmonize it with rational management and long-term conservation of natural resources. This is probably one of the most outstanding challenges that both society and government must meet in the twenty-first century. **NM**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Carl Lumboltz, *El México desconocido* (1902; reprint, Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> A.S. Leopold, "Fauna silvestre de México," *IMEFNAR* (Mexico City) (1965).

TABLE 1

Vertebrate species exterminated or that have become extinct in the last century in Mexico. Most of the species have disappeared due to a change in or the destruction of their habitat, hunting and the introduction of exotic species.

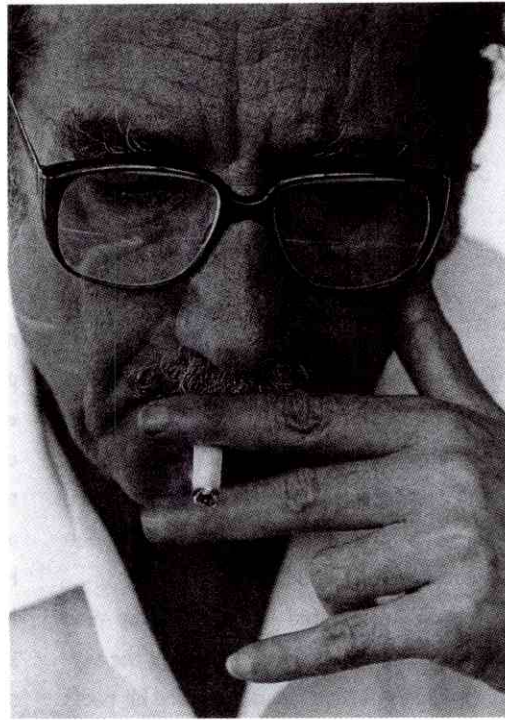
Species		Causes			
Common name	Species	OV	DH	IES	OR
<b>FISH (21 in all)</b>					
Shovelnose sturgeon	( <i>Scaphyrhynchus platyrhynchus</i> )	-	X	-	-
*Ameca shiner	( <i>Notropis amecae</i> ) ©	-	X	X	-
*Phantom shiner	( <i>Notropis orca</i> )	-	X	-	X
*Durango shiner	( <i>Notropis aulidon</i> )	-	X	-	X
*Salado shiner	( <i>Notropis saladonis</i> )	-	X	-	-
*Potosi pupfish	( <i>Cyprinodon alvarezii</i> ) ©	-	X	X	-
*Violet pupfish	( <i>Cyprinodon ceciliae</i> )	-	X	-	-
*Memorial pupfish	( <i>Cyprinodon inmemorian</i> )	-	X	-	-
*Longfinned pupfish	( <i>Cyprinodon longidorsalis</i> ) ©	X	-	-	-
*Parras pupfish	( <i>Cyprinodon latifasciatus</i> )	-	X	-	-
*Catarina pupfish	( <i>Megupsilon aporus</i> ) ©	-	X	X	-
*Stumptooth minnow	( <i>Stypodon sygnifer</i> )	-	X	-	-
*Parras charcodon	( <i>Characodon garmani</i> )	-	X	-	-
*Graceful priapella	( <i>Priapella bonita</i> )	-	X	X	-
*Endorheic chub	( <i>Evarra tlahuacensis</i> )	-	X	-	-
*Plateau chub	( <i>Evarra engelmanni</i> )	-	X	-	-
*Mexican chub	( <i>Evarra bustamantei</i> )	-	X	-	-
Golden skiffia	( <i>Skiffia francesae</i> ) ©	-	X	-	-
Tequila splitfin	( <i>Zoogeneticus tequila</i> )	-	X	X	?
Colorado squawfish	( <i>Ptychocheilus lucius</i> )	-	X	-	-
Razorback sucker	( <i>Xyrauchen texanus</i> )	-	X	-	-
<b>BIRDS (11 in all)</b>					
*Imperial woodpecker	( <i>Campephilus imperialis</i> )	X	X	-	-
Carolina parakeet	( <i>Conuropsis carolinensis</i> )	X	-	-	-
Passenger pigeon	( <i>Ectopistes migratorius</i> )	X	X	-	-
Whooping crane	( <i>Grus americanus</i> )	X	X	-	-
Trumpeter swan	( <i>Cygnus buccinator</i> )	X	X	-	-
California condor	( <i>Gymnogyps californianus</i> )	X	X	-	X
Eskimo curlew	( <i>Numenius borealis</i> )	X	-	-	-
*Guadalupe Island petrel	( <i>Oceanodroma macrodactyla</i> )	-	-	X	-
*Guadalupe caracara	( <i>Polyborus lutosus</i> )	X	-	-	-
*Slender-billed grackle	( <i>Quiscalus palustris</i> )	-	X	-	-
*Socorro dove	( <i>Zenaida graysoni</i> ) ©	-	-	X	-
<b>MAMMALS (12 in all)</b>					
Mexican wolf	( <i>Canis lupus baileyi</i> )	X	-	-	-
Mexican grizzly bear	( <i>Ursus arctos</i> )	X	-	-	-
Sea otter	( <i>Enhydra lutris</i> )	X	-	-	-
Northern river otter	( <i>Lontra canadensis</i> )	X	X	-	-
Caribbean monk seal	( <i>Monachus tropicalis</i> )	X	-	-	-
Elk	( <i>Cervus elaphus</i> )	X	-	-	-
*San Quintín kangaroo rat	( <i>Dipodomys gravipes</i> )	X	-	-	-
*Todos Santos Island woodrat	( <i>Neotoma anthonyi</i> )	-	-	X	-
*Coronados Island woodrat	( <i>Neotoma bunkerii</i> )	-	-	X	-
*Tres Mariás Island rice rat	( <i>Oryzomys nelsoni</i> )	-	-	X	-
*San Pedro Nolasco deer mice	( <i>Peromyscus pembertonii</i> )	-	-	-	X
*Angel de la Guarda deer mice	( <i>Peromyscus guardia</i> )	-	-	X	-

OV= overkilling    DH= Destruction and modification of the habitat    IES= Introduction of exotic species    OR= Other reasons

\* Indicates that a species is endemic to Mexico

© Indicates a species surviving only in captivity





Reprinted courtesy of Jaime Sabines' family

## The Lovers Are in Mourning<sup>1</sup>

Mario del Valle\*

Poet Jaime Sabines died March 19 this year. Clerks, students, pedestrians, housewives and secretaries are in mourning. The president, officials, merchants, entrepreneurs, workers, hermits, poor and rich alike, academics and rogues are all in mourning. *The lovers* are in mourning. His readers are in mourning. "For this we all weep," to paraphrase Shelley.

Jaime Sabines did not want official remembrances or massive demonstrations for his funeral. This simple, forceful man preferred a discrete, family burial. He took a ferocious joy in life that inspired profound reflections on love and death throughout his work.

Poetry and literature owe much to Sabines. A poet of simple words, he abom-

inated "literary-ness," but that did not keep him from being a baroque and allegorical writer. He expanded the tradition of the great poets of the Americas, plumbing the depths of human experience. Sabines fortified the poetic character of modern Spanish which Rubén Darío had created.

I met Jaime Sabines in mid-1965, at the house of some mutual friends who had a horse ranch near Texcoco. Jaime, who was working at the time as a feed salesman, often visited his friends and clients in the area. Sabines dedicated his book *Yuria* in 1967 to these devotees of poetry and music, writing, "To Rosita and Carlos Viesca. *Yuria* doesn't mean anything. It is everything: it is love, it is the wind, it is the night, it is the dawn; it could also be a country. You are in *Yuria*. Or perhaps, like a disease, you have

*Yuria*." The dedication comes close to a kind of Baudelairian spleen, and concludes, "*Yuria* is a cup in which other poems may fit. But it is this, this spoiled liquor, that Jaime offers you."

At those occasional, magical parties, Jaime Sabines would read aloud poetry by different authors, and in his own grand style, of course. He modulated his voice, and we would listen to the footsteps of pain, the shadow of loss and the pleasure of joy. The music in the verses of Pablo Neruda, Miguel Hernández or Tagore (in whom he sought "Oriental serenity and tenderness") resonated with grand trumpets and rosy dawns.

In an interview Sabines was asked, "Would you keep writing if you knew you would have no readers?" He answered, "I think I would keep writing, because I don't write for fame or prizes. I write to com-

\* Mexican writer and editor.

municate, to build a bridge from man to man. I write to confess, not in the Catholic sense, but to show my faith in my fellow man. My confession is a simple act of saying *me to you*, and that's enough."<sup>2</sup>

All creation is also reflection, and a reason for living. The poetry of Jaime Sabines is a reflection on the course of human events: "I don't want to convince anyone of anything. Trying to convince someone of something is improper, an offense against his or her freedom of thought. I want to introduce, to show, not to demonstrate. Let every person arrive at truth in his or her own way. Who has the right to say definitively, 'This is so,' if the history of humankind is nothing more than a story of contradictions, trials and searching?"<sup>3</sup>

In 1981, Sabines published *Poemas sueltos* (Loose Poems), a collection of verse and prose. This was the first book to be put out by the publishing house Papeles Privados, which specialized in poetry. By 1981, Sabines had gone 10 years without publishing, though his audience and fame had kept growing. This collection of "loose poems" sold out quickly. Poems like *El peatón* (The Pedestrian), *Sísifo* (Sisyphus), *Caballos de fuerza* (Horse Power), and *Recado a Rosario Castellanos* (Message to Rosario Castellanos) were quickly embraced by readers.

In 1993, Papeles Privados published a trilingual version of *Algo sobre la muerte del Mayor Sabines* (Something about the Death of Major Sabines) in English, French and Spanish, illustrated by painter Rafael Coronel. Then, in 1995, the bilingual, English-Spanish edition of *Pieces of Shadow/Fragmentos de Sombra* took the poet and myself to New York. Sabines, ill for years due to a broken leg with exten-

sive surgical complications, in a show of great fortitude, read a rich selection of his poems in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Poet W.S. Merwin, the anthology's translator, read in English at Sabines' side, giving a serene and emotional performance. Both poets reading together created a magical atmosphere that gave the poetry its truly cathedral dimension. *Pieces of Shadow* was released in the United States and enjoyed a warm reception among U.S. readers.

We celebrated the reading the next day with a helicopter flight over the skyscrapers of Manhattan. It thrilled his poet's soul to see Whitman's Hudson River from that height.

The New York reading infused new life into Jaime Sabines' last years. Other successful recitals followed in Rotterdam, Paris, Madrid, Quebec and other capitals, including several Mexican cities. The world had opened its arms to the poet.

Jaime Sabines was an extraordinary reader of his own poetry. His teacher was poet Carlos Pellicer, also a notable reader of poetry and a friend. Pellicer offered to write a short introduction to Sabines' first book, *Horas*, but Sabines respectfully declined. "Poetry must be its own defense," he said, "It either is or is not poetry." *Horas* was published in 1951, in a modest edition. The volume not only brought forth a grand new style, but also laid the foundation for the greatest Mexican poetry of the last half of the twentieth century.

Sabines' love for life could only be conquered by death, a premonition-like metaphor in almost all his poetry. *Tarumba*, published in 1956, is a book filled with premonitions. Jaime Sabines is both bard and prophet, and as such, he proph-

esies when he asks, "What the hell can I do with my knee, with my leg that's so long and scrawny..." *Tarumba* is the testament to the fall. It predicts the physical pain, and death walks the four cardinal points of this beautiful and intense poem. In whole poems and random verses, poetry changes in time. The poet, who distantly sees the path of his own future through a labyrinth of words, creates an alchemy of days. What a poem predicts truly happens. *El paralítico* (The Paralytic) of 1961 is another example of this. It says, "He came to look and he remained still. He doesn't move and he can't get up. He has a black angel on his shoulder...Even if he wanted to, even if he were crying/ to run, he couldn't. His body / is his enemy, keeps him stuck...A dark lead in his legs,/ slowly he's growing a lead mushroom..." The "Prince Cancer" metaphor, among others, gives form to the profound and dramatic poem *Algo sobre la muerte del Mayor Sabines* (Something about the Death of Major Sabines), yet more proof of the poet's second sight.

Sabines and Juan Rulfo both tell tales of apparitions and disappearances. How many similarities there are between these two! But there are other preferences, other images where Jaime Sabines abbreviates and put his finger on the sore spot. We find many echoes of philosophies and poetics, both ancient and modern. Echoes of Fernando Pessoa, who he read late in life, in the concise baldness of his work. Sabines struggled with Pablo Neruda's influence on his writing, largely due to his overwhelming love for the Chilean writer's poetry. In addition to Dostoevsky, Joyce and Kafka, we also find echoes of *La Biblia* (The Bible), the literary anthology edited



by Cipriano de Valera and Casiodoro Reina. Not erudition, but wisdom.

Jaime Sabines wrote sophisticated poetry, and he did so in a unique way. He was persistent, as seen in *Algo sobre la muerte del Mayor Sabines*. And he was popular, because when confronted with life, he embraced it with the senses and emotions of the common man. He created reality without artifice, "with verses," as Juan José Arreola says, "notable because they are made up of bare words, without facade." The work of Jaime Sabines is not extensive. It is brief. All of his books were republished in only

one volume titled *Otro recuento de poemas* (Other Collected Poems).

Mexico recently suffered the loss of Octavio Paz. Only a few months later, we lost Carlos Illescas, the Guatemalan poet who had made Mexico his home. This March, we lost Jaime Sabines. The work of the great poets endures, and each is different. Jaime Sabines endures in our generation and in those to come. He will live on in the hearts of his readers, those who know the necessity of his verse, and in the hearts of those of us who were honored to know him. Jaime Sabines was loved and admired not only by his own

friends, but by scholars, poets, politicians, musicians and artists and writers in general. But more than anything, he was a poet of the people, a modern poet of his nation. He was a poet who spoke of Man and his times, in the voice of Everyman. **MM**

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This essay was read at the posthumous homage to Jaime Sabines at Mexico City's Fine Arts Palace, March 23, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>Mónica Mansour, *Uno es el poeta. Jaime Sabines y sus críticos* (Mexico City: SEP, 1988).

<sup>3</sup>Jaime Sabines, *Diario semanario y otros poemas en prosa* (Xalapa, Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, 1961).

WHAT THE HELL CAN I DO WITH MY KNEE,  
 with my leg that's so long and scrawny,  
 with my arms, my tongue,  
 with my weak eyes?  
 What can I do in this whirlwind  
 of well-meaning imbeciles?  
 What can I do with the smart rotten ones  
 and with the sweet girls who don't love men but poetry?  
 What can I do with the poets wearing the uniforms  
 of the academy or of communism?  
 What, among hucksters or politicians  
 or the shepherds of souls?  
 What the hell can I do, Tarumba,  
 if I'm neither a saint nor a hero nor a bandit,  
 nor an adorer of art  
 nor a druggist  
 nor a rebel?  
 What can I do if I can do it all  
 and all I want is to look and look?

*Tarumba* (1956)

# THE LOVERS<sup>1</sup>

The lovers say nothing.  
Love is the finest of the silences,  
the one that trembles most and is hardest to bear.  
The lovers are looking for something.  
The lovers are the ones who abandon,  
the ones who change, who forget.  
Their hearts tell them that they will never find.  
They don't find, they're looking.

The lovers wander around like crazy people  
because they're alone, alone,  
surrendering, giving themselves to each moment,  
crying because they don't save love.  
They worry about love. The lovers  
live for the day, it's the best they can do, it's all they know.  
They're going away all the time,  
all the time, going somewhere else.  
They hope,  
not for anything in particular, they just hope.  
They know that whatever it is they will not find it.  
Love is the perpetual deferment,  
always the next step, the other, the other.  
The lovers are the insatiable ones,  
the ones who must always, fortunately, be alone.

The lovers are the serpent in the story.  
They have snakes instead of arms.  
The veins in their necks swell  
like snakes too, suffocating them.  
The lovers can't sleep  
because if they do the worms eat them.

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<sup>1</sup> All poems are reprinted from *Pieces of Shadow*, a bilingual edition of a selection of Jaimes Sabines poems, compiled by Mario del Valle and translated by W.S. Merwin (Mexico City: Papeles Privados, 1995).



They open their eyes in the dark  
and terror falls into them.

They find scorpions under the sheet  
and their bed floats as though on a lake.

The lovers are crazy, only crazy  
with no God and no devil.

The lovers come out of their caves  
trembling, starving,  
chasing phantoms.  
They laugh at those who know all about it,  
who love forever, truly,  
at those who believe in love as an inexhaustible lamp.

The lovers play at picking up water,  
tattooing smoke, at staying where they are.  
They play the long sad game of love.  
None of them will give up.  
The lovers are ashamed to reach any agreement.

Empty, but empty from one rib to another,  
death ferments them behind the eyes,  
and on they go, they weep toward morning  
in the trains, and the roosters wake into sorrow.

Sometimes a scent of newborn earth reaches them,  
of women sleeping with a hand on their sex, contented,  
of gentle streams, and kitchens.

The lovers start singing between their lips  
a song that is not learned.  
And they go on crying, crying  
for beautiful life.

*Horat* (1950)

# Jaime Sabines And Poetic Emotion

Juan Domingo Argüelles\*

When Jaime Sabines died, he was five days away from his seventy-third birthday. He had published the best of his work, a central piece of the Mexican literary canon. In the year 2000, bereft of his physical presence, we will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of his first book. *Horla* was the volume that unveiled this great poet's splendid, intense work.

*Horla* is the door to the apotheosis of Sabines' emotion, and on its first page it delivers the following limpid image of wounding abandonment:

*The dawn came without her.  
He scarcely moves.  
He remembers.*

*(My own eyes, more delicate,  
dream her.)*

*How easy absence is!*

*On the leaves of time  
that drop of day  
slides, trembles.*



Reprinted courtesy by Jaime Sabines' family

Sabines and his wife "Chepita".

The poetry of Jaime Sabines is a touchstone of Mexican culture. It is reread and unreservedly admired by countless readers. Sabines' poetry has opened a better door than that of reading for information, erudition or fashion. It opens up the door of emotion through authentic poetry.

The person who is motivated to read by emotion rather than by gain is much more able to enter the realm of poetry. As Efraín Huerta said, this realm is not to be explored by the pompous or the dispassionate.

Sabines' poetry is a potion, and, as he has said, poetry can be nothing else. "Poetry is discovery, the splendor of life, instantaneous and permanent contact with the truth of humanity. Poetry is a drug taken once; a witch's brew, a vital poison that cast other eyes and hands on man, stripping his skin so he can feel the weight of a quill."<sup>1</sup>

Here is a definition of poetry written by a true poet. Indeed, it is the poet's definition and not that of the theorist. In this, and in his writing for ordinary people, Sabines was similar to Pablo Neruda. It was Neruda, author of *Crepusculario* (Twilight Volume), who said that "poetry is insurrection." He also said, and proved, that subjects for poetry are not only to be found, as some like to think, in the grandeur of books, but also in "the harsh tasks of man."

These truths resemble two other truths that Sabines expressed exactly 40 years ago, when accepting the Chiapas Prize in 1959 in his native state. He said that "one should not live as a poet, but as a man," and that "all poetic art should

\* Poet, essayist and literary critic.



be comprised of and subordinated to the art of living."

Jaime Sabines taught many generations to truly read poetry and not just look at books. Is that nothing? Certainly not, especially because so many read books and do not notice the poetry in front of them. So many also write books in verse, and yet lack the ability to bring poetry to the reader. In their fatuous, mistaken zeal to glitter and dazzle, "they have hidden the light, made bread into coal and words into screws," as Pablo Neruda said.

For many years, Sabines has resided in the best of his readers. We call him the poet of the people because for Sabines, as for any other real poet, emotion broke the spine of the book and freed poetry to wander the streets.

Some poets might wish, in a fleeting moment of vanity, that some far-off reader would remember their verse as what made them feel poetry was necessary. Some might wish not just to be read and reread but to be retained in the heart and memory without needing the book. Some would wish the prestige, whether it be true or false, that spins itself around the name of the poet, to be totally unconnected to the experience.

Jaime Sabines endowed Mexican poetry with a new intensity. He gave it new wings. He turned it away from the fatuous scribbles of little men who write so critics will endorse them and academics will study them. He turned it into a human vocation, that of communication among men. After all, as he asked, "what are poets good for? They serve, like Sisyphus, to push the stone up the hill only to have it fall again, to pick the flower out of the ash pile, to

hurl disenchantment out of the hearts of men."<sup>2</sup>

The poetry of Jaime Sabines opened our eyes to reality. It gave us a timely warning about the dangers of a craft that most people think is all too innocuous. The poetry of Jaime Sabines stripped the skin off its readers so they could feel the weight of a quill. With that, it gave them the gift of emotion and the charm of knowing through the senses.

"Jaime Sabines," wrote Octavio Paz, "is one of the best contemporary poets in the Spanish language. Soon after his first book, he found his voice. It is an unmis-

We call him  
the poet of the people  
because,  
for Sabines, emotion broke  
the spine of the book  
and freed poetry  
to wander the streets.

takable voice, a bit brash and harsh. It is a rolling, dark green stone, marbled by those sinuous, deep lines that the Sun and the seasons etch on craggy heights. Passionate maps, the signs of the four elements, hieroglyphics of blood, bile, semen, sweat, tears and all the other liquids and substances man uses to sketch his own death, or that death uses to sketch our image of man."<sup>3</sup>

In Paz's well known essay "Corazón de León y Saladino" (The Lionheart and Saladin) (1972), included in the book *In/mediaciones* (Immediate Mediations) (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1979) and also

in *México en la obra de Octavio Paz* (Mexico in the Work of Octavio Paz) (1987), edited by Luis Mario Schneider and Paz himself, he talks about some of Sabines' virtues.

"Sabines," he writes, "is an extraordinary poet, a writer of some impressive, unforgettable fragments and many completed poems....Sabines has succeeded in writing poems that have range and complexity. Three unusual qualities of these poetic constructions astonish me: simplicity of line, spontaneity of delivery and solidity of form."<sup>4</sup>

As if these three unusual qualities were insufficient, one should remember what Paz says about Sabines in his *Obras completas* (Complete Works). In the first volume, Paz points out that Sabines belongs to the founding generation of contemporary Latin American poetry, along with José Lezama Lima, Enrique Molina, Nicanor Parra, Roberto Juarroz, Alvaro Mutis, and Paz himself.

In the third volume, Paz says, "It would be tedious to mention all the Latin American poets who, after López Velarde, make prose poetic; six names will suffice: Borges, Vallejo, Pellicer, Novo, Lezama Lima, Sabines."<sup>5</sup>

In the seventh volume, Paz comments, "Mexico went through an empty period somewhere between 1940 and 1950. The great magazines had vanished, the last one being *El Hijo Pródigo* (The Prodigal Son). The generation of *Contemporáneos* (Contemporaries), an island of clarity in a sea of confusion, had fallen silent. Criticism oscillated between revilement and flattery. Only two or three voices in poetry and art stood up to the system and nationalism. The style was 'progressivist,' and the dissident was relegated to 'Now-

heresville.' At the end of this period, a new era was born, and poetry, as usual, heralded the change. A handful of books were enough to make the desert bloom. One of them was *Varia invención* (Other Inventions) by Juan José Arreola; another was *El llano en llamas* (The Prairie Aflame) by Juan Rulfo; yet another was a collection of poetry by Sabines.<sup>6</sup>

Jaime Sabines is a founder of contemporary Mexican poetry; his work has been present and pivotal from the very beginning.

Sabines once wrote, "Poetry exempts no one from human suffering." The spiritual tension throughout his work is to be admired also because it affirms the indubitable truth that, "Poetry will never be excessive." Every reader proves this to him or herself, and the work of Sabines revitalizes and affirms it for us.

From the first to the last, Jaime Sabines is carried away by passion. He is the supreme Mexican poet of emotion. In *Me encanta Dios* (I Just Love God), a beautiful autobiographical poem written in 1993 and published on the last page of his last *Recuento de poemas* (Collected Poems) (1950-1995), he writes, "I just love God. He's a magnificent old man who doesn't take himself seriously. He likes to play, so he plays, and sometimes he gets carried away and he breaks your leg or he crushes you totally." Finally, he reconciles himself: "God's always in a good mood. That's why he's my favorite parent, my best child, my closest brother, the most adored woman, the puppy and the flea, the oldest stone, the softest petal, the sweetest smell, the unfathomable night, the bubbling of light, the source of who I am. God makes me happy; I just love God. God bless God."

"Sabines," wrote Marco Antonio Campos, another Mexican poet, "doesn't just belong to that minority of other poets, critics and literary professors. He belongs to the people. His poems seem to be written for everyone, even for those that put on sterile gloves when it's time to write or those who want their poems to glitter like the curlicues on a baroque altar. The astonishing fact is that Sabines himself has made only the tiniest contribution to his own popularity. Much like Juan Rulfo, another great recluse, he has not led a literary life. The sumptuous vanity of poets and writers, whether deserved or not, has always been almost or completely unbearable for him."<sup>7</sup>

In the words of José Emilio Pacheco, Sabines is one of the few Mexican poets who has truly left a body of work. "An impressive *Recuento* (Collected Poems), and, shall we say, five poems (not necessarily the same for every reader) that are among the greatest of his language and his time. You could not ask or aspire to more, no matter how great your ambitions."<sup>8</sup>

There have been, admittedly, detractors of the robust figure and characteristic greatness of Sabines' work. Sabines' strong masculine tone has come to annoy a few people who confuse poetry with affectation. They do not understand that spiritual authenticity does not hide but rather reveals the masculine principle in men or the feminine principle in women. As Paz says, critique gets confused with revilement, and the cold spirited are irritated by emotions foreign to them and they write about it: they can't reconcile themselves to being passionless but insist on making it public.

Long before those people learned to read, though, Sabines already had readers.

His audience has always grown, because true poetry will find its way in the intelligence and emotion of its audience. To write for the future is a miserable excuse that people use to justify their own failure. They feel bad because no one reads their work, and they blame the supposed ineptitude of the readers.

The poet does not pretend. He writes from what he is, what he feels, what he knows and what he does not know; what he sees and what he dreams. We do not come into this world just to write books. For Sabines, literature "can be work, but also idleness. Poetry is something else: it is a destiny."

Jaime Sabines wrote for the present and the future, and his books have been alive for a long time. They live in the devotion of readers who, with every reading or rereading, rewrite his poems every day. ■■■

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Juan Domingo Argüelles, comp., *El poeta y la crítica: grandes poetas hispanoamericanos como críticos*, Collection Poemas y Ensayos (Mexico City: UNAM, 1998), p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>3</sup> Octavio Paz, "Corazón de León y Saladino," *México en la obra de Octavio Paz* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989) p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>5</sup> Octavio Paz, *Obras completas* vol. 3, *Fundación y disidencia* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica: 1994), p. 247.

<sup>6</sup> Octavio Paz, "Los privilegios de la vista" *Obras completas* vol. 7 (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica: 1994), p. 330.

<sup>7</sup> Marco Antonio Campos, prologue to Jaime Sabines, *Los poemas del peatón* (Québec: Écris des Forges, 1997), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Mónica Mansour, *Uno es el poeta: Jaime Sabines y sus críticos* (Mexico City: SEP, 1988), p. 310.



# THE PEDESTRIAN

It's said, it's rumored, it's asserted in the salons and at  
celebrations by somebody, or a number of people in the  
know, that Jaime Sabines is a great poet.

Or at least a good poet. Or a decent poet, respectable.

Or simply, but really, a poet.

The word reaches Jaime and it makes him happy.

How wonderful! I'm a poet. I'm an important poet.

I'm a great poet.

Convinced of it, he goes out into the street, or comes  
home. Convinced of it. But nobody in the street realizes  
that he's a poet, and even fewer at home. Why don't poets  
have a star on the forehead, or shine in some visible way,  
or have a ray coming out of their ears?

My God, Jaime said. I have to be Papa, or a husband, or  
work in a factory like anybody else, or walk, like anybody else.

A pedestrian.

That's it, Jaime said. I'm not a poet. I'm a pedestrian.

And at that he lies on the bed with the sweet happiness  
of contentment.

*Loose Poems* (1981)

# AT THIS TIME, HERE

I ought to dance to that *danzón* they're playing down  
in the cabaret,  
leave my cooped up room  
and go down dancing among the drunks.  
A man's a fool to lie in bed  
without a woman, bored, thinking,  
just thinking.  
I'm not "starved for love", but I don't want  
to spend every night in a soak,  
staring at my arms,  
or with the light out, making drawings with a lit cigarette.  
Reading, or remembering,  
or admiring my literary status,  
or waiting for something.  
I ought to go down into the empty street  
and with my hands in my pockets, slowly  
go along with my feet, saying to them:  
one, two, three, four...  
This Mexican sky is dark,  
full of cats,  
with frightened stars  
and wrung out air.  
(Last night it had rained, though,  
and turned cool, amorous, thin).  
I ought to spend today crying  
on a wet sidewalk at the foot of a tree,  
or wait for a shameful streetcar  
and shout at it, at the top of my voice.

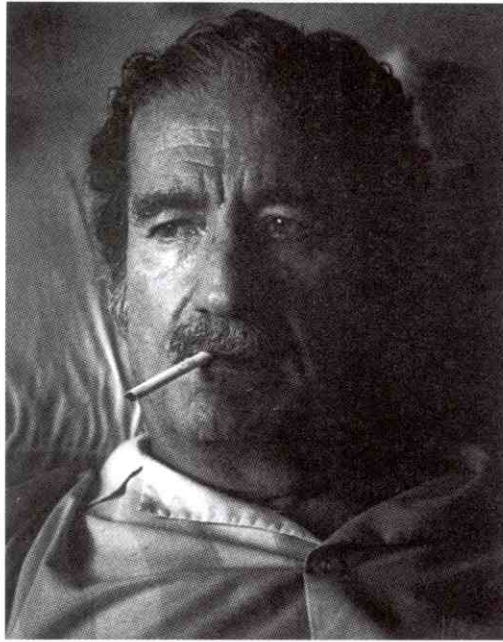


If I had a dog I could pet it.  
If I had a child I would show him my picture  
or tell him a story  
that didn't mean a thing but was long.  
I don't want, now, no I don't want  
to keep lying awake night after night.  
When am I going to get to sleep, when?  
What I want is for something to happen.  
To die, for real,  
or really be fed up,  
or at least have the roof of my house  
fall for a while.

Let the cage tell me about its affair with the canary.  
Let the poor moon that the gypsies still sing to  
and the tender moon of my cupboard  
say something to me,  
talk to me in metaphors the way they're supposed to.  
This wine is bitter.  
I have a beetle under my tongue.

How nice if my room  
were left to itself all night,  
turned into a fool, staring!

*The Signal* (1951)



Reprinted courtesy of Jaime Sabines' family

## On the Death of Jaime Sabines

Jaime Labastida\*

The death of poet Jaime Sabines is no less painful because it was expected. Only a year ago, two other major Spanish-language poets, Octavio Paz and Margarita Michelena, died. Mexico seems to be suddenly falling silent as our great poets, who gave voice to the human condition, abandon and orphan us.

Sabines was a poet of love and death, two inseparable concepts for Man. Few other poets have been able to cast these age-old themes in a new light. Sabines was able to write his most profound poems about death because man exists for death. People think immortality would be delightful. On the contrary, we forget that death allows us the delight of loving and being loved. Only because of death is

mankind able to create art and poetry. The gods have a torturous disease: tedium, the boredom that stems from their own immortality. In that man dies and is conscious of his own mortality, he is able to love.

In *On Myth*, one of his first poems, Sabines wrote, "My mother told me that I cried in her womb./ They said to her: he'll be lucky./ Someone spoke to me every day of my life/ into my ear, slowly, taking their time./ Said to me: live, live, live!/ It was death." In only six lines and two verses, Sabines distills true anguish.

Where is pain born? Where does the need to love come from? Jaime Sabines is often called the loving poet, the last of the romantics, as if his poetry, also known for its supposed populism, were not also profound and wise. The verse just quoted

sounds as if it had been wrenched from the sayings of Heraclitus. As the Ephesian philosopher said, "It is not for men's best that everything goes their way. For men, sickness makes health pleasing, evil makes good pleasing, hunger makes satiety pleasing, work makes rest pleasing." Surely Heraclitus could have added: death makes life pleasing. This is what Sabines tells us. Death shouts in all of our ears every day, softly, with a smooth slowness, for us to live, because from the moment we are born, Nature pronounces an implacable death sentence on us. Sabines knew this in a way few others do. His poetry seems to have a Freudian base, a carefully considered one that the poet has made his own. The poetry of Sabines has been built on the borders of Eros and Thanatos, and from thence comes its profundity.

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\* Mexican poet and essayist.



Sabines told us, appropriately enough, about Pain, "It has been written in the first testament of man:/ do not scorn it because it has much to teach you./ Lodge it in your heart tonight./ At dawn it must go./ But you will not forget what it told you from the cruel shadow." In effect, pain is what teaches us to value life. We must accept suffering for it teaches us.

In the last years of his life, Sabines learned to live with pain. His operations, infirmity and terrible illness did not dishearten him. I can testify to his stoicism,

his serene gallantry in the face of his oncoming death. I also saw how much he desired for Mexico, and especially his home state of Chiapas, a timely and dignified peace.

His modesty moved him to ask for private burial and funeral services, touched only by the grief of his family and intimate friends. He knew what he meant to us, yet something inside of him (perhaps a touch of irony) inspired discretion. The true greatness of the man can also be seen in this silent deed. He always hated

presumption. I am sure that the homage rendered him will bear witness to the grief of the people, who recognized Sabines as its very beloved poet.<sup>1</sup>

I loved him as a brother, and I admired him as a master. **MM**

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup>On the afternoon of April 23, the nation paid homage to Jaime Sabines in the Fine Arts Palace in Mexico City. Writers Angeles Mastretta and Carlos Monsiváis spoke and writers Alí Chumacero and Guillermo Sheridan, actress Ofelia Guilmain and others read poetry. [Editor's Note.]

WHAT A BARBAROUS CUSTOM, THIS BURYING OF THE DEAD!  
Killing them, annihilating them, obliterating them from the face of the earth.  
It's betraying them, depriving them of the chance to revive.

I'm always hoping that the dead will rise up, that they'll  
break out of the coffin and say happily What are you crying about?

So I'm nervous at funerals. They check the sections of the  
lid, they lower it all, they put flagstones on top of it, and  
then dirt, more, more, more, shovel after shovelful, clods,  
dust, stones, stamping on it, packing it down, flattening it,  
there you'll stay, you won't get out of here.

They make me laugh, after that, the crowns, the flowers,  
the crying, the unrestrained kisses. It's a joke. Why did  
they bury him? Why not leave him out to dry until his  
bones talked to us about his death? Or why not burn him,  
or give him to the animals, or throw him into the river?

There ought to be a rest home for the dead, airy and  
clean, with music and running water. There would be at  
least two or three, every day, who would rise up and live.

# Jaime Sabines

(1926-1999)

## Notes for a Biography

Pilar Jiménez Trejo\*

In the last four decades of the twentieth century, Jaime Sabines became Mexico's most widely read poet. Unlike many Spanish-language writers, his verses have been read by thousands upon thousands of people, many of whom know them by heart.

Jaime Sabines Gutiérrez was born on March 25, 1926, in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas. His Lebanese father, Julio Sabines, came to Chiapas in 1914 as a captain in Carranza's army, and later became a major in the Mexican army. His mother was Luz Gutiérrez, a member of the Chiapas aristocracy. He had two older brothers, Juan and Jorge.

His childhood and adolescence were spent in typical Chiapas sobriety. Almost every evening, his father would tell his "three musketeers" stories that his memory called up out of that Arabic dream that lasted *A Thousand and One Nights*. Years later, Jaime Sabines would recognize his family's oral tradition as his first contact with literature.

His interest in poetry was born early; when he was a child, his mother made him recite poems. He knew *El declamador sin maestro* (Teach Yourself to Recite Poetry), an anthology of 114 clas-

sic verses, by heart. He also read the novels by Jorge Isaacs, Victor Hugo, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Honoré de Balzac and Alexandre Dumas. In high school, his brother Jorge, "the writer in the family," and his mother forced him to participate in a student poetry contest. The verses were Jorge's, not Jaime's. He was surprised when he received news that he had won first place. Jaime was 16, and his involvement in this "fraud" made him feel obligated to write. His first poems were printed in the school student newspaper. As the editor of his school newspaper's poetry page, Jaime reveled in the poets who excited him then: Federico García Lorca, Antonio Machado, Miguel Hernández, León Felipe, Walt Whitman, Vicente Huidobro...

Sabines developed into a taciturn young man. In 1945, he had to leave Tuxtla for the hostile environment of Mexico City. He entered medical school, but 3 years of anguish convinced him that medicine was not his vocation. Those were also years of solitude during which he read and wrote madly. *La Biblia* (The Bible, a literary anthology) became his constant companion; he read Neruda, Joyce, Huxley, Nietzsche, Vallejo, Baudelaire, Khayyam and Tagore. He visited Tuxtla for a few months.

In 1949, Sabines returned to Mexico City to study Spanish literature at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He rented a room at 43 Cuba Street, where cabarets and night clubs lit up every night. His companions were a coffee tin, a hot plate, his *Delicados* cigarettes without filters, a radio and the mute company of books. After communing with the volumes surrounding him, the poet would throw himself on the bed and write and write. One of those mornings *Los amorosos* (The Lovers) was born, a poem that showed many of the themes of his future work: love, death, time, joy and the body. In this room, his first book, *Horas*, was born.

It was at this time, during visits to the house of his teacher Efrén Hernández, that Sabines met writers Juan José Arreola and Juan Rulfo. He attended literary gatherings with friends such as Emilio Carballido, Rosario Castellanos and Fernando Salmerón. His second book, *La señal* (The Signal), was published in 1951. While visiting his mother's house over Christmas vacation, he wrote *Adán y Eva* (Adam and Eve), his first long poem which would be published 11 years later.

In 1952, during a visit to his family in Tuxtla, Major Sabines had an accident

\* Mexican writer.



and Jaime had to stay longer. Months later, he married his high school sweetheart Josefa Rodríguez, "Chepita," and he did not return to the university. He took on the running of his brother Juan's fabric store, El Modelo. Behind the counter, while awaiting the birth of his first child, Sabines wrote another long poem: *Tarumba* (1956), "a song of survival." He was visited in his store by other young poets, such as Oscar Oliva, Eraclio Zepeda and Juan Bañuelos, who came to talk about poetry and share a bottle of Castillo rum. In 1959, Jaime Sabines was awarded the literary prize given by the state government of Chiapas. Over a dozen awards soon followed, including the Xavier Villaurrutia Prize, the Elías Sourasky Prize in 1982 and the National Arts and Sciences Award for Linguistics and Literature in 1983.

The poet returned to Mexico City and worked with his brother Juan in a livestock feed factory for 17 long years. In this period, Jaime and Josefa bore and raised their four children: Julio, Judith, Julieta and Jazmín. The writing continued.

In 1961, Sabines published two books: *Diario semanal y otros poemas en prosa* (Weekly Diary and Poems in Prose) and *Poemas sueltos* (Loose Poems). A year later, the UNAM decided to collect his work into the book *Recuento de poemas* (Collected Poems).

At this point, Sabines' father developed cancer and the poet, in response to the pain of his father's oncoming death, began to write the verses that would become one of his most important poems: *Algo sobre la muerte del Mayor Sabines* (Something about the Death of Major Sabines). On September 30, his father died, and Sabines left the poem unfinished. In 1964,

however, he returned to the subject of death and wrote the second part of the poem, which was finally published in 1973, after the publication of *Yuria* (1967) and *Maldiciendo* (Badtime) (1972).

Between 1976 and 1979, Jaime Sabines was an Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) deputy in the Chiapas state legislature. His brother Juan had been elected governor there. In 1977, *Nuevo recuento de poemas* (New Collected Poems) was released by Joaquín Mortiz. Almost 10 years before, the second edition of *Recuento de poemas*, published by the Ministry of Education (SEP), had sold out with a printing of 40,000 copies. Posters printed with his poems were put up in the Mexico City subway.

In 1983, Sabines left politics but decided to continue living in Chiapas, this time in the country. He bought a ranch near the Monte Bello Lakes and called it "Yuria."

In 1986, the UNAM and the INBA organized a tribute to celebrate Sabines' sixtieth birthday. Lectures were given on his work, and the festivities concluded with a poetry reading in which hundreds of his readers gathered. The poet began to divide his time between "Yuria" and Mexico City.

In 1987, Vervuert, a German publishing house, published a Sabines anthology, titled *Dein Körper neben mir* (Your Body Is Beside Me). Other anthologies were published later in Bulgaria, Cuba, the United States, Canada, Chile, France and Spain. Sabines' poems were also included in anthologies of Latin American literature assembled in over 20 countries. Also in 1987, Sabines' brother Jorge died. Months later the poet was reelected as deputy, this time in Mexico City,

and he decided to live in the capital permanently.

In November of 1989, during a visit to Chiapas, Sabines slipped and broke the femur of his left leg. He never recovered completely from the injury and had to go through almost 40 operations because of it.

During the last decade, Sabines spent most of his time convalescing at home. Nevertheless, the poet agreed in the last five years of his life to give various poetry readings attended by thousands of people. Another testament to his popularity is the fact that two years ago the largest telephone company in Mexico published a Sabines anthology with a print run of 500,000 copies.

In his last years, Sabines also traveled extensively in Mexico and around the world, promoting new editions and translations of his work with poetry readings. He is fondly remembered despite his comment, "The highest honor for a poet is to become anonymous. When someone says a poem, a fragment, or a line of Jaime Sabines without knowing who wrote it, that will be Jaime's supreme moment."

On March 19, 1999, Jaime Sabines died, a victim of the "Prince Cancer." He wanted to die at home, under the care of his family. They say that in the days before he died, his blue-green eyes stared out the window in his bedroom at a bougainvillea that was just starting to bloom with the coming of spring.

In the last 10 years, Sabines gave us only one new poem, *Me encanta Dios* (I Just Love God), which illustrates to some degree the struggle (his struggle) with life, though he always knew that "dawn must come." ■■■



Luis Humberto González Silva

## Ricardo Garibay

### *A Pasionario* of Letters

(1923-1999)

In colloquial speech in Bolivia, the name *pasionario* is given to old fighting cocks, the ones that have survived thanks to their courage and passion for life. The comparison may not be the most appropriate, but we could say that Ricardo Garibay Ortega (born in Tulancingo, Hidalgo, January 18, 1923; died in Cuernavaca, Morelos, May 4, 1999) was a fighting cock of letters, a *pasionario*, whose weaknesses were writing, reading and women.

Part of his existence testifies to the first of these weaknesses: his writings in many of the best known literary genres, including novels, short stories, essays, memoirs and plays. But his name can also be linked to two other genres where he left part of himself: journalism (print, radio and television) and cinema (script writing). In the last years of his life, the radio was one of the media through which he made public his vehement commentaries on another of his preferences: reading.

#### A PASSION FOR WRITING

Before he began to work exclusively in literature, Ricardo Garibay studied law, was a beginning philological researcher and

a furtive student of letters. It was not until he was 30 that he dedicated himself completely to writing, a craft he spent 10 to 12 hours a day practicing, making his debut with a short story in a collection, *Los presentes* (Those Present), which also includes contributions by Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Fuentes. Other of his contemporaries were Josefina Vicens, Rosario Castellanos, Elena Garro, Sergio Galindo, Luis Spota, Agustín Yáñez, José Revueltas, Juan José Arreola and Juan Rulfo.

According to some of Garibay's colleagues and critics alike, Arreola's and Rulfo's fame eclipsed him. This should not be taken literally, since fame is no parameter for measuring some and disregarding others.

What is undeniable is the vastness of Garibay's work (around 60 works) and his current and future readers. Sadly, in our country, many authors' writing becomes known only posthumously and not when first published.

His work is the product of two elements: his humility before a blank page and a bold effort to infuse his work with true breath, the breath of life. As he himself said, "If in a single reading the reader can see what is written on the paper, then the text breathes. It doesn't matter if it's long or short. It has it and that's it. It breathes. It's alive."<sup>1</sup>



A PASSION FOR READING

Reading, writing, reading...these are the writer's trade, and Garibay practiced his craft every day to the full. We can see this in the examples of the readings that captivated him, that moved him; readings found in a miscellaneous assortment of books whose leit motif is a passion for reading, a kind of a log whose notes go beyond a mere inventory of texts and authors that he critiqued, tasted, disdained or admired. It is sort of a fishing trip, but in this case the hook is cast into the stream of letters, not to catch fish, but "*astucias literarias*" ("literary astutenesses").

Garibay liked this phrase, coined by another Mexican writer ("Literary astutenesses..., foreseeing that moment, so dear to the spirit, in which a word unites happily—or astutely—with another."<sup>2</sup> Emilio Uranga), for its power of suggestion. He decided to rephrase it, saying, "The dear, unexpected moment in which one word happily or astutely joins another, and together they reveal to us one of the vital secrets of life."<sup>3</sup>

Ricardo Garibay, with his curious penchant for meeting up with these vital secrets of life, devoured every piece of literature that fell into his hands. He went through every line trying to make discoveries deserving of his interest, to unearth literary stopovers—the other way of saying literary astutenesses—along the pathways of letters.

Every stopover is a phrase in which its author has managed to capture and reveal the very guts of existence that we often do not see. These subtleties may come from different sources and latitudes, but their particularity is that they offer the reader (in this case also a creator) an idea, a message of a word that will nourish the perception or sensibility of someone who has opened out into a life given over to literature, such as Garibay's.

A PASSION FOR WOMEN AND LIFE

One fact stands out, among others, in Garibay's books: several of them have women as central characters. Examples are *La nueva amante* (The New Lover), *Verde Maira* (Green Maira), *Mujeres en un acto* (Women in One Act), *¡Lindas maestras!* (Pretty Teachers!), *Taib, Lía y Lourdes* (Lía and Lourdes), *Treinta y cinco mujeres* (Thirty-five Women) and the unfinished *Cartas a Minerva* (Letters to Minerva). The feminine always

seduced him. Women were the constant spirit that wandered through his writing, a spirit he related to as though it were a woman to be pursued and courted.

Another achievement in Garibay's work, specifically his narrative, is the rendering of everyday Mexican speech. He knew better than anybody how to listen and capture the colloquial speech of different social strata, and he brought it to his writing to give them voice and presence, to present these always ignored sectors in a real way.

Testimony to Garibay's dynamism and passion for life throughout his 76 years is the fruit of his constant participation in Mexico's cultural milieu (he wrote innumerable movie scripts; he was an assiduous columnist in the Mexico City daily *Excelsior*, and a co-founder of the news weekly *Proceso*); the prizes given to his work (the Mazatlán Prize in 1962 to *Beber un cáliz* [Drink a Chaliceful] and the prize for the best foreign book published in France in 1975, for *La casa que arde de noche* [The House that Burns at Night]); his many lectures on Spanish-language narrative and poetry; the television programs in which the central topic was always Mexican culture; as well as the radio spots called *Literary Astutenesses*, in which Garibay gave himself over body and soul to talking about any text at all with his own characteristic brand of excitement.

Unfortunately, just as with other Mexican writers who have died in this decade (Octavio Paz and Jaime Sabines, to mention only the most recent), the cancer was more tenacious and lethal than his three passions, and it beat him. But, just as he wanted, "What better way to die than between one page and another. There could be no greater happiness!"<sup>4</sup> And it happened just that way. Now, the responsibility falls to us, his readers, of recovering and maintaining the legacy of his work, not allowing it to be forgotten. **MM**

Hugo A. Espinoza Rubio  
Staff writer

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 5 May 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Ricardo Garibay, *Paraderos literarios* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1995), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Reforma* (Mexico City), 5 May 1999.

# Problemas del desarrollo

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# Reviews

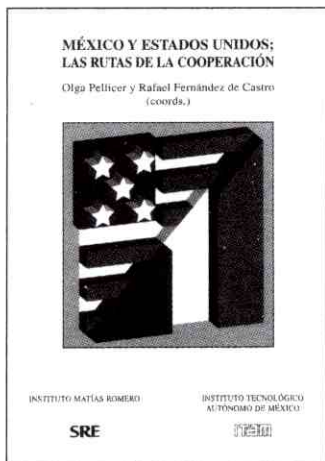
## México y Estados Unidos, las rutas de la cooperación

(Mexico and the United States. The Paths of Cooperation)

Olga Pellicer and Rafael Fernández de Castro, comps.

Instituto Matías Romero and Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, Nueva Epoca

Mexico City, 1998, 287 pp.



The very title of the book emphasizes cooperation, in contrast with the titles of other books on the same subject like *Distant Neighbors* or *Marriage of Convenience*, that emphasize a relationship between the United States and Mexico more akin to conflict and mutual ignorance.

This book is a collection of articles about the most important aspects of the relationship. First, Rafael Fernández de Castro compares bilateral relations in the 1980s and the 1990s, characterizing them as asymmetrical and complex, marked by the great many participating actors. According to Fernández, the agenda includes economic-trade questions, structural issues (migration and drug trafficking), international policy and the so-called informal agenda (human rights and democracy). He constructs a model that takes into account all these elements and

concludes that relations have improved. The link between both executives has become more pragmatic in order to solve common problems. Trade has moved out of chaos to the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Foreign policy has been transformed, going from the confrontation over the Contadora Group to a common peace proposal for El Salvador. Relations regarding drug trafficking and migration have advanced, particularly once they became institutionalized. And, undoubtedly, issues around democracy and human rights will become more important in the near future.

Writing on migratory policy, Francisco Alba goes into how the Mexican government went from being totally bereft of policy, to having one oriented toward dialogue and cooperation. This has made it possible to limit conflicts. The idea is to arrive at a “mutually agreed-upon regimen for conflict resolution” (p. 78). In Alba’s view, paradoxically, NAFTA contradicts labor liberalization and the mobility of individuals. Therefore, he proposes a broader discussion about regional integration, so that migration can be analyzed in the context of a regional economy. He also supports dialogue and cooperation despite the apparent obstacle of migratory policies being the result of each state’s sovereign decisions.

In his article, Luis Herrera Lasso deals with border relations. Taking into consideration the more than 300 million annual crossings of the 3000 kilometer border, in his opinion it is only recently, in the 1990s, that the governments of the United States and Mexico have attempted “to forge a permanent institutional framework that would allow them to establish a dialogue and find solutions to problems that require bilateral cooperation” (p. 90). He thinks we must aspire to a border planned and managed by both governments, and not a system of control that attempts to isolate each government’s policy from the other.

It falls to Miguel Ruiz Cabañas to deal with the problem of drug trafficking. According to his analysis, the crises in bilateral relations with regard to this issue have been more linked to U.S. domestic factors than to a real reduction of illicit drug dealing.

If the economy is doing well, drugs become an attractive election issue. It is this factor, external to the relations themselves, that makes solutions difficult to find. Countering this, the author lays out all the advances in institutionalization in an extremely difficult area, but then states that things have not been as successful as with other topics on the agenda. Rather pessimistically, he underlines that institutionalization has not resolved problems of unilateral actions on the part of the U.S. government nor brought about the trust needed for cooperation.

Sidney Weintraub writes about trade and investment between the United States and Mexico, pointing to a great change. During the Cold War, the United States was only concerned with containment of the Soviet Union, while for Mexico this was not important. Since NAFTA, a much more solid economic relationship has been established that requires cooperation and since then, institutional relations have been vigorously bolstered.

Undoubtedly, most countries in the world are concerned about migration, although for different reasons. Rodolfo Tuirán proposes that a “bilateral focus” is needed to appraise the problem “within the broader framework of development, asymmetry and the two countries’ increasing economic integration” (p. 159). He states that the political will to agree on solutions does exist and that, therefore, progress has been made. Tuirán offers us an extensive, profound characterization of Mexican migrants to the United States, at the same time that he enumerates the main causes for their move. Based on projections, he concludes that migration will continue to be constant, and that therefore it is recommendable that both parties maintain a dialogue to find integral, useful solutions.

Mexican communities abroad are of great importance, both in the United States and in Mexico. Carlos Gutiérrez and María Esther Schumacher describe the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad, a unique program in which a country with a less powerful economy aids those who voluntarily emigrated to a wealthier country. This is obviously due to the Mexican government recognition of its own responsibility to these emigrants. In order to raise that community’s standard of living, the program includes strategies for education, community organization, sports, health, cultural, and business matters and the dissemination of information, etc.

To situate Mexico-U.S. relations in a historical context, Jesús Velasco Márquez tells us about our two countries’ common history. Using as a starting point Mexico’s asymmetrical

relationship with the United States with its many participants, Velasco describes how it has changed over time from being allies to enemies; from partners of convenience during the nineteenth century to a period of confrontation at the beginning of this century, and later how it went back to cooperation for convenience’s sake. During World War II, both basically shared common interests at a government level, but the public of both countries had a negative perception of each other. During the Cold War, Mexico designed a foreign policy independent of the United States. By the 1960s the special relationship with Mexico on economic matters had come to an end and divergences and confrontations became more and more acute during the Echeverría administration. This, together with domestic discontent in the business community would lead Mexico to devalue the peso in 1976. During the 1980s, the foundations of a new kind of relationship began to be laid. When Mexico’s economy was reorganized, NAFTA was signed and became “the keystone of relations with the United States and of its entire foreign policy” (p. 241).

In a truly original, refreshing chapter, Alfonso Alfaro talks about the “phantoms” in bilateral relations. He dedicates his article to the different political actors’ perceptions, asking an intelligent question: What happens when a society that includes several civilizations but tries to allow a cultural space to emerge among them (Mexico) meets up with another society organized around a single civilization, but within which different cultural identities are in effervescence (the United States)? Ideals, dreams, values, prejudices, senses of time and customs interweave to produce a very complex set of relations between these two countries. In the author’s opinion, it may be through culture that solutions to both societies’ problems can be found.

Undoubtedly, this book is fundamental for understanding relations between Mexico and the United States. As devil’s advocate, I would say that I would like to have read a theoretical article that could have given more meaning to the separate analyses presented here. It is of note that Jesús Velasco’s excellent historical article is placed almost at the end of the book, when at the beginning it would have helped in situating the more specific articles. However, these are minor points that in no way diminish the book’s academic value. **MM**

*Paz Consuelo Márquez Padilla*  
**Director of CISAN**



## Pancho Villa

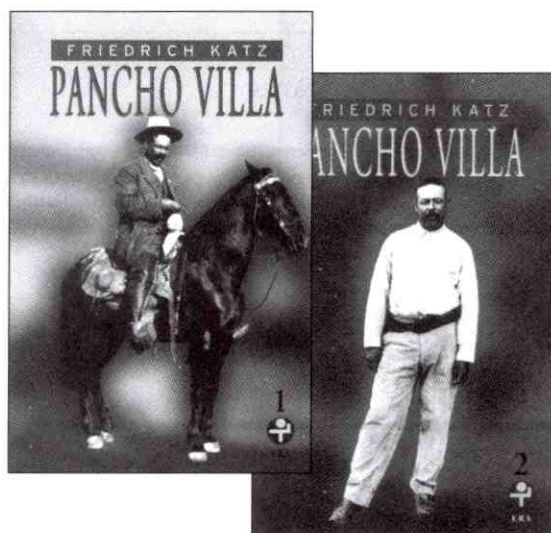
(The Life and Times of Pancho Villa)

Friedrich Katz

Paloma Villegas, trans.

Stanford University Press-Era

Stanford, California and Mexico City, 1998, 985 pp. (2 vol.)



Austrian Friedrich Katz took up a challenge when he wrote the history of the main caudillo of the most radical mass current in Mexico's 1910 revolutionary movement, a leader who survives as a folk epic that continues to expand even today in the collective memory of the Mexican people. Katz' accepting that challenge has resulted in the publication of one of the greatest books of contemporary narrative on Mexican history.<sup>1</sup> The text of the University of Chicago researcher and historian is the fruit of an enormous academic endeavor and over 20 years of complex, rigorous, impassioned research. During that time, he followed the tracks of the revolutionary through archives and documents of different nations of the Americas and Europe. He also gathered and reviewed practically all the innumerable texts written on the life of Villa. No less important is the iconographic and cinematographic research, as well as the numerous interviews he did to document and support his work.

*Pancho Villa* is narrated in four chronological parts. The first part deals with the life of the young bandit, hunted by the law in his native state of Durango, when he was still known by his real name, Doroteo Arango. In these years, the future revolutionary Francisco Villa lived like an outlaw and became the

brigand most hated by the rich, the hacienda owners and the state government, at the same time that he won the admiration of other outlaws and the poorest of the poor, giving birth to the legend of the justice-seeking rebel. These are also years when survival was difficult in the inhospitable northern hills, when he learned the hard lessons of the guerrilla fighter and man of arms and when his tough character and ability to command were forged. This part of the book ends with Villa's joining the Mexican Revolution and an account of his performance during the first three years of fighting.

A second part of the book analyzes Francisco Villa's rise to national prominence and his transformation into one of the most outstanding leaders of the revolutionary movement. This is the stage of his life of the legendary Division of the North, the poor people's army Villa headed, that, at the height of its strength had 50,000 troops, mainly poor and landless peasants, former peons and workers from the great northern haciendas, miners, workers, *soldaderas* (women soldiers) and a vast contingent of men who, like Villa, had been classified as "transgressors of the law" and were hunted by the old Porfirio Díaz dictatorship. This period produced Villa's most important military victories (Chihuahua, Torreón and Zacatecas, among others), which would be definitive for the defeat and weakening of the counterrevolution. Katz also explains the social composition of the Villista movement, its ideology and its meaning in the context of the Mexican Revolution.

During the period from 1915 to 1920, the Villista guerrilla forces waged a struggle of resistance, leaving behind the days of victory and the unstoppable Division of the North. In the third part of the book, Katz describes the times of defeat and the definitive decline of the Villista army when the movement headed up by Villa was reduced to a few hundred men who came together to mount assaults like the one on Columbus, New Mexico, or who scattered to get away from Carranza's army or the U.S. army's so-called "punitive expedition." In these years, Villa and his men took refuge in the desert and foothills and survived on the resources taken from their enemies and the government and thanks to the inhabitants of little towns who remained faithful to their cause.

The last part of the book reviews Villa's capitulation and days at the Canutillo Hacienda, where he was confined after making a peace pact with the Mexican government. The curtain rings down on the last act with a description of the conspiracy

and murder of the "Centaur of the North" in 1923. Katz uses documentary proof to show that Villa's death was a decision made by the victorious caudillos of the armed struggle, who then declared themselves the only legitimate heirs of the Mexican Revolution.

While Katz' work is preceded by a great many books, narrations, tales and memoirs that have contributed to myth and legend, revindicating the figure and legacy of Francisco Villa's struggle, as well as others that have aimed to reduce him to a simple bandit and portray him as a murderer without scruples, ideals or political principles, Katz' Pancho Villa is the first academic study and historical work that transcends legend and myth, apologia and crude abuse, to situate and explain the origins and social character of Villismo, its significance for the

revolutionary movement and its historical contribution to contemporary Mexico. The name and work of Friedrich Katz will surely be obligatory references when remembering or analyzing the life and times of Pancho Villa. **NMM**

*César Navarro Gallegos*

**Researcher at the Mora Institute and UNAM professor**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Katz is the author of *The Secret War in Mexico* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) and *La servidumbre agraria en México* (Mexico City: Setentas, 1976) and editor of *Riot, Rebellion, and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico, from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).

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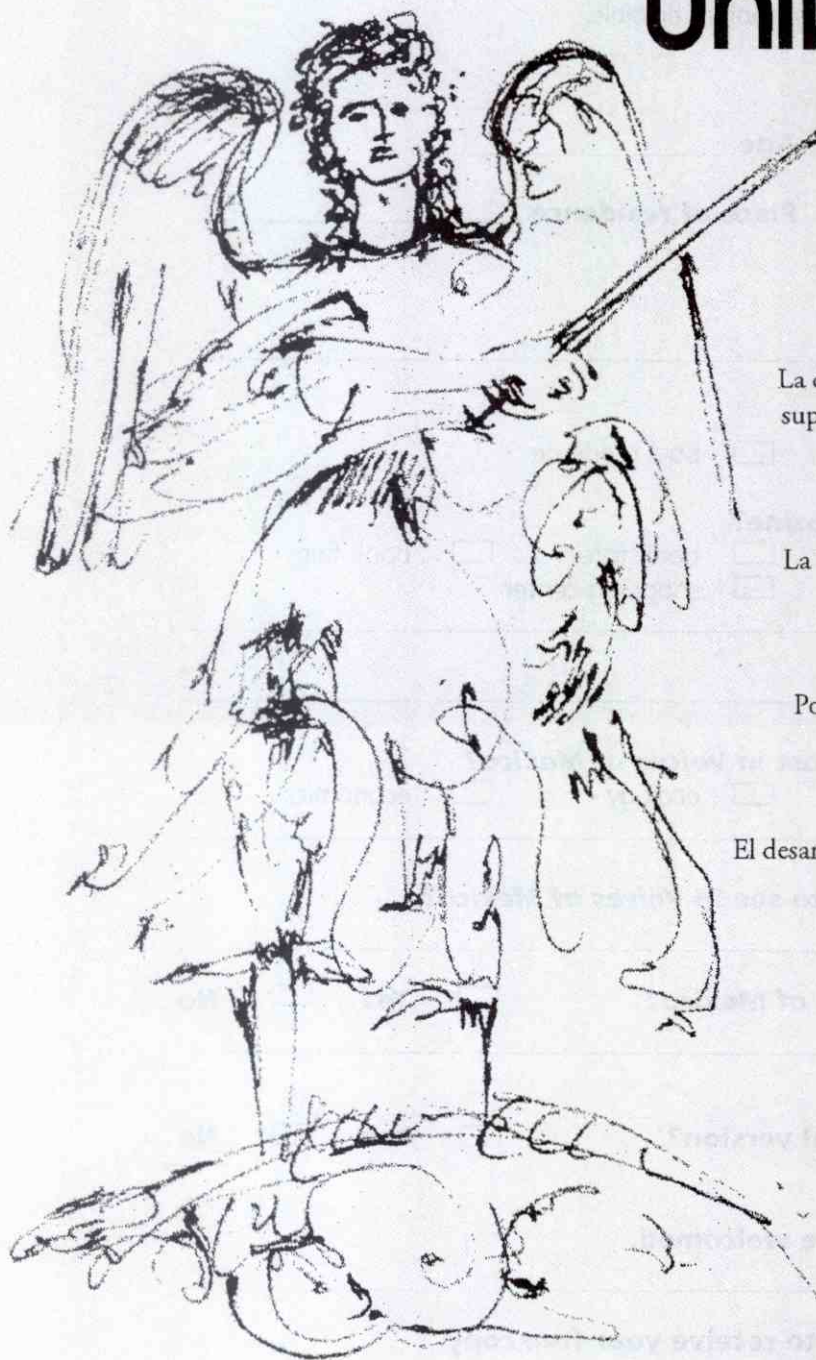
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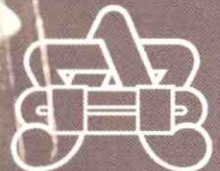
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