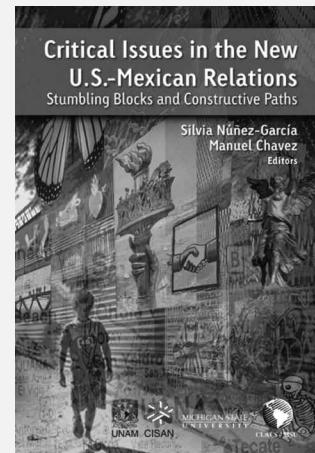


Reviews

**Critical Issues in the New U.S.-Mexican Relations.
Stumbling Blocks and Constructive Paths**
Silvia Núñez-García and Manuel Chavez, eds.
CISAN, UNAM/CLACS, Michigan State University
Mexico, 2009, 155 pp.

The U.S.-Mexican migration corridor is by far the world's largest. It has been estimated that from 1976 to 2006 the number of persons born in Mexico who reside permanently in the U.S. increased 15 fold to approximately 12 million, and that at least 85 percent of them entered the country without documents every year since 2000. These are some of the most striking findings of Elaine Levine, one of the co-authors of the recently published *Critical Issues in the New U.S.-Mexican Relations. Stumbling Blocks and Constructive Paths*.

The book offers an excellent series of seven chapters on the main problems in Mexican-U.S. relations. Its basic assumption is that culture is the clue and may also be a solution to the complex U.S.-Mexico relations. So, public diplomacy, whether understood as an instrument to facilitate understanding, mutual respect and cooperation or as mere cultural diplomacy, needs "to be reconsidered and implemented as a permanent feature of the binational relationship." As a matter of fact, according to the editors, misperceptions and reinforced negative attitudes about the "other" have made symmetrical cooperation difficult. Consequently, the relation follows "a complex model of interdependence where decisions made on one side of the border have significant and immediate repercussions on the other." Actually, Mexicans living in the U.S. may be seen as "cultural hybrids."



Why is this? History explains everything, as the past speaks for itself. In her article “Mexican Migration to the United States,” Elaine Levine recalls elements of the past that help us understand the current state of the Mexico-U.S. relationship. Migration has been commonplace ever since Mexico was forced to cede half its territory to the U.S. after losing the 1848 war. For many years after that, movement between the two countries was entirely unregulated and relatively small scale. In 1924, the U.S. began controlling and restricting entry for the first time. Ever since, the control of migration has gradually increased along with the Mexican population living in the U.S., which is nothing if not an economic paradox. At present, the Mexican-origin population has the highest participation in the U.S. work force of all migrant communities: 68.4 percent in 2005.

In his contribution to the book, Manuel Chavez correctly observes that very little is said in the media about migrants’ contributions to the U.S. economy, the type of jobs they do and their independent relationship with labor markets in the service, hospitality and agricultural sectors. His point is fully explained in Levine’s piece: barriers to economic mobility are not rooted in labor markets, but in the nation’s public school systems. To her, the segregation of winners and losers in U.S. society still has a high correlation to race and ethnicity, but most of the segregating occurs before people look for their first job. The public school system is preparing Mexican children for the same kind of low-skilled, low-paying jobs their parents do. Recently, efforts have been made to strengthen migrants’ ties to their homeland. Dual nationality was approved, and hometown associations are actively promoted and supported.

This idea of building networks between the two neighbors is taken up by Silvia Núñez García, who emphasizes the undeniable role of social networks today in determining new spheres of influence. These networks are articulated beyond national borders and have the potential for transnational influence.

SECURITY: THE TURNING POINT OF THE RELATIONSHIP

The largest part of the book is dedicated to security, a hot issue in U.S. foreign policy and an even more worrying one in Mexico’s domestic policy.

The opening article, "Foreign Policy and Governance in Mexico. A Conceptual and Operational Dilemma," by José Luis Valdés-Ugalde, describes how Mexico's 2000 elections signaled the beginning of a transformation of a political regime dominated by a non-democratic political tradition and a political class without a coherent long-term political project. Mexico was a country with a closed, single-party, relatively authoritarian political system. After 2000, there was hope that Mexico was going to play a prominent role in international affairs, a vision that never materialized. The chapter discusses the basic aspects of the not-always-felicitous relationship between domestic and foreign policy. It also explains the Mexican Paradox: for the first time in the history of Mexico since its 1910 revolution, foreign policy has acquired great importance and has been more closely linked to the success of domestic policy. For the last two presidential terms, Mexico has sought to be present and participate more in multilateral discussions and negotiations as the economy became the central focus of its foreign policy.

As the country internationalized, it has had to abandon its anti-U.S. stance, opt for cooperation instead of conflict and forge a partnership mainly in economic but also in political terms with the U.S. and Canada. Mexico's foreign policy ambivalence, expressed in the so-called "agreement to disagree," shaped Mexico-U.S. relations for decades, in the sense that it was the only arrangement that allowed a margin of relative independence without endangering Mexico's most important bilateral relationship, and without officially compromising with any of the parties involved.

From a similar point of view, well-known Mexican specialist Leonardo Curzio offers several reflections on the reactions of the Mexican people after 9/11. Mexico reinforced its borders especially in relation to the so-called restricted nationalities and has accepted supporting the concept of intelligent borders. Furthermore, Curzio addresses the issue of identity. While other regions of the world like Europe have developed an emerging supranational identity and at the same time preserved their national particularities, North America has not moved beyond the free trade level, and, since 2001, the gap between Mexico and the U.S. has grown. Far from developing more trust between the two countries, the agreement has maintained the flow of people

and workers. Cooperation was not been oriented toward building bridges, but toward building borders, controls and even fences. The author provides a forecast for U.S.-Mexico relations: if we consider the next 50 years, and we use our political will to overcome the prejudices each side has toward the other, U.S. security will inevitably be formulated from a perspective that unquestionably includes Mexico.

BIODIVERSITY VS. SECURITY

The book closes with an excellent piece on “The United States and Mexico in the Face of Scientific Uncertainty: Regulating Genetically Modified Organisms,” by Edit Antal, an expert in science and technology. The author analyses two different conceptions of risk assessment in the case of genetically modified seeds, especially corn. The differences in the conception of risk assessment between the U.S. and Mexico unfold in the context of NAFTA, which, while it does not directly regulate GMOs, does promote the harmonization of regulatory policies in many ways.

Antal makes her point taking into account that companies like Monsanto have arrived from the U.S. and tried to introduce genetically modified seeds into Mexico. The debate has been huge, especially with regard to corn. However, the author centers her analysis on a more objective basis, that is, risk assessment and discourse analysis of the main actors active in each country’s genetic engineering policies.

As she correctly observes, parameters differ in the two countries. In the U.S., the main interests are economic growth, international competitiveness and the right to be informed, while in Mexico, the issues are food security and the defense of biological and cultural diversity. This idea may be generalized as the book’s common question: what can Mexico do to achieve more symmetrical cooperation with the U.S. and make a point in the global political culture? ■■

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