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Contemporary Political Discourse in Mexico

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Preface

José Luis Orozco is a distinguished professor of political science at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and one of Mexico's leading political philosophers. During April-June 2000 he was a Mexico Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, supported by a generous grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. He wrote this paper during the period leading up to the election of President Vicente Fox and revised it shortly afterwards with additional reflections based on the transition process.

This study looks into the concepts and assumptions that underlie the current political debate in Mexico and the ways these have changed in recent years in the context of institutional change, the opening of the political system, and the influences of globalization.

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Both scholars and politicians have explained the new scenario brought about by the PAN's triumph in July 2000 by referring to the intersection between Mexican and American polities and markets brought about by globalization and free trade. This victory has led to several assumptions about the relationship between the Mexican transition to democracy and a new, more pragmatic style of political thought. The implementation of NAFTA at the same time that a successful political opposition at the federal, state and local levels emerged has fostered the idea that this process will be the main trend of the new millennium. According to many analysts, civil society, supported by an independent federal electoral body, has been the protagonist of this transformation in which democracy can at last find its way. In this analysis, there is an assessment on whether these political developments will lead to more active civic participation and a non-ideological discourse.

Is this expectation just a manifestation of simple voluntarism or optimism? Has Mexico been inserted in the process that Francis Fukuyama broadly depicted a decade ago as "the end of history?"[i] This paper will offer some tentative reflections on the subject. To start with, it seeks to demonstrate that pragmatism is a political method far from unknown to the Mexican ruling class during the last seventy-five years of institutionalizing the revolution. Nonetheless, the new shift to the center of the Mexican political spectrum seems to be, and indeed is, different from the political discourse that the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) retained at least until the 1980s: the ideological left within the Constitution. World conditions have changed in such a way that it is no longer possible to keep that kind of populist pragmatism. The Mexican ruling classes

—and their opposition— have developed a new pragmatic style in order to face unexpected economic challenges from abroad. As the country has moved from a state scenario to a market scenario, Mexican ideological and political styles have become not only more complex and versatile, but also increasingly murky and problematic.

A Twist to the Vital Center?

At the beginning of his presidential term, Carlos Salinas urged the Mexican people to become more pragmatic by leaving aside the dogmatic populist (and ideological) political culture of the previous half-century. At the turn of the last decade, pragmatism was considered more in accordance with modern politics, while populism became a matter of political archeology. The old national connotation of pragmatism as mere opportunism, a lack of principles, and an illusion of freedom from historical constrictions, gave way to its new global meaning associated with managing emergent economic conditions beyond the state. A global economy, it was said, demanded an open mind far from the prevailing patterns of thought left over from Mexican state paternalism.[ii]

Since its inception, voluminous political and economic literature from all sides of the Mexican cultural and ideological spectrum has been settling accounts with this technocratic and anti-national approach. Regarded as more submissive than creative, as prone to surrender rather than resisting adverse circumstances, the technocrats' approach was *a priori* negatively received. Seen as no more than a device to subordinate national aspirations to the profit-oriented logic of transnational capitalism, the pragmatic offer of the new generation of Mexican rulers was systematically disqualified and even dismissed within intellectual circles. To think pragmatically, according to many critics both from the left and the right, was no more than thinking American

or, better stated, thinking the way Americans would like Mexicans to think about politics and economics.

The discursive trap seemed so evident that it did not even deserve to be discussed. It was not until the National Autonomous University crisis in 1999 that the issue was examined again. Using the most sentimentally overloaded terms of globalization and neoliberalism, fragmentary pragmatism was seen as the avant-garde of a financial colonialism implicit in the New World Order. Regardless of the terms used to name the process, the defenders of the public institutions on trial have pointed out that, despite the alleged failure of NAFTA and the social goals of globalization, Mexican political and intellectual life has already lost its relative coherence. By coherence, I do not mean just a philosophical interconnection between the diverse conceptual components of the state ideological apparatus. If philosophy offers an abstract image of the political world, we need to consider other ways of approaching politics, such as policymaking, legal practice, educational orientation, common sense, cultural biases and even some sets of mythological convictions in order to have a better understanding of intellectual and behavioral changes.

From that perspective, I think that an adversarial political intelligence has been gaining ground within the Mexican "organization of culture," to use Antonio Gramsci's terms. A "war of positions" has been taking place in Mexico despite official indifference towards it.[iii] Without any impressive turnabout, the old ideological establishment is now forced to realize that a threat to the *status quo* has taken place. Not surprisingly, it has been the political intelligence forged under the dominant state system that prevents its own organic intellectuals from realizing the very nature of transformations beyond the traditional national structure of power. New political "cognitive maps," to use a term popularized by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, have changed

not only the image of local and national levels of power and participation but also their international or transnational dimensions.[iv] Traditional political structures no longer have the same weight given to them by the rulers and the ruled in previous years.

This new way of political thinking does not fit exactly what many contemporary cultural and political critics are denouncing as the new hegemonic global thinking,[v] where national and state-centered designs are surpassed by those of the global oracles, especially the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. By stating that the sinister forces subsumed under the market have been taking over political institutions, that mentality is able to create a Manichaean reality in which good and evil struggle. In the midst of two abstractions, those of the state and the market, the most familiar of them appears to be more humane than the unknown new entity. Instead of focusing on new corporate centers that can exert different kinds and degrees of coercion, the habit of thinking in cosmological-historical ways gives no opportunity for realistic concrete choices. The puzzled defenders of the welfare state-oriented system of beliefs have been unable to provide any congruous answers to the retrieval of national values.

From another simplistic perspective, the fact that almost all Mexican political parties are converging towards a vital center appears to prove that the prevailing civic culture has become pragmatic, according to the discrete hopes envisaged by political science classics such as Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture*. The movement around the center, made pragmatically by the official PRI inaugurated more than a decade ago, was foreseen (and denounced) by many as the arrival of a political intelligence more akin to the North Atlantic world conceptions. An increasingly participatory attitude among Mexicans and the loss of widespread cynicism, it has been said, will be the results of that arrival. An open polity with active civic involvement, thus, seems likely to be the next step in our political development. To my view, the "end of ideology"

idea advanced by Daniel Bell better applies to what is happening in Mexico today. The lack of ideological guidelines cannot be related mechanically with what Almond and Verba had in mind when writing about "the working principles of the democratic polity and its civic culture."[vi]

Rather than participatory democracy, the present centrist trend of Mexican politics and public opinion means, from a realist and historical approach, only the end of what I would call the first pragmatic era of Mexican politics. The political style based on pragmatism stretches from the left to the right, and has now been removed to the political center without offering any automatic guarantee of democracy. A sort of cult of the center expressed both by the right and the left does not mean, at least until now, any bit more than the recognition of non-extremist positions as strategically preferable. In other words, this apparent truce — or perhaps ideological exhaustion — seems to point to the loss of the Mexican political regime's pendular movement.

The Life and Times of the First Mexican Political Pragmatism

When I speak of this distinctive style of Mexican political pragmatism, I refer to the founding moment of the PRI during the late 1920s, an age in which "the American philosophy" was already in vogue at Harvard and the University of Chicago. As developed by William James, pragmatism had attracted the attention of young European philosophers from distant political positions including socialism and nationalism since the beginning of the twentieth century. Conceived as a way of accelerating both proletarian and ethnocentric impulses overloaded by intellectualism and traditionalism, pragmatism became syndicalism in the works of Georges Sorel and nationalism in the works of Enrico Corradini. One derivative, fascism, was able to combine class interests and national interests in an aggressive manner. Around 1928, Julien Benda in France and William Yandell Elliott in the United States denounced the way in which

pragmatism served the cause of *homo politicus* in Europe and *homo oeconomicus* in the United States[vii].

Departing from Benda's and Elliott's standpoints, I made some years ago the distinction between state and market pragmatism, both clearly opposed to each other at the end of the 1920s. As for Mexican pragmatism, the mere fact of its introduction by an intellectual elite linked more to the national public university and the emerging institutional *caudillos* than to any business group or propertied interests determined the morally loaded state-orientation of its members. Rather than approaching Charles Sanders Pierce or even the widely mentioned William James, the Eurocentric —especially French— philosophical and political tradition was inclined to privilege the ideas of Henri Bergson, Emile Boutroux or the more contemporary and accessible José Ortega y Gasset. From their immersion in that new European philosophy, the members of the philosophical movement known as the *Ateneo de la Juventud* —Pedro Henriquez Ureña, Alfonso Reyes, Antonio Caso and José Vasconcelos— felt themselves immersed in a kind of free thinking far away from colonialism and dictatorship. Under such an impulse, old-fashioned scholasticism, uncritical liberalism and authoritarian positivism were deprived of intellectual status.[viii]

Thinkers like Vasconcelos, Caso, Samuel Ramos, Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio directly or indirectly sought to define the profile of man and culture in Mexico. Without any official militancy in the new revolutionary party, all of them supplied a sort of philosophical essence of the "Mexican Being" that gave impetus to the nationalistic current of thought stemming from the Revolution and provided the Mexican ruling classes with a blueprint for consensus and domination. Since the 1920s, Ramos'and Gamio's visions of Mexican human nature were the most significant anthropological component of nationalistic ideology for almost

half a century. Following Caso's pragmatic advocacy, Ramos' subsequent adhesion to Ortega y Gasset's "perspectivism" led him to examine "the Mexican circumstances" in order to prepare a "future reconstruction." A deeply introspective view led Ramos to resort to psychoanalysis in examining the mimetic motivations behind the Mexican imitation (and the consequent failure) of French and American political paradigms. Having left the narrowness of both thomism and positivism, his "situational" philosophy led him to consider the set of "inferiority complexes" which were regarded as the "main causes" explaining Mexican inadequacies (and, once unveiled, potential greatness). This would remain a major current of thought at least until the early 1960s.[ix]

While one-party systems were consolidated in Europe, the pragmatic convergence between Mexican intellectuals and politicians blended in revolutionary, centralist, authoritarian, progressive and cosmopolitan elements within a political symbiosis that can properly be considered as the first Third World ideology. Overcoming the individualism of the mid-nineteenth century liberal age and the positivistic turn-of-the-century political approach, the new pragmatic attitude of the Mexican ruling classes felt that their revolutionary doctrine combined the best political innovations of the time while remaining open to the future. A very discretely mentioned pragmatism put in the hands of both rulers and philosophers a sort of freedom to embrace the accepted values of the past within a *social perspective* able to tune the system in harmony with almost any new current of thought. Among other things —the Second World War included— this compound explains how, after the redistributive presidential term of Lázaro Cardenas, it was possible to embrace the conservative presidency of Manuel Ávila Camacho. Afterwards, what was called the pendulum theory explained the more or less regular oscillating

movements between left and right administrations, which supposedly depended on presidential whim.

This is the reason why, despite its one-party axis, the complex components of Mexican political culture opposed any single intellectual hegemony. Also, the regional, social and functional disparities among the ruling classes grouped around the revolutionary ethos hindered the emergence of a homogeneous national ideology to be followed unanimously, to the extent that this is possible in any society. Precisely because of the lack of a uniform ideological direction, the Mexican state had a built-in political flexibility unsurpassed by other developing nations. Directed by the state, pragmatism could remain in Mexican politics more than in any other country of the world. No state dogmatism interfered or was inserted in its functioning. Lacking the anti-revolutionary bias of fascism and the anti-capitalist bias of communism, adaptability became the main feature of the Mexican one-party state.

What some authors called Mexican populism exceeded charismatic leadership or indiscriminate mass politics and was embodied in a widely accepted political culture. The political organization forged by the PRI was able to verticalize and equalize in a rhetorical manner the class-interests of workers and peasants alike in such a manner that it created a sophisticated answer to the stability and consensus questions posed by a backward society. At the same time, a national capitalist class was almost surreptitiously promoted from above and military groups were accommodated within a progressive social framework. A mass-oriented ideology, made up of the main political ideas of the time —socialism, nationalism, as well as welfare capitalism— become feasible through the almost unlimited and highly centralist sexennial presidential hegemony.

From State Pragmatism to Market Pragmatism

Regardless of the personal governing style of each Mexican president in power, continuity was kept and a broad consensus prevailed around the general state-orientation of the system. This continuity explains why, when Carlos Salinas promoted a pragmatic attitude in accordance with technocratic and business-oriented values, he was not tempted by the idea of getting rid of the state as a make-believe prime mover. The consensus added to Max Weber's distinctive force of the state was not jeopardized by Salinas' neoliberalism. On the contrary: the National Solidarity Program put in practice by the Salinas government revealed Mexican state paternalism at its best. However, he also opened the gates, through trade and commerce, for the eventual dissolution of an increasingly precarious equilibrium established by the previous conciliatory dogmas of the Mexican Revolution.

The internationally oriented, entrepreneurial newcomers, many of them raised within the old political system, challenged the reluctance of the Mexican ruling class to relinquish the last political bulwark of the system. Feeling themselves limited by the state directed mixed economy, those entrepreneurs were able to undermine the old constitutional framework intended to control the centrifugal tendencies of national capitalist accumulation. By operating according to the trends and advantages of international finance, the newcomers broke the legal and administrative devices throughout which the Mexican government controlled key areas such as foreign investment, trade protection and, later on, state ownership of national resources. The over-concentration of power by the Mexican imperial presidency —to abuse a term coined by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. to describe a different reality— was the weak flank of the assailed fortress. Once focused on the most visible flaw of the political system, it was elevated to the condition of universal scapegoat both for the lack of democracy and the subsequent economic disaster.[x]

By trying to turn the establishment upside down, it is possible to conclude that, instead of favoring the political wing of the ruling class, the young state and PRI rulers favored the strengthening of its economic wing. But, of course, things do not always follow a single formula. Originally encouraged by the Mexican state, business concerns backed by international capital were autonomous and flexible enough as to crack the rigid and obsolete political and legal structures that limited their development. It is difficult to separate the public and the private actors in this process. What is not difficult to assert is that the alleged market orientation of Mexican crony capitalism became no more than a plea for arbitrariness and trickery. Combining state and market devices, the traditional corruption of Mexican politics was multiplied on an unprecedented scale. The result was a mixture of demagogical interests, to use a term coined by Arthur Bentley, with cash-value-oriented interests, to use another expression from William James, which contributed to deteriorate the whole system.

Instead of making the Mexican society plural, these economic and political mechanisms and the ideological fragmentation polarized the components of the long social compact, leaving the PRI in an ideological vacuum. Without an over-encompassing state direction, the PRI lost its social and political cohesion. Paradoxically enough, the Mexican right embraced its own traditionalistic tenets and engaged in entrepreneurial crusades, becoming pluralist and global in the process. On the other hand, the left embraced within the same nationalism both the bourgeois causes of human rights and universal democracy and the social causes of Indian communities and the poor. Precisely because of their intrinsic divisive nature, both prevailing political extreme wings have shared a common personalistic, or almost providential, leadership that hampers any concrete ideological unity.

In the middle of the aforementioned polarization, the PRI was unable to go beyond the initial conflict between technocrats and old guard *priistas,* created by the uneven process of globalization. The PRI's political cadres had to face the fact that the ideological content of the Mexican Revolution had fallen into the hands of the left as a consequence of party discipline. The ambiguity of the PRI for supporting or rejecting causes related to globalization itself showed a highly divided identity not only among its regional leadership but also among old and new guards. Without the previous political unity guaranteed by a one-party system and a strong presidency, the PRI's pragmatism can no longer manipulate ideologies to achieve consensus. Its network of vested interests and pervasive corruption had convinced voters that they were incompetent to deal with either particular issues or organize public policy systematically.

In trying to overcome any sudden political turn coming from the pendular character of state pragmatism, the last PRI government strategy of economic shielding produced a correlative political and ideological rigidity. Apparently, it is based on the premise that, in a non-ideological atmosphere created by economic performance, there is no need for a strong consensus. Such a strategy misses the very first lesson of American market pluralism, that of a visible hand which rectifies the work of a superseded invisible hand when problems of loyalty and unity arise. The Mexican government, therefore, has sacrificed its pillars of consensus on the altar of global economics. Unable to play the game of market pragmatism, the Mexican ruling class and its party could not come up with a better offer for future generations than promising "computers and English lessons."

An Open Political Culture?

As for political culture concerns, Mexican society is facing surprises and dilemmas never experienced by previous generations. Almost without precedent, the Mexican media are becoming more and more oriented toward muckraking. Beyond the previous government's apparent indifference towards media exposure, an informed and critical public is calling for accountability. But it is still too soon to evaluate whether this new development will create a critical political culture or just an elite free press in the hands of new intellectual magnates. Appealing to political resentment and frustration rather than to civic involvement, Mexico's new journalism moguls seems to reflect the interests of powerful pressure groups more than the emergence of mature public opinion. The fact that most of the TV talk shows, highly ranked magazines and newspaper editorials are still controlled by former establishment intellectuals speaks more about group confrontations, accommodations and mafia-like publishing structures than about a participatory national dialogue.

At least until the end of the year 2000, it is impossible to say that a new political culture has emerged in Mexico. If it is true that the Mexican market and polity are closer to their related institutions in the United States, the general economic asymmetry remains as the ultimate source of confrontation that hampers a fluent bi-national relationship, not to mention the process of integration. From that perspective, Mexican centrism, rather than the vital center of American politics, may imply a catastrophic equilibrium among deeply divided social forces. The presidential triumph of the supposedly right-oriented PAN over the PRI and left-oriented PRD should be contrasted with the quantitative advantages of both PRI and PRD in state and capital city governments. The victory is also tempered by the PAN's extremely precarious plurality in both houses of the Congress and in the Mexico City Assembly.

A society fragmented in many functional, regional and generation gaps can hardly offer the kind of unity needed to nurture pluralism. While the left has been able to control key social areas such as public education and some independent popular organizations, the right has a definitive influence on foreign affairs and entrepreneurial circles, not to mention its traditional Catholic bulwarks. Rather than occupying a political center, the former official party has been mostly limited to controlling PRI-affiliated unions, peasant organizations and an old clientele marginal to globalization without even a cohesive nationalist or populist discourse.

From a theoretical viewpoint, the different historical, political and cultural ways of viewing liberalism in Mexico and the United States may, on the other hand, foster misunderstandings rather than coincidences. Broadly stated, those misunderstandings can proceed from the opposing rationalist and empiricist styles of Mexican and American liberalism. To start with, the same idea of a civil society has a different connotation among the followers of Adam Ferguson and the followers of an elemental Hegelian theory of the state. To the former, civil society appears as the space for property and interchange and, therefore, for freedom; to the latter, civil society is no more than the space of egotism and should be superceded by the morality and liberty of the state. Both explicitly and implicitly, this latter assumption guided the political performance of business leaders and their associations during the *priista* governments. Their role was always confined to being obedient and accepting the president's suggestions — and even his occasional recriminations.

At the present time, many voluntary associations are emerging within Mexican society. More than fostering competence in a plural way, they are trying to conquer (or re-conquer) social entitlements and channel political complaints. Regardless of their affiliations, their historical grievances and their common mistrust of the state, the main representative groups of the

contemporary Mexican civil society have no room left for those associations regarded by revolutionary traditions as their natural foes. Although the contemporary idea of Mexican civil society encompasses many heterogeneous groups (from environmentalists to feminists, and from Indian communities to sexual minorities), it excludes capitalist entrepreneurs, conservative religious organizations, and private sector groups; it has instead been consecrated as a sort of sanctuary of brotherly causes.

The same rule could be applied to the notion of a social contract, which was developed in the Anglo-American world by thinkers like John Locke and John Rawls, and in Latin America by thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and by modern social constitutions. Rather than a Rawls-style pragmatic contract, Mexican political parties across the spectrum propose grandiose constitutional reforms to solve every important issue that emerges. As Almond and Verba wrote about "the image of the democratic polity" that was conveyed during the late 1950s to the elites of the new nations, this image is now, as it was before, "obscure and incomplete and heavily stresses ideology and legal norms." To oppose ominous forces coming from abroad, the domestic constitutional and democratic act of political will is needed to preserve national integrity.[xi]

In the same manner, the idea of rule of law has dissimilar, if not adversarial, meanings in the Mexican and American political contexts. Sovereignty continues to be the key word in dealing with the Mexican idea of law. According to traditional lawmakers and lawyers, to speak about a supra-national market or corporate legality means no more than interference, if not imperialism. The acceptance of a set of intelligent global rules not only contradicts the democratic law-making process itself but also submits national law to norms established by the corporate and banking practices of powerful nations. Considered as rights-depriving norms, those economic rules are seen as inconsistent with the very nature of natural and rational law. If

governments are only instruments to rule over externalities —electoral, environmental, cultural or police matters— the political preeminence of economic laws is regarded as a return to a *laissez faire* approach favorable to transnational business rather than as an attempt to make corporations honest.

The Mexican idea of democracy, finally, is also quite distant from American and even Western connotations. The competitive meaning of democracy is practically unknown, or just labeled as market democracy. More than a plural society, the idea of democracy presupposes in Mexico a system of equality that necessarily involves economic distribution. For that reason, only egalitarian movements have a right space within the Mexican conception of a democratic polity. Therefore, the participation in politics of movements associated in the past with social injustice, such as the Catholic Church, or with private concerns, are considered unworthy of occupying political spaces that do not belong to them.

Besides that, no word in contemporary Mexican discourse has been so misconstrued as the substantive notion of democracy. Still asserted in a very ideological way, it remains vague and confined to extremely general goals. Seen as a sort of universal panacea, the term has become at the same time an arcane and popular shibboleth. Within it, is possible to include intellectual sophistry, shabby radicalism or hard-line nationalism. At the bottom of the different ways of understanding democracy there is an underlying conviction that it is originated by a reason's or nature's right. To sacrifice collective will to a set of procedures that only offers in return the status of voter and consumer is simply unconceivable. Rather than a bargaining or marketing process, democracy still means in the Mexican mind the majestical triumph of better causes over the worst causes.

At this point, I am by no means trying to demonstrate a legalistic or egalitarian idiosyncratic preference among the Mexican ruling or non-ruling classes and an ultimate naiveté derived from the illusion of reducing economic laws to political or democratic laws. If that were the presidential and a general political attitude that prevailed until the 1980s, the same resistance against globalization coming from civil society continues to regard constitutional reforms as a bulwark for preventing the evils of foreign intervention. Such intellectualism derived from grassroots expectations even leads many Mexicans to suppose that the foreign debt or whatever disliked economic handicap can be banished by a wise or democratic decree. Voluntarism, either presidential, intellectual or popular, disregards the fact that, more than big words and big categories, what is at the stake is a realist accommodation to new world historical and technological trends in order to avoid imposing more national costs on future generations.

The Resistances From Within

A realist approach to the new international position of Mexico implies the search for a way to resist unfavorable influences that undermine the capacity for national action. The same idea of resistance should, then, be treated from a less romantic perspective than nineteenth century images of community and nation. Until now the big rebellions against the primacy of globalization and neoliberalism —the mestizo-led Indian uprising in Chiapas, the independent union movements against privatization, the bank debtors' demands for a moratorium on debt payments and the student movement at the National Autonomous University (UNAM)— have retained the rebellious ethos of twentieth-century anti-capitalism. More specifically, and according to contemporary political semantics, those resistance impulses spring from the main and often contradictory sources of anti-globalization, tribalism, unionism and intellectualism.

Plainly stated, these terms translate aspirations anchored in realities that have been already subjected to revision and readjustment in other parts of the world.

In fact, these contestatory actors are reacting against globalization and its winners, following the same pattern that others used against the national establishment during the revolt of 1968. Both with the 1968 movement and more recent movements, the Mexican government followed Vilfredo Pareto's dictum on the necessity of elite circulation in times of crisis by co-opting the contestatory class cadres. The newcomers found a way to break the ruling class's monopoly on power by becoming popular leaders and updating the national revolutionary slogans in order to displace the old oligarchy. Luis Echeverría, as presidential candidate, realized the usefulness of merging state rewards and intellectual subordination to the state (represented by its rulers). If Echeverria's regime meant the climax of state pragmatism in Mexico, at the same time it showed its weakness. The idea of a law-abiding economic world order and the proliferating university courses on economic law from a state intervention perspective showed a serious concern about the world market. But the juridical culture approach to that market — factually denied by devaluation and the growing foreign debt— proved to be innocuous.

After years of economic upheaval, both the traditional and marxist organic intellectuals were firmly replaced in key positions by economic technocrats trained in the United States. Old intellectuals had to yield to a new emerging pattern of political culture that placed social relevance on university degrees, public and family relations and media participation. The presence of a new organic, entrepreneurial intellectual who despised a state no longer able to co-opt social actors according to the old spoils system shows the emergence of a new intellectually pragmatic market. More privately than publicly oriented, this market has exerted a profound influence on Mexican culture at large. Under the new conditions, literary or philosophical

profoundness has lost its former value and is becoming more and more a sign of detachment from public affairs. Although two large television corporations and a few big newspapers have established control over both the “cognitive maps” and the new rules of the game of public opinion, no one of them has been able to channel the trends of resistance or to create any truly participatory fora.

When contrasting those new mainstreams in Mexican culture —that of the new mass media oligarchy and that of the old mass organization leaders— there is a premonition of another serious polarization in Mexican society. Civilized spaces used to promote ideological interchange and to debate new ideas, such as the National University of Mexico, are no longer regarded as holders of a minimum national-rational consensus and have suffered an increasingly severe deterioration. If free public education appeared as one of the most relevant symbols of Mexican nationalism against the proclaimed global ideal of individualism, pragmatism, hedonism, uniformity and standardization, it appears now as a symbol of intolerance, old-fashioned radicalism and lack of creative proposals. When globalization has reached most of the key sectors of the Mexican economy, the increasingly precarious top-level national consensus seems to be menaced by the entrepreneurial order created by NAFTA and the aforementioned dictates of the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank.

Moreover, the backbone of the Mexican political system, vertical unionism, has become weak and obsolete. During Salinas’ term technocratic political and economic performance faced the anachronistic labor structures created by the state and the party in order to control an overall national workers movement. Extremely successful since the mid-1930s, such control was partially (and visibly) made possible by the longevity of its leaders, notably Fidel Velazquez. Considered the living prototype of Mexican corporatism, Velazquez enjoyed absolute power for

over sixty years and his name was associated with the worst and most despicable trade unionist (and gerontocratic) practices. If corruption was the name of the game in dealing with controlled unions, it was not the real reason why the Salinas government undertook action against Mexico's organized workers. Taking advantage of the deeply vicious ways of holding personal power and allocating patronage, Salinas undertook an attack against the main leader of the Oil Workers' movement and, from then on, weakened the capacity of the entire union structure to confront not only his own government but big business as well.

Precisely the day NAFTA entered into effect, the Indian movement of Chiapas became the symbol of grassroots resistance to globalization. Forgotten in spite of their symbolic appeal, Mexican Indians, as well as many peasant (and urban) communities throughout the country, were completely marginal to free trade negotiations with the United States. A shrewd and opportune leadership of the Indian uprising was able to get international support by connecting poverty and marginalization to Mexico's undeniable lack of democracy. After the cleanest and most internationally monitored election, it is to be seen whether the sibylline supreme government argument remains inalterable or if it is renewed in the search of more open negotiations.

Also, the outgoing PRI administration's ostensible disregard for the most elemental forms of public morals and the evident political favoritism in dealing with the bank privatization process will undoubtedly lead to a public debate. Private as well as public corruption left an image of the president and the PRI that can easily be assailed by the public purity of PRD and the private purity of PAN. From different angles, both parties have attacked the highly politicized privatization policy as well as the selling of productive publicly owned corporations regarded as the material bulwarks of the nation. Denunciations of both the villainous market and

the dishonest state have generated a number of catchwords that make dialogue on particular economic and personal issues almost impossible.

Some internal currents of the PRI favored nostalgia for the kind of nationalism that supposedly could harness the state and the market in a socially advantageous relationship. Beyond the old guard and their patronage machine, the self-named patriotic and nationalistic sectors of the PRI have argued for the need to rescue true liberalism from its global perversions. Even technocratic governments have proclaimed their engagement with a social liberal policy and promoted a number of social programs (Sedesol, Alianza para el Campo, Progresa, etc.) because they provided a sense of legitimacy anchored in the welfare state. Many *priistas* were convinced that the "neoliberal disguise" was only a chameleon tactic that was useful to repack the PRI "in order to weather the current political storm."[xii] No president, even Fox, dares to speak about dismantling the state: the welfare connotation is still so deeply rooted in Mexican political culture that no one in power can proclaim or put forward for consideration its disappearance. State welfare, in any event, remains widely considered as the indispensable cushion device for a society that has as many economic inequities as Mexico does.

Assets and Liabilities of Mexican Nationalism

To contrast the negative effects of an asymmetrical globalization, the main intellectual question in contemporary Mexico seems to be that of how to use national heritage in order to give moral and social meaning to the technological and scientific innovations that globalization has brought. When the zeal of secular national revolutions is gone, it seems impossible to defend national integrity through enlightened means. Without a militarist or a fundamentalist tradition, the essentially secular nature of the Mexican political system was historically developed in tune

with modernity in order to further a more evolutionary capitalistic society. When Mexican nineteenth-century liberalism aimed to remove the remnants of previous and older associations left from colonial days, such as the Church or the Army, there was a widespread assumption that this process onwards was to place the national development in the same trajectory as American and French modern revolutions.

Unable to distinguish the basic social features of each of those revolutions, Mexican liberals felt themselves immersed in the legacy of the French Revolution, particularly after the war with the United States. The same assumption and the same suspicion towards American expansionism animated the disposition of Latin America's advanced leaders for more than a century of independent political life. Starting from very abstract modern paradigms, a sort of selective constitutionalism made out of the highest ideals and the best social humanist and historical causes was unsuccessfully framed for over a century of popular struggles and *coups d'etat*. Military dictatorship and economic backwardness were the responses of historical reality to the great expectations fostered by Latin America's ruling sectors.

After the nineteenth century experiment of intellectual assimilation and the adaptation of the most progressive political legislation, the pragmatic revolt against the abstract exercise of reason called for more appropriate political formulae in Mexico. Beyond imitation and abstraction, the new national spirit tried to reach a more realistic, sociologically grounded approach. Writing at the middle of the 1930s, Manuel Gamio was convinced that in order "to aspire to internationalism", Mexico should engage in "the prior building of a true nationhood." Based on "the most advanced of present-time thought," Gamio warned against the dangers of "a conservative, imperialist, warlike and awkwardly anachronistic nationalism." Amply speaking, to accomplish such a task would imply, according to Gamio's anthropologic advise, "to

equilibrate the economic situation by raising the proletarian masses; to intensify crossbreeding in order to consummate racial homogeneity; to substitute the deficient cultural characteristics of these masses by those belonging to modern civilization resorting, naturally, to the characteristics which offer positive values; to unify the language by teaching Castilian to those who just speak indigenous languages"[xiii]

From both the philosophical perspective to the new sociological perspective, the building of Mexican nationhood was regarded as more solid when invoking holistic commitments between the state and the different classes and races. Postulates about redeeming people replaced the passive political speculation of liberals and positivists. But even when Marxism was introduced as a materialistic explanation of forces neglected by idealistic pragmatism, Mexican intellectuals avoided the real political issues of private property that appealed to the general historical forces that were behind capitalism and the exploitative nature of capitalist property. The Mexican revolution, thus, did not pay attention to the historical pragmatism developed by Charles Beard in 1913. By showing the concrete connection between private property and politics, between the productive and speculative constellation and the real "structure of power," Beard was able to abandon the "architectonic perspective" of the constitution as an abstract political framework. The traditional notions of checks and balances were approached by him from the realistic and pragmatic perspective of the correlation of concrete economic forces that never acted as a "collective capitalist" but through negotiation, opportunity, compromise and even internal class war.[xiv]

A reading of Charles Beard would have contributed to a better understanding of the deepest mechanisms of power and weakness in Mexican society. Under an extremely general set of revolutionary assumptions, it was possible for the new regime to foster the illusion of an

above-all-classes political mechanism able to conciliate every conflict that appeared in a simplistically divided society. A state able to manage the holistic entities of class and ethnicity appeared as the indispensable keeper of social peace and institutional balance. No other political apparatus, accordingly, could perform such a vital function. Contrary to Almond and Verba's failure to deal with the correlation between systems of belief and ownership, the overwhelming weight given to class struggle omitted the dimension of the concrete forms of property and its functional organization. In the middle of the contradiction between a class-divided society and the necessary sovereignty of the people as a whole, Mexican political debate relapsed in the hopelessly interminable and abstract quarrel of monism versus dualism, juristic versus Marxist argumentation.

Missing from almost all deliberation, the analysis of the Mexican property system has been postponed ever since the framing of the Constitution in 1917. Another American pragmatic thinker, Morris Cohen, was able to find in 1927 a more strict correlation between private and corporate property and sovereignty. "Sovereignty is a concept of political of public law and property belongs to civil law," Cohen declared. "The distinction between public and private law is a fixed feature of our law-school curriculum. It was expressed with characteristic eighteenth-century neatness and clarity by Montesquieu, when he said that by political laws we acquire liberty and by civil law property, and that we must not apply the principles of one to the other." Rejecting the main pigeonholes of consecrated law, the "dispassionate scientific study" proposed by Cohen implied a pragmatic proposal to search out the many faces of power within the wide continuum of what is regarded as public and what is regarded as private.[xv]

If American economic theory justified private property in terms of maximizing productivity, Mexican nationalism justified public property in order to maximize legitimacy.

When the Mexican state assumed sovereignty, its holders assumed a very ambiguous condition of national owners and administrators. Since the protection of the weak classes was its conceited goal, such an ownership condition was seen necessary to protect peasants and urban workers against the misuse and abuse of strategic property. An endless land reform provided the basic natural resources to the state, and constitutional article 123 on workers' rights the social bases of the revolutionary regime. On one hand, the organicist arrangement of social classes allowed the emergence of functional corporations whose power was derived from their share in the national and popular sovereignty of which they were a mystical part. On the other hand, the dual condition of chief of government and head of the state guarantied to the president and his protégés a double and uncontrolled immunity. In a singular turn, when the state assumes sovereignty (i.e., the ownership condition) the previous cleavage of exploiters and exploited is deprived of meaning. Such a situation makes it almost impossible to trace personal power/property relationships. No political catechism can, then, solve the mystery of real power.

The assimilation of property into the idea of sovereignty, or vice versa, veiled the problem of how the real economy and productivity function without restrictions in Mexican society. When the national market is subordinated to the nation-state, the search for higher political and human causes makes economic discipline a secondary matter. Charles Beard was able to trace in the accounting books of the founding fathers a sort of original map of political ties because he paid attention to the way in which urban and rural propertied interests were defended or accommodated. Departing from the idea of a class struggle between capitalist-oriented classes that had not even emerged in 1917, Mexican political theorists were unable to attend any other consideration than the logical brilliance or the historical progressiveness of the first constitution coming from state pragmatism. In order to strengthen the political congruency

of the revolutionary regime, the Marxist organic intellectual Vicente Lombardo Toledano provided for theoretical and practical purposes the presence of a made-by-the-state national bourgeoisie to be overthrown when the conditions for a superior socialist revolution were mature. A nation-state representing the sovereignty of the people could create the preconditions for the rise of modern Mexican capitalism as well as those conditions necessary for its regulation and even its disappearance.

The voluntarist internal character of the Mexican state contrasted, however, with its external dependency. Its organic state intellectuals were shortsighted before transnational forces operating in informal political ways. Keeping the distinction between the public and the private, they remained apathetic before the autonomy gained by the private sector, not to mention its transnational liaisons. First, what latter was labeled as crony capitalism grew in the shadow of the state sovereignty. At the same time, the basis of the welfare state became more and more vulnerable, dependent on the world energy market and foreign loans, especially American. Nationalism, thus, was a social tool to prevent, in a political way, interference from abroad in the exercise of power and property by the ruling class. Even recently, when forced to open almost indiscriminately the most profitable markets, the ruling class retains the sovereignty rhetoric in order to prevent foreign meddling in national affairs such as democracy and human rights.

A very strange national protectionism has politically divided the market from the state. What happens in the former seems to be irrelevant to the latter. Since there is no way to expropriate a transnational bourgeoisie or to leave it out of real power by using political means, Mexican ruling classes can restrict their protection of sovereignty to a very simple *status quo* formula. Does Vicente Fox's accession to power mean that Mexican nationalism is exhausted in

such a way that it no longer can provide any progressive element to tame the effects of globalization?

Whither Mexico After July 2000?

To discuss contemporary Mexican dilemmas in the dichotomous framework of the state and the market would be an easy formula but it is not a realistic one. A state-oriented pragmatism can be separated from a market-oriented pragmatism only by using a very abstract approach. Both state and market are the interwoven mechanisms of the same multifaceted process of influencing people. In bold strokes, while the market privileges the field of interchange, the state privileges the field of domination. At the middle, consensus derives from their more or less satisfactory working concurrence. Empirically coeval, state and market operate together and according to the pertinence of force, exchange or compromise. To create two separate (and independent) entities is to think in ideological (if not fundamentalist) terms. By assigning opposite attributes to the state or the market, political reality becomes polarized in such a way that every moment of the multifarious social action becomes self-contained. Rather than thinking of the state and the market as ends by themselves, a new pragmatic attitude should start considering both as means for a collective national purpose.

Instead of attempting to regulate and moralize every one of the aspects of economic and social action, the *priista* Mexican government was reluctant to project those two goals within its own structure. Under the still current metaphysical assumptions, political accountability then became impossible. Precarious holders of sovereignty such as the legislative and the judiciary could not balance a state embodied in the owner-purveyor executive. Judicial aristocracy, whether Mexicans democrats like it or not, should gain (not, unfortunately, regain) a real

political stature if legal institutions are to play a more rational and functional role. Impartial arbitration as well as a national and local debate are necessary components of the political arrangement that Mexico needs to assume in its new global condition. As for the executive, no branch of the Mexican government should express any longer the higher interests of the nation, particularly if those interest have international consequences. The illusions about economic planning and economic nationalism placed on the executive have ended in centralization, bureaucracy and distorted development.

But the institutional rearrangement is, of course, no more than the prelude of wider political tasks. In many ways, the same metaphysics of the state portrays the presidential electoral process as a sort of cosmic political event. A national party that was structured according to the Italian class-conciliation model made its members averse to accepting what they regarded as the debasement of the entire Mexican society. Following that premise, a political party integrated into the state could not be removed without damaging the radical essence of the political system. Such a removal, on the opposite side, has been seen by its challengers as entailing a judgment of history, a drastic change rather than a mere political competition. The PRI debacle, it is true, deprived the party of a favorable general conservative inertia coming from the corporatist and clientelist political machine implanted among the Mexican popular sectors for more than seventy years. In contention with the American market-oriented corporation, the Mexican state-oriented corporation can no longer furnish its almost Middle-Age guilds with a social function that surmounts the profit-motive and articulates an organic class system involving the most valuable national assets vis-à-vis globalization's *laissez faire*.

The crisis of the Mexican corporate structures proves that the separation between state and market is unable to explain the complexity of an actual social continuum within which many

sub-systems of power operate. Undoubtedly, the structural weakness of the main opposition political parties does not show any kind of substitutive social organicism to meet corporativism. The business-like nature of PAN's leadership can be contrasted with the lack of nationally organized (and correlated) grassroots political support or the almost floating intellectual left aggregated into the Alianza para el Cambio (the Alliance of the PRD and several smaller parties). Lacking the entrepreneurial moment of the American revolution, Mexican businessmen were latecomers not only in the process of framing the Constitution but also in creating a complementary political organization and culture. Thenceforth, their alliance with the more obscure forces of the reaction reflected both a doctrinal disconnection and a thickened capacity for action. Certainly, the PAN's rank-and-file have relinquished a tradition associated with the United State's support of nineteenth century liberals or the loss of more than half of Mexican territory. What they can oppose to the globalization goals of their charismatic and business-oriented president is an aggressive impetus against secular education or family planning by arguing that they act in consonance with the neoliberal struggle against state religion or even lay fanaticism.

Not too far from the ideological cracks within the PAN, the PRD faces a similar lack of internal cohesion. If the PAN is regarded by foreign analysts as the best suited Mexican party for carrying out the global imperatives expressed in NAFTA, the PRD has emerged as the national hope to prevent or modify that occurrence. Paradoxically, the PRD's triumph means in current Mexican political discourse a sort of return to the grassroots in spite of its internationalist ideology. Organized by disappointed former *priistas* as well as by socialists and communists from a wide political spectrum, the current unity of the PRD comes from saving and updating the Mexican revolution's original objectives. But there is no political naiveté, or a belief that history

repeats itself, in such an assumption. While acquiring a new knowledge of contemporary world society, the PRD has seized corporate fortresses that were deserted when the PRI lost popular ground. At the same time, the sense of the state left by the best years of PRI predominance has proved to be an asset in gaining the support of middle and lower urban classes affected by the reduction of their previous standard of living. However, factual conditions may lead the PRD to precipitate in Mexican society an anarchical paternalism unable to conciliate the demands and expectations of social sectors that only share economic vulnerability with each other.

Will the defeat of the PRI transform it after the 2000 election in the countervailing power of the otherwise extremely polarized forces represented by the PAN and the PRD? The fact that the PRI has been able to recover power after PAN administrations and many of its former members are in the PRD's leadership shows that it still exerts a widespread formal and informal power throughout the Mexican political spectrum. Both in the state governments and the congress, there is no question about its strong presence if it is able to counteract its strong centrifugal forces. In spite of any recovered unity, the PRI will be no longer able to preserve its recourse to state pragmatism that encouraged its monopoly of the nation and its unlimited corruption and (more limited) authoritarianism. A logical prediction —which is always the exception in politics— could announce that its national electoral failure will force the PRI to move to a middle point between the PRD's statism and the PAN's marketism. By countervailing those extremely ideological positions and by preparing itself for a more intelligent pragmatic era, it may be possible that the PRI will overcome the burden and guilt imposed by society on defeated monopolistic parties.

NOTES

[i] Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest 16* (Summer 1989).

[ii] Almost thirty years ago, I pointed out the seemingly irreconcilable opposition between American and Latin American political discourses in "Two Ways of Thinking on Political Thought," *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* (1974).

[iii] Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal Carcere* (Torino: Einaudi, Editore, 1962).

[iv] Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture. Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

[v] I. Ramonet, *Nouveaux pouvoirs, noveaux maitres du monde. Un mond sans cap* (Montreal: Editions Fides, 1996).

[vi] See Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York: The Free Press, 1960) and *The Civic Culture.*

[vii] For the statement of this antithesis, see Julien Benda, *La traison des clercs* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1927) and William Yandell Elliott, *The Pragmatic Revolt in Politics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928)

[viii] See Antonio Caso, Alfonso Reyes, Pedro Henriquez Ureña, C. González Peña, J. Escofet, José Vasconcelos, *Conferencias del Ateneo de la Juventud* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1984).

[ix] P. Romanell, *Making of the Mexican Mind. A Study In Recent Mexican Thought* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1952), pp. 7-9, 163 and ff.

[x] See G. Zaid, *La Nueva Economía Presidencial* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1994) and E. Krauze, *La Presidencia Imperial. Ascenso y caida del sistema político mexicano (1940-1996)* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 1997). Either in its absolute monocrat or imperial apparels, the one man ruling image seems more a metaphor (or a caricature) than a political reality sustainable on sociological grounds.

[xi] *The Civic Culture.*

[xii] Manuel Pastor Jr. and Carol Wise, "Mexican-Style Neoliberalism," in Carol Wise, ed., *The Post-NAFTA Political Economy* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p. 63.

[xiii] Manuel Gamio, *Hacia un México Nuevo. Problemas Sociales* (Mexico), p. 5.

[xiv] Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960).

[xv] Morris R. Cohen, *Law and the Social Order. Essays in Legal Philosophy* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books, 1982), pp. 41 and ff.