CULTURE AND DEMOCRACY: SYMBOLIC POLITICS IN MEXICO

by

DWIGHT WILSON

(Under the Direction of Howard Wiarda)

ABSTRACT

Mexico has made a transition to democracy, but appears not have reached the stage of consolidated liberal democracy. Given the inadequacy of institutional views of explaining consolidation, theorists have turned to the liberalization of culture as an essential element in explaining the sources of democratic consolidation. This study adopts a political cultural theory of democratic consolidation, and conceives of political culture as symbolic narratives. Symbolic narratives are stories about the nation and the goals of politics that motivate and give meaning to political behavior. The study argues that a liberal symbolic narrative is a necessary component of a consolidated democracy. By viewing the evolution of symbolic narratives since the independence period of Mexico, the study reveals the transformational goals of Mexican political programs; politics has for long been oriented toward reordering society from the ground up. These aims conflict with the more limited aims of liberal democracies, and Mexico's democratic consolidation will follow the liberalization of the predominant symbolic narrative of the nation.

INDEX WORDS: Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Mexico, Political Culture, Symbolic Politics

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DEDICATION

To Big Jim, who was bigger than life.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN MEXICO

The election of Vicente Fox to the presidency of Mexico on July 2, 2000 was not an unforeseen upset. The race had been tight and despite the state's support for the "official" candidate, Fox's support extended beyond the base of his party; many in the center and on the left were backing the conservative Fox as the best hope for defeating the long-governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Nonetheless, the reality of the election was stunning to the government's supporters and detractors alike after seventy years of one party rule. Fox's victory represented the culmination of an elongated process of democratic opening and was heralded as the dawn of a new era in Mexican politics. Elections like this one are rightly celebrated for their historic significance, but when the cameras are turned off and reporters go home the difficult business of governance gets underway. A transition is not the end of democratization; democratic consolidation is the more inchoate process by which democracy is stabilized, institutionalized, and becomes, in a word, permanent. The question of consolidation has become urgent as the number of electoral democracies—regimes that feature elections, even free and fair ones, but that do not respect the rule of law—has multiplied.[1] This unexpected development following a worldwide wave of democratization has caused a flurry of questions over the essence of

[1] See e.g. Diamond, Larry. 2002. "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes." *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2):21-35; Zakaria, Fareed. 1997. "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy." *Foreign Affairs* 76 (6):22-43.

democracy, under what conditions it works best, and whether there are prerequisites for its success.[2]

Purpose of the Study

This study proposes to contribute to our understanding of the role culture plays in democratic consolidation. The purpose is first to demonstrate that institutional requisites are by themselves inadequate for explaining consolidation; institutional analysis must be accompanied by an account of the political cultural milieu in which institutions operate. The complete investigation of a democratic transition and consolidation would be one of culture and institutions (and probably many more variables) working in tandem. Given the relative neglect of cultural studies in contemporary literature concerning new Latin American democracies, this study secondly seeks to correct the imbalance by focusing on political culture. Institutions cannot be separated from their cultural context as culture shapes actors' decisions and their interpretation of institutional constraints.

Though most elites have apparently agreed that the democratic process will be the sole route to power and the institutional requisites for the democratic process have been present in Mexico for many years, these elites do not always behave and institutions do not perform according to liberal expectations. The history of the Mexican political process since independence will form the background for understanding the political cultural sources of this effect. The study will argue using an interpretivist framework that conceives of culture as a shared system of meaning, and as will be elaborated more fully in Chapter Three, will describe

[2] Karl, Terry Lynn. 1990. "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America." *Comparative Politics* 23 (1):1.12; Schmitter, Phillipe, and Terry Lynn Karl. 1991. "What Democracy Is… and Is Not." *Journal of Democracy* 2 (3):75-88; Przeworski, Adam, and Fernando Limongi. 1997. "Modernization: Theory and Facts." *World Politics* 49 (2):155-83.

the most important Mexican “symbolic narratives” of politics, the overarching stories about the Mexican nation and the purposes of politics, as the basic core of political culture.

The purpose is not to argue that Mexican culture, or any other culture, is unsuited to democracy. It is possible that democratic institutions might be erected and survive in almost any cultural context, but performance will vary across cultures because the meanings attached to a variety of political concepts vary, and actions are interpreted differently according to cultural context.

Nor is a cultural perspective to be taken as an implication that Mexican culture will in perpetuity condition political actors to engage in political behavior in any one fashion. Instead, the political cultural conditions have shaped the terms of political action and will continue to do so until significant cultural changes take place. Indeed, culture, it will be argued, is inherently mutable. I will return to this topic in the conclusion of the study to survey the changes visible in Mexican culture and their conformity to liberal expectations.

Because this study is intended to contribute to the literature on democratization, a further goal beyond the study of democratic performance in Mexico lies in establishing a basis for further use; the technique used here is applicable to the wider range of democratizing countries and beyond the study of national democratization. This cultural dimensions of politics structure democratic practice globally.

Thesis of the Study

Why does Mexico continue to display apparent vestiges of its violent, fragmented, and authoritarian past? Theories of democratic consolidation that furnish lists of features of behavioral and institutional requisites for stable democracy take us only part of the way to

illuminating the sources of liberal democratic stability. If consolidation is to be fruitfully employed as a social science concept, it must also be understood as a process of cultural change. Institutions operate within a political cultural context, and this context influences the degree of consolidation of liberal democracy.

The symbolic narratives that have achieved dominant status in Mexico have been transformational and all-encompassing blueprints for the reorganization of Mexican society from the ground up. The liberalism of the early republican period, the positivist modernizing narrative of the late nineteenth century, and the revolutionary nationalism of the twentieth century have differed in content, but these narratives have sanctioned the use of broad state power to achieve the greater goals they establish for the Mexican nation. Such transformative ends are at odds with the limited understanding of the political process which places its emphasis on the limitations of state power as a chief means of securing political goals. The transition of dominant symbolic narratives toward liberal understandings will be an essential step in the consolidation of democracy.

The Transition

In the last twenty years a whirlwind of upheaval has visited nearly every facet of Mexico—economic, social, cultural, and not least political. This brute fact is evident at nearly every turn. The Mexico of 2009—led by a president from a party other than the PRI wrangling with a divided congress and assertive state governments—would scarcely have been recognizable as recently as fifteen years earlier. Democratic reforms taking place for some years previous had already set the stage for a genuine democratic opening, but the freewheeling multiparty competition that has taken root since the late 1990s was not a necessary outcome. Indeed, many

leaders of the long-ruling PRI machine likely acquiesced to wide-ranging reform measures as much out of fear of losing their seven-decade winning streak as of a legitimate commitment to honest governmental procedure. Today, though, the democratic transition at a glance appears solid, even irreversible.

And perhaps it is. We might identify a few core principles to which almost all Mexican citizens would adhere—constitutionalism, elections as the only acceptable means of acquiring political power, separation of powers, subordination of the military to civil authority, and a free press operating in a relatively open atmosphere. We might appropriately determine that the democratic game has displaced all other games in town and that Mexico has reached a virtual point-of-no-return on the road to liberal democracy. The presidential election of 2000 was a watershed year for the democratic transition. The long anticipated fall of the PRI from the apex of political power—the very symbol of the PRI's rule—confirmed for many the arrival of a cleaner, more open and honest system of democratic procedure. The dashing and no-nonsense personality of Vicente Fox engendered expectations for a new dynamism capable of sweeping away the vestiges of an obsolete and thoroughly corrupt model of governance.

During and immediately after the transition, some literature devoted to the study of the Mexican political transition painted a fairly upbeat picture of Mexico's democratic prospects.[3] Levy, Bruhn, and Zebadúa argue that "the general and quite inexact term 'democratic' is now appropriate for Mexico."[4] Indeed, the old authoritarian system constructed around the PRI's predominance has been dumped in the graveyard and replaced by a lively three party

[3] Schedler, Andreas. 2004. "From Electoral Authoritarianism to Democratic Consolidation." In *Mexico's Democracy at Work*, ed. R. Crandall, G. Paz and R. Roett. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner; Preston, Julia, and Sam Dillon. 2004. *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy*. 1st ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Avritzer, Leonardo. 2002. *Democracy and the Public Space in Latin America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press;

[4] Levy, Daniel C., Kathleen Bruhn, and Emilio Zebadúa. 2006. *Mexico: The Struggle for Democratic Development*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 4.

competition, itself an astonishing turnabout where a centralized corporatist state held a near-monopoly on economic and social activity for much of the twentieth century.

Striking evidence of democratization is easily found in the boisterous competition among genuinely competitive parties. The deep pockets of the state financing the PRI and its loyal opposition parties, electoral fraud, and frank violence and intimidation (without denying its straightforward electoral appeal to many voters) allowed the PRI to maintain control of all state governorships until 1989, an absolute majority in the national legislature until 1997, and the presidency until 2000. Now the PRI struggles to have its voice heard as only one viable political party.

This multiparty competition is something new to Mexican politics; only a few years ago it would have been impossible to predict that in 2006 the presidential election would be closely fought between the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) and the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), with the PRI trailing in a distant third place. Since successive electoral reforms beginning in the 1970s have given greater and greater representation to opposition parties, though, parties of all manner have managed to elbow their way into legislatures, city halls, and governors' mansions, and now the presidential palace has been captured by the long-suffering PAN. Though their internal structures are far from solidified, the major parties may be crudely placed along a left-right continuum, with the PRD staking out the left side, the PAN the right, and the PRI taking an ill-defined position within the middle, with various smaller parties filling out the spectrum with green, social democratic, conservative, and pro-labor platforms. In the two previous presidential elections, then, voters had the opportunity to make a real choice between competing platforms, and parties have been obliged to scramble for votes in something much more significant than the pantomime campaigns of the PRI years. Party constituencies have

begun to coalesce, with educated and upper class voters tending toward support for the PAN, educated urban voters trending toward the PRD, and rural and less educated voters sticking through the leaner years with the PRI. Parties do not base their electoral appeals exclusively on their programmatic principles, however, and much of the old patronage-driven machine politics remains evident in campaigns. Perhaps as the dust settles from the PRI's collapse a cohesive three or four party system with relatively fixed social bases will develop. In contrast to the years of single party rule, elite-level conflict has grown more intense.[5]

In addition to these recently evolved cleavages, an explosion of civil society groups has accompanied the opening of the political system. As is well known, modern democracy does not survive by elections alone. Among empirical democratic theorists in the post-cold war era, attention has centered on the role of civil society as a buffer between state and citizen,[6] and in the last few decades popular movements have been credited with reining in official overreach in Latin America.[7] Despite the activity of an "official civil society" comprised of state-directed (and even state-created) groups in Mexico, groups independent of the state in Mexico were squeezed tightly by the PRI system, running into myriad roadblocks, and patronage-driven relationships governed much of the interaction between state and society. Now human rights groups, labor unions, peasant unions, business organizations, women's groups, environmental and indigenous groups noisily clamor for the government to address their concerns.

[5] Bruhn, Kathleen, and Kenneth Greene. 2007. "Elite Polarization Meets Mass Moderation in Mexico's 2006 Election." *PS: Political Science and Research* 40 (1):33-8.
[6] See e.g. Fals-Borda, O. 1992. "Social Movements and Political Power in Latin America." In *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America*, ed. A. Escobar and A. Alvarez. Boulder: Westview Press; Garreton-Merlno, M. A. 1989. "Popular Mobilization and the Military Regime in Chile: The Complexities of the Invisible Transition." In *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, ed. S. Eckstein. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press.
[7] Escobar, Arturo, and Sonia E. Alvarez. 1992. *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Federalism, once a chimera proclaimed in the constitution but absent in practice, has matured. The hallmark of the PRI system was a tight centralism, with political power concentrated in the national executive and flowing outward to the national legislature and judiciary, and downward to state and local officials. Now, devolution of political and economic power from the center to lower levels of government has taken long strides and the once commanding and imperious presidency has shrunk to pitiable proportions, all of which further limits state power, a characteristic normally associated with liberal democracy.

Doubts concerning the long-term viability of the regime tend to grow from the increasingly brutal wave of violence unleashed in the drug war. Concern usually revolves around the versatility and durability of new, fragile institutions and the potential for the "Colombianization" of Mexico. These concerns, legitimate and pressing as they are, focus attention on institutions, allowing the presumption that institution are the linchpin of democracy and its consolidation.

There is, then, no doubt that the Mexican political system is far more democratic than at any time in the last century, and perhaps ever. With a growth in party competition, civil society's vigor, and division of power, we may be witnessing the transformation of a corporatist, single-party authoritarian regime into a participatory, multiparty democracy. This is to say that the transition to democracy is complete, and we may now consider its status as a potentially consolidated democracy.

Democratic Consolidation?

The recent debate over democratic consolidation has filled the pages of journals and books for twenty years. Mexico's recent history makes it a prime candidate for consolidation, and some

scholars began to find the process underway in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Discussion of Mexico's political fate did, indeed, turn to expectations of its democratic consolidation.[8]

Much of the discussion channels, implicitly or explicitly, the modernization theories prominent in the 1960s that predicted political and economic development to proceed together. Levy and Bruhn,[9] for example, maintain that political liberalization is the outcome of economic liberalization. These scholars found many economic and social challenges to democratic consolidation but few of other sorts. The challenges that remain, towering problems though they are, might presumably be addressed through discussion, negotiation, and compromise—the hallmarks of the democratic process. In the event that the political will can be mustered the path should be clear, consequently, for democratic consolidation.

But evidence from Mexico suggests that the deepening of democratic consolidation might face higher hurdles than previously imagined. Satisfaction with democratic performance is volatile and trust in institutions and parties remains low. The annual Latinobarómetro survey of attitudes in Latin America has shown that support for democracy in Mexico has hovered around a disconcerting fifty percent since 1996, a time frame which of course includes the historic transfer of presidential power to the Fox administration. Satisfaction with democracy is shown in the same survey to have fluctuated between eighteen and forty one percent in the last several years, numbers which should give pause to the most optimistic democrats.[10]

The preferred method of the PRI in quieting opposition was cooptation, but the threat of retaliation always stood as a backdrop to offers of conciliation. Politically motivated violence has

[8] See e.g. Camp, Roderic Ai. 2007. *Politics in Mexico: The Democratic Consolidation*. 5th ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
[9] Levy, Daniel C., Kathleen Bruhn, and Emilio Zebadúa. 2006. *Mexico: The Struggle for Democratic Development*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 4.
[10] See "Informes Anuales." available at http://www.latinobarometro.org/

not melted away with the authoritarian one party regime, and mobilized citizens have continued to clash with authorities. Plans by the government to build a new airport near Mexico City led to rioting by those whose land was to be expropriated in 2002. Violence flared again in 2006 ending in mass detentions. In the capital city of the state of Oaxaca in the summer of the same year a teachers' strike escalated into a melee as the police attempted to disperse the demonstrators. The protesters expelled the police from the city center and attempted to create a parallel government, demanding the resignation of the governor. The standoff lasted months and has yet to be fully resolved. These and many other outbursts of violence are accompanied by charges of widespread human rights abuses as authorities are accused of acting with impunity, and police themselves become targets of attacks with Molotov cocktails and machetes.

The revolutionary group Ejercito Zapatatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) based in the southern state of Chiapas, though no longer on the radar screen of the international media, continues to defy the state and to administer "autonomous municipalities" without the consent of the government. Meanwhile, a shadowy splinter group of the EZLN, the Ejército Popular Revolucionario (EPR), rejects the more conciliatory, media-driven approach of the larger group and has undertaken a bombing campaign in the last several years after a period of relative inactivity.

Perhaps most dramatically, after the photo finish of the 2006 election, the losing candidate of the PRD refused to accept defeat, charged fraud, and established a rump government leading some members of the legislature to deny the legitimacy of the president-elect. In the next months members of the PRD occupied the legislative chamber to prevent President Fox from delivering the state of the union address and attempted to thwart the inauguration of the new president. Are these the inevitable growing pains of a new democracy,

bumps to be smoothed by a democracy still in the making, or the sign of a more intractable condition, one in which the consolidation of liberal democracy is a significantly more complex prospect? These could be disconnected incidents of lawlessness, and the Mexican political system has without doubt democratized. But there remain pockets of illiberal tendencies, and the systematic quality of these events signals that they spring from a deeper failure of the rule of law and widespread disapprobation for the political process as practiced in the new democracy. At the height of the drug violence seizing the country, there have even been suggestions of that Mexico may be on the verge of state failure.[11]

A problem endemic to any inquiry into democratic consolidation lies squarely in the concept of consolidation itself. Scholars seeking the essence of consolidation have proposed a litany of factors, threatening to make an already confused concept incoherent.[12] The consolidation literature grew from the recognition that a transition to democracy is not the fully realization of democracy; new democracies experience growing pains and face the looming threat of reversal. Democracies have sometimes been considered consolidated only when they are secure and unlikely to undergo an authoritarian reversal (in a sudden or creeping movement), a deceptively straightforward condition.

Clearly, though, definitions based on the foregoing criterion tells us very little in practice and threaten to collapses into tautology if not more fully elaborated. Beyond problems of conceptual clarity consolidation encounters serious measurement difficulties. Consolidation appears only to be measurable after the fact, after authoritarian reversal has not taken place. Important questions that must be addressed include how consolidation comes about and how we

[11] Bowman, Tom. February 27, 2009. “CIA and Pentagon Wonder: Could Mexico Implode?” *National Public Radio*. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101215537

[12] Schedler, A. 1998. "What is democratic consolidation?" *Journal of Democracy* 9 (2):91-107.

can know it has taken place, and in the extensive literature devoted to consolidation we find a variety of answers to them, sometimes from the same authors. A large portion of research in democratization and consolidation has focused primarily either on behaviors of political actors and particularly elites in upholding democratic institutions, or on the importance of institutions themselves in making democracy routine and reducing the uncertainty surrounding the democratic process.

Recognizing the failure of earlier modernization theories to predict either the onslaught of authoritarianism in the 1960s and 1970s or its precipitous collapse in the following decades, scholars grappled with explaining democratization by appealing to contingency inherent in any transition. Elites and elite level interactions are often seen as the keys in democratic consolidation while the roles of institutions or values are downplayed as necessary bulwarks for democratic success.[13] The bargaining and pact-making that preserves the interests of power brokers and secures their support for the democratic process are the linchpin of democratic consolidation. In this formulation the regime hinges on contingent choices and democratic consolidation is one of several possible outcomes of bargaining processes. Solid institutional frameworks and mass dedication to democratic procedure might certainly take an ancillary part in upholding the democratic regime put in place by elites but the focus remains on the determining role of these foundational decisions.

Other studies of democratic consolidation broaden the perspective beyond pure contingency of some of the transition literature to analysis of institutions. Institutions are viewed as playing a crucial part in cementing democratic practices and ensuring loyalty among

[13] Burton, Michael, Richard Gunther, and John Higley. 1992. "Introduction: Elite Transformations and Democratic Regimes." In *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe*, ed. J. Higley and R. Gunther. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press; Casper, Gretchen, and Michelle M. Taylor. 1996. *Negotiating Democracy: Transitions From Authoritarian Rule*. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press.

important actors. Linz and Valenzuela,[14] O'Donnell and Schmitter,[15] and Stepan and Skach[16] emphasize the importance of institutional design in ensuring that losers in political competition will not be alienated from the democratic process. Proportional representation electoral schemes and parliamentarism appear in their eyes as the best guarantors of democratic stability. Institutions thus reduce political uncertainty and create "credible commitments" among actors who have reason to distrust each other that pacts cannot afford.

Elite behavior and institutions may take some initial steps toward explaining consolidation, but stop short of the full journey. Remmer opines that scholars who focus on elite decision making have dusted off Machiavelli's prince, a skilled virtuoso who can impose democracy along with the help of a dash of fortune. These voluntaristic accounts of democracy were a response to repeated failures of theory to predict the course of regimes but in themselves represents a further failure of theory by assigning the outcome of democratization to chance and divorcing political actors from any context.[17]

Institutions, too, tell only a partial story. As Alexander argues, institutional designs are not immutable and the basic institutional array can be revisited by challengers to the status quo at any time.[18] Institutions cannot be their own guarantors when they may be reformulated. As recent events in Russia and Venezuela have shown, democratic institutions are unable on their own to

[14] Linz, Juan J., and Arturo Valenzuela. 1994. *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
[15] O'Donnell, Guillermo A., Philippe C. Schmitter, and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Latin American Program., eds. 1986. *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
[16] Stepan, Alfred C., and Cincy Skach. 1993. "Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation: Parliamentarism versus Presidentialism." *World Politics* 46 (1):1-22.
[17] Remmer, Karen. 1991. "New Wine or Old Bottlenecks? The Study of Latin American Democracy." *Comparative Politics* 23 (4):479-95.
[18] Alexander, Gerard. 2001. "Institutions, Path Dependence, and Democratic Consolidation." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 13 (3):249-69.

forge a consolidated democracy but can be degraded from within. Even where institutions appear stable, they do not always reflect the actual processes of politics.

O'Donnell has pointed out the importance of informal rules to democracy. The formal aspects of democracy, such as elections and separation of powers, may be fully institutionalized while the informal practices of politics considered contrary to democracy (clientelism and particularism in his mind) remain fully institutionalized as well.[19] We are tempted when we observe disparity in formal rules and actual behavior to conclude that the rules are being broken when it is equally plausible that we simply have not uncovered the actual rules prescribing behavior.

Often sufficient conditions for consolidation are drawn upon as explanation for democratic stability. Linz and Stepan begin such an exercise by citing "a free and lively" civil society, autonomous political society, the rule of law, an effective bureaucracy, and a properly regulated economy. The presence of these conditions signals the completion of the consolidation process.[20] Coming from the opposite direction, evidence of an unconsolidated regime is sometimes adduced by a checklist of alarming behaviors. Schedler lists violence, rejection of election results and transgression of authority as easily recognizable signs that democracy is yet to be fully internalized by relevant actors. Openly antidemocratic behaviors clearly signal that democrats cannot relax, but as Schedler notes, consolidation cannot be measured only in these terms since, as has become clear, democracy may be undermined by entirely democratic means.[21] As real world cases have added instances of democratic erosion to an already wide range of challenges to liberal democratic rule, the list of requirements for consolidation grows to

[19] O'Donnell, Guillermo A. 1996. "Illusions About Consolidation." *Journal of Democracy* 7 (2):34-51.
[20] Linz, Juan. Alfred Stepan. 1996b. "Toward Consolidated Democracies." *Journal of Democracy* 7 (2):14-33.
[21] Schedler, 1998, op cit.

unwieldy proportions. As they grow the conditions for consolidation begin to resemble ad hoc additions made to compensate for failures in empirical application.

Such lists of sufficient conditions for consolidated democracy (or unconsolidated democracy) are, furthermore, only descriptive, rather than explanatory. No mechanisms for the emergence of the various dimensions of consolidated democracy are delineated. Appeals to elite behavior or institutional configurations alone lead us in a circle since these behaviors and institutions may change if not fully institutionalized; why they become institutionalized is the very question consolidation is intended to address. A preference for parsimony might be the usual standard in political science, but as yet no simple formulation has been found to satisfy conceptual demands for consolidation.

Consolidation has been implicitly or explicitly conceived as an endpoint in a process of development of liberal democracy, with a host of regimes falling somewhere between authoritarian and consolidated democracy. Expectations of this sort are inherently normative, rendering consolidation of questionable value except as a programmatic rather than as an empirical concept applicable as a measure of democratic stability. Becker proposes forsaking the use of consolidation altogether since it has unintentionally been deployed simply as a "seal of approval" without providing a coherent explanation of how democracies become consolidated. Expectations that democracies will consolidate in such a way that they will conform to liberal prescriptions could indefinitely remand a range of political systems to a "transitional" or under-performing phase of democratization. We cannot foreclose on the possibility that illiberal democracies or hybrid regimes are stable, distinct regime types themselves—consolidated democracies but not liberal democracies. What we have referred to simply as consolidated democracy is better conceived as consolidated *liberal* democracy, recognizing this as one among

several possible outcomes in political development. Given the state of Mexican democracy, it is distinctly possible that its democratization has in fact been a process of the consolidation of an illiberal democracy.

"Consolidology," in short, has failed to advance our understanding of the sources of democratic stability and performance through appeal to bargaining or rules. Becker proposes forsaking the use of consolidation altogether since it has unintentionally been deployed simply as a "seal of approval" without providing a coherent explanation of how democracies become consolidated.[22] Most often assessment of democratic consolidation consists of applying the Potter Stewart test, that is, we know it when we see it. A straightforward explanation of the sources of consolidation has so far escaped our grasp.

Given its complexity, consolidation is now more often seen as operating at several levels. The recognition of the multifaceted nature of consolidation has contributed to increased attention to cognitive bases of political behavior. Legitimacy, for instance, has taken an important position in explaining consolidation. Linz and Stepan stress the premier importance of legitimacy of the democratic regime, which rests on an internal judgment that the government has the right to make binding decisions which must be obeyed whether or not one agrees with them. Legitimacy is expressed in "loyalty" to the regime among the various actors vying for control of the government, crucially for the opposition, as well as the public at large.[23] Disloyal and semi-loyal opposition pose a threat of destabilizing a newly created democracy by withholding assent to or actively opposing the regimes decisions. Linz and Stepan thus define consolidation as the period of struggle for allegiance of actors not yet fully loyal to the regime.[24] In their judgment, a

[22] Becker, D. G. 1999. "Latin America: Beyond "Democratic Consolidation"." *Journal of Democracy* 10 (2):138-51.
[23] Linz, Juan J., and Alfred C. Stepan. 1996a. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. pp. 16-17.
[24] Ibid, p. 44.

consolidated democracy is one in which the large majority of the population esteems the regime as legitimate.

For Gunther, Puhle, and Diamandouros, consolidation hinges on "substantial attitudinal support" for and "behavioral compliance" with the rules of the new regime.[25] Ultimately they describe a consolidated democracy as one in which "all politically significant groups regard its key political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political contestation, and adhere to the democratic rules of the game."[26] Diamond takes a parallel tack in ascribing legitimacy to the core of consolidation, requiring that elite and masses believe that democracy is the "most right and appropriate" for their context. The commitment to democracy must transcend an abstract endorsement as an ideal form of government and entails a behavioral component, rising to the level of a change in political culture.[27] As for Linz and Stepan, Diamond underscores the centrality of the willingness of elites to extend to each other the respect necessary to compete peacefully for influence in the decision-making process.[28]

These investigations of attitudinal change and support for democratization parallel another stream in the literature that reserves a central place for political culture in democratic consolidation. The developmental theories of the classical modernization theorists paid special attention to political culture change as a defining feature of development and thus democratization. Almond and Powell, for instance, expected that political culture would become secularized and rationalized, leading to the adoption of modernized political systems.[29] This was

[25] Gunther, Richard, Nikiforos P. Diamandouros, and Hans-Jürgen Puhle. 1995. *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation: Southern Europe in comparative perspective*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 3
[26]Ibid, p. 7.
[27] Diamond, Larry. 1999. *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
[28] Linz and Stepan, op cit. p. 69.
[29] Almond, Gabriel, and James Coleman. 1966. *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*. Edited by G. C. Almond, James; Pye, Lucian. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

rooted in the Parsonian view of culture change as a change in value orientations. For example, as modernization proceeds, the particularistic worldview wherein kinship ties dictate relationships prevalent in traditional societies should be replaced by a universalistic one in which all are treated equally; the expectation that status is conferred by birth in traditional societies should be replaced by the expectation that merit determines life chances. These expectations were not borne out, and the modernization perspectives that had fueled so much academic output lost vitality as facts on the ground conflicted with hypotheses.

Though chastened by earlier failures, social scientists have renewed interest in culture following the worldwide wave of democratizations in the latter part of the twentieth century, the end of cold war ideological fixations, and the phenomenal growth of some national economies and laggard performance of others. Scholars again take culture seriously, some finding in it a powerful explanatory tool to account for a wide range of social, economic, and political outcomes.[30] Culture has proved an inescapable issue in democratization and democratic consolidation, provoking extensive polemics. While some scholars find no relationship between cultural factors and democratic consolidation,[31] others have remained stalwart in seeking to reintroduce culture as the important subject it had been in previous decades. Diamond, for instance, calls political culture and democracy a "classic and fundamental theme"[32] and has tried to balance attention given to institutions, elites, and culture. Fukuyama lists culture as the "deepest" of four levels at which consolidation takes place, providing the ultimate foundations for democratization at the levels of ideology, institutions, and civil society. Democratic transition

[30] Huntington, Samuel P. 2000. "Culture Counts." In *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, ed. L. E. Harrison and S. P. Huntington. New York: Basic Books.
[31] Gasiorowski, M. J., and T. J. Power. 1998. "The structural determinants of democratic consolidation - Evidence from the Third World." *Comparative Political Studies* 31 (6):740-71; Mousseau, M. 2000. "Market prosperity, democratic consolidation, and democratic peace." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44 (4):472-507.
[32] Diamond, Larry Jay. 1994. *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*. Textbook ed. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, p. 7.

may takes place at those more superficial levels, but consolidation only comes with the slow process of change in the "a-rational, ethical habit" of culture.[33]

The cultural underpinnings of consolidation illuminate the process in ways unavailable to other theoretical constructions based solely on institutions or behaviors. Taking consolidation as a process of cultural change toward liberal democracy transforms consolidation from a programmatic and normative concept to an empirical one subject to explanation, though one with its own set of problems, examined below.

Organization of the Study

The study will consist of eight chapters. Chapter Two will examine the concept cultural theories and compare positivist approaches typified by the civic culture concept, and interpretivist approaches familiar to anthropological theorists, making the case that an interpretivist conceptualization of culture better serves our understanding of the effects of culture on politics.

Chapter Three briefly outlines the literature on Latin American history and culture and establishes the study's theoretical framework for Mexican political culture by describing the symbolic narratives framework. Chapter Three will also establish the methodological foundations of the study, with a short examination of the problems of comparability and generalization associated with cultural studies.

Chapters Four through Six will describe in greater detail how symbolic narratives unfolded from the independence era to the transition from PRI rule, focusing on how political narratives have conceived of the means and ends of politics. Chapter Four will briefly treat the foundations of Mexican society and culture in the colonial period, and will more extensively

[33] Fukuyama, F. 1995. "The Primacy of Culture." *Journal of Democracy* 6 (1):7-14.

focus on the post-independence struggle for predominance between conservatives and liberals that culminated in Liberal Reform of the mid-nineteenth century. Chapter Five will discuss the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876 – 1910) and detail the ideological presumptions and controversies of that regime and of the Revolution breaking out in 1910, while Chapter Six will extend this analysis to the post-Revolutionary regime of the PRI. Chapter Seven will make a sketch of the Mexican political landscape since the democratic transition and discuss the cultural change apparent in Mexican society in the twenty first century. Finally, Chapter Eight will conclude the study with a discussion of the implications for Mexican democratic consolidation and possibilities for further study.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURE AND POLITICS

The previous chapter concluded that Mexico has not become a consolidated democracy. The current chapter turns toward a discussion of conceptions of culture and lay the foundation for the analysis of Mexican political culture used in the remainder of the study.

Theories of Culture

In 1988 Ronald Inglehart wrote of a "Renaissance of Political Culture."[34] Dissatisfied with the popularity of rational actor models and the neglect of cultural variables, he proposed that democracy could be linked to enduring cultural traits. The title suggested the pattern of the waxing and waning appeal of culture as a social science concept, and he declared a rebirth in cultural studies in political science. Twenty years after the "renaissance" how much can we say we know with any certainty about the interplay between culture and politics? Debates in journals and books have arisen not only over the boundaries of culture and measurement issues—important as these are—but also whether in the final analysis culture is a fruitful concept for the social sciences at all, revealing a much deeper fissure. In answer to Inglehart and other proponents of cultural theories, skeptics find no meaningful relationship between cultural factors and political or economic performance. These critics declared that the political cultural renaissance was simply reiterating old fallacies seen and exposed for years. This state of affairs

[34] Inglehart, Ronald. 1988. "The Renaissance of Political Culture." *The American Political Science Review* 82 (4):1203-30.

is all the more surprising if we agree with Lichbach and Zuckerman[35] that cultural theories comprise one of the three large schools of research in comparative politics along with structuralism and rationalism.

Political culture has great potential as a midrange theoretical perspective. Culture, standing somewhere between a macro-level focus of structural theories and a micro-level focus of the individual, might serve as the missing link between the two. Cultural theories have most often revolved around questions concerning the link between culture and variables such as regime type and economic performance. As a potential explanation for such wide ranging and consequential effects, the energy poured into cultural studies is easily understood.

Despite continual criticism and varying appeal since its introduction into political science in the 1950s and its elusive nature, cultural explanations for political events obstinately continue to attract attention. Clifford Geertz, perhaps the best known contemporary expositor of culture in the social sciences, stated flatly "One of the things everyone knows but no one can quite think how to demonstrate is that a country's politics reflect the design of its culture."[36] Why should this be the case? Why should such effort be expended on a concept that continually eludes our grasp, rather than dispense with it? The answer lies in its intuitive appeal and seemingly commonsensical explanatory power. We immediately recognize the importance of community norms, identity, religion, and other subjective elements. We cannot easily dismiss the probability that capitalist development and liberal democracy likely arose first in Western countries due to some cultural influences.[37] How, though, are these important aspects of social life to be defined, and what effect can we say they have on political behavior and institutions?

[35] Lichbach, Mark Irving, and Alan S. Zuckerman. 1997. *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*. Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
[36] Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures; Selected Essays*. New York,: Basic Books, p. 311.
[37] Wiarda, Howard J., and with the assistance of Esther M. Skelley. 2007. *Comparative Politics: Approaches and Issues*. Lanham, [Md.]: Rowman & Littlefield Pu. p. 67.

This chapter will identify two broad categories into which most political culture research falls, here referred to as positivist and interpretivist. The positivist branch of cultural studies is associated with behavioralism and descends from the survey methodology established in large part by Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture*. The underlying assumption among positivist researchers is that for culture to have value as a social science concept it should be clearly identified and measured—usually as subjective values, beliefs, or orientations held singly by individuals—and its impact on politics objectively assessed. Interpretivist researchers, on the other hand, doubt the relevance of methodological positivism for revealing culture and its effects, arguing that culture cannot be reduced to discrete values and beliefs. Instead, this school defines culture as intersubjective, as a system of shared meaning. This chapter will compare the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches, and explain that the positivist approach fails to meet the social scientific criteria it is intended to satisfy due to its weaknesses explaining political change, subcultural variation, its tendencies toward reification and determinism, and the difficulties in distinguishing between causes and consequences. An interpretivist approach, on the other hand, avoids these problems associated with positivist cultural studies and will thus be adopted for this study.

Behavioralism and Positivism

What we now refer to as political culture has occupied a prominent place in political thinking as long as pen has been put to paper. From Herodotus and Aristotle to Rousseau and Weber, "constitutions," "customs," "habits," "morals," "manners" and other turns of phrase have been enlisted to account for differences among societies, all of which terms we would translate into our own idiom as culture. Following World War II, as the modern field of comparative politics

took shape, the demand grew to integrate the scientific method to contribute to a cumulative body of knowledge about the "emerging areas" that had been overlooked in favor of European case studies.

The behavioral approach that followed upended the discipline in the mid-twentieth century even as scholars of political culture in political science drew heavily on predecessors stretching back through the canon of western thought. Also during this time period the field of cultural anthropology was taking shape; Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, George Foster, and Margaret Mead pioneered the discipline, while scholars such as Benedict and Nathan Leites put their cultural expertise to work in the policy field during World War II and the cold war, exercising heavy influence on the new cultural inquiries in political science.[38] Almond took the first tentative steps distinguishing political culture as a concept with promise for comparative political inquiry, untangling it from parties and ideologies,[39] but it was Almond and Verba's landmark study that set the benchmark for inquiry into the political cultural effects on democracy. The five nation study that comprised *The Civic Culture* took long strides in clarifying the concept and establishing measurement criteria. Political culture was defined as the "particular pattern of orientations toward political objects," and these orientations were divided into three subtypes, cognitive, affective, and evaluational orientations.[40]

Centering on the political cultural requisites for democracy, the study finds that the proper mixture of orientations produces a civic culture conducive to this regime. The ambition of the project alone sets it apart; the survey data forming the basis for comparison allowed for a truly comparative enterprise. Though treated to extensive scrutiny and criticism,[41] *The Civic*

[38]Wiarda. 2007, op cit, p. 69.
[39] Almond, Gabriel. 1956. "Comparative Political Systems." *Journal of Politics* 18 (3):391-409.
[40] Almond, Gabriel A., and Sidney Verba. 1963. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton, N.J.,: Princeton University Press, p. 13.
[41]See e.g. Almond, Gabriel; Sidney Verba, ed. 1989. *The Civic Culture Revisited*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Culture became the primary reference and foundation for further positivist political cultural research in political science.[42] Political culture was a central concept for political science in these halcyon days and was of immense importance to modernization theories. For Almond and Powell development was by definition marked by the secularization of culture, "the process whereby men become increasingly rational, analytical, and empirical in their political action."[43]

The Behavioral Revolution promised a scientific method for the study of politics that could at last empirically confirm the effects of culture on political development and democracy, and allow prediction of the direction of cultural change. The optimism was short-lived, though. Challenges to cultural theories arose as modernization theories were scrutinized and critiqued particularly by dependency theorists, who appealed to relations of international capital to explain underdevelopment and authoritarianism; by rational choice, relying on individual preference maximization; and by the "transitions to democracy" literature that focused primarily on elite-level interactions that lead to the fall of authoritarianism and its replacement with more liberal regimes. Adherents to these approaches make wide-ranging claims with only secondary place for culture or bypassing it altogether.

In addition to methodological issues (explored more fully below), critics of cultural theories during the *Civic Culture* period noted the teleological quality of postulated cultural change. Developing societies tended to be lumped into "traditional" and "modern" categories accompanied by the presumption that the modern was better suited to democracy. A normative project was detected in an allegedly empirical one; traditional culture was viewed as ballast retarding the achievement of the universally desirable traits of modernism and democracy.

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[42] Chilton, Stephen. 1988. "Defining Political Culture." *The Western Political Quarterly* 41 (3):419-45.

[43] Almond, Gabriel A., and G. Bingham Powell. 1966. *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*. Boston,: Little, p. 24.

Nonetheless, the positivist concept of culture proved more resilient than these critiques would have it. After a period of relative inactivity in the 1970s and 80s, theories with one foot in the civic culture approach experienced a resurgence, occasioning Inglehart's proclamation of a renaissance. Robert Putnam reoriented discussion of cultural effects on democracy toward social capital. His trailblazing studies *Making Democracy Work*[44] and *Bowling Alone* [45] provoked a flurry of attention given to individual-level interactions, and their positive relationship with democratic institutional performance and the risks of democratic decay associated with the loss of social trust. Putnam locates causal influence in "norms, networks, and trust," the basis of the social capital that lowers barriers to collective action and improves democratic performance. Fukuyama similarly argues that trusting societies are likely to fare better in a globalizing environment.[46]

Inglehart was simultaneously pulling modernization theory and its associated cultural investigations away from the brink of obscurity. Compiling new evidence for the interconnection of economic and technological changes with value change, he claimed that the earlier theorists had been in large measure correct, he has argued that postmaterialist values were emerging in the most technologically advanced societies.[47] Landmark cultural studies continue to appear, such as Landes' global extension of Weber's thesis that cultural orientations contribute to economic development.[48] These developments demonstrate the continued salience of a cultural orientation in comparative studies and reignited the debate surrounding the soundness of the concept.

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[44] Putnam, Robert D., Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Nanetti. 1994. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
[45] Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
[46] Fukuyama, Francis. 1995. *Trust: Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Free Press.
[47] Inglehart, Ronald. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
[48] Landes, David S. 1998. *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton.

Problems of Positivism

Among critics of culture as a social science concept, a consensus has emerged that culture is at best unenlightening and at worst downright pernicious to the search for general answers to questions about important political processes. Among its defects are questions concerning its boundaries, which are unfortunately fuzzy; what can be counted as culture and what can be ruled out? There have been as at least as many definitions of culture as there have been cultural theorists and even more considering that these theorists sometimes change their minds. This might betray not just indecision on the part of its practitioners or the expected evolution that will follow a concept's application and refinement, but a deeper problem with the concept itself. Falling somewhere between the macro- and micro-levels, culture can be taken sometimes as an instance of individual cognition and at others as an objective feature of social life.[49] Despite decades of research and reworking no one has been able to find a definition of culture which all can agree also fulfills the demands for a useful social scientific concept. In a broad-based challenge to political cultural studies, Reisington doubts even that culture can be considered a concept, but is instead used as a "rubric," a loose categorization without strict criteria.[50]

Even while its exact proportions have been controversial, culture in political science has been marshaled to explain far too much, its critics charged, thus explaining very little. Culture has been recruited as a residual variable, as a background condition that fills in the cracks when other more dynamic factors appear insufficient to fully explain observed phenomena. Culture acts as a "dumping ground" in other words.[51] A reliable backup variable can be convenient for explaining away problem areas, but need not be explored as a valuable concept in itself.

[49]Chilton, 1988, op cit.
[50] Reisington, William M. 1995. "The Renaissance of a Rubric: Political Culture as Concept and Theory." *The International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 7 (4):328-52.
[51]Wiarda, 2007, op cit, p. 73.

Cultural theories have further encountered the problem of accounting for political change. Since culture is by its nature shared and transmitted through generations, it must remain stable to be recognizable as a coherent entity that can be studied, and as Eckstein points out the postulates of cultural theory produce the expectation of continuity.[52] Yet accounting for political change, particularly in the form of regime transitions and economic development, has been high on the culturalist agenda since the 1960s. For culture to occupy a forward position in our theoretical arsenal it cannot fail in making sense of the continual flux of the political world. We are in a difficult position if we propose to understand the politics of more than a handful of places by reference to a population's unchanging orientation to the world. The assumption of static culture leaves the cultural analyst in the uncomfortable position of appealing to some extrinsic cause to make sense of observed change. If outside forces—structures for instance—are responsible for changes in culture there appears to be little reason to appeal to culture as a causal force, except as an intervening variable.

Furthermore, sudden changes, as in revolutionary changes, would have to be reconciled with cultural continuity if we presume culture matters for social outcomes. Does culture change quickly or glacially, or in fits and starts? The question remained problematic among cultural theorists. There are those who maintain the durability of cultural patterns over long periods. Pye and Pye see culture as integrated with an individual's personality and cultural change as traumatic to the person.[53] Others have seen culture as more easily mutable, changing relatively quickly in response to economic or political changes. Putnam, for instance, finds reason to worry that the United States has depleted its supply of social capital in relatively short order.[54] If culture

[52] Eckstein, Harry. 1988. "A Culturalist Theory of Political Change." *American Political Science Review* 82 (3):789-804.
[53] Pye, Lucian W., and Mary W. Pye. 1985. *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press.
[54]Putnam, 2000, op cit.

is to be convincingly delineated as a single concept, it cannot be simultaneously durable and mutable.

Area specialists will lose no time in objecting that positivistic cultural studies sacrifice accuracy for the sake of generalizability; the nuance and complexity inherent in any society must be reduced for the sake of comparability. Such comparison, however, papers over significant differences within and across cultures. Entire nationalities might be lumped within an undifferentiated whole defined by an essential core. Even in the most homogeneous of societies, though, beliefs and values of members conflict, sometimes fundamentally, and all the more in complex modern societies of millions of citizens. Subcultures—groups with values different from those of the majority—cannot fit neatly within this schema, and countercultures and separatist groups might derive their very identification in opposition to the national identity they reject. But for the sake of speaking of the Italian, Russian, or Mexican political cultures that can be compared these divisions must usually be acknowledged and then passed over. The wide-ranging, large-N studies performed by many comparativists studying culture therefore simply paper over these differences.

Additionally, the positivist political culture conception as values and other subjective beliefs apparently relies on the presumption of a deterministic impetus that does not withstand scrutiny. Barry forcefully pursues this critique arguing that explanations relying on values most often are reduced to tautological reasoning, collapsing into the unedifying observation that people's behavior is due to their cultural predilection for that type of behavior. It might well be the case that behaviors are derived from cultural values, but they might also be attributable to myriad other factors as well. Though tautology is not a necessary flaw of cultural explanations, escaping the trap is a "formidable" task.[55]

[55] Barry, Brian M. 1970. *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy*. London,: Collier-Macmillan, pp. 90-92.

In the end analysis, political culture of the positivist variety appears to exist as a national unit encompassing every member of the political community, and to make us do things that can be explained wholly by reference to a cultural predisposition. Positivist conceptions of political culture are consequently hard pressed to escape the charges of determinism and reification.

The predominant civic culture conception has the advantage of being relatively concrete; these beliefs and values can be identified and their prevalence among sample population measured, but the very nature of the concept of culture makes its study in the behavioralist vein challenging in special ways. The assumptions of behavioralism place a premium on precise measurement as a means of scientific advancement, and from the positivist view if culture is to be a useful concept, it must be subject to such measurement, usually quantification. Survey data and statistical studies were to bring cultural studies into the realm of science.

To be certain of their results, however, researchers must know that they are indeed measuring what they think they are measuring. The validity problem is a well-recognized and acute one for comparative studies. Such problems are only compounded when studies are performed across cultural lines, however. When studying a different culture we must entertain the possibility that our concepts and definitions do not, in Sartori's term, "travel" unadulterated.[56] Does representation mean the same in Tanzania as in Britain? Does democracy? We may find that both these are highly regarded in any number of cultures, though if their meanings are entirely distinct among those cultures we are left with a hopelessly distorted picture of the role they play in different cultures when we attempt comparison. Assurances of validity require intimacy with the culture under study. The deeper we climb into another culture to be certain of local meanings of concepts, however, the further we move from the purposes of large-scale

[56] Sartori, Giovanni. 1970. "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics." *American Political Science Review* 64 (4):1033-53.

studies—hypothesis testing and wide application. Cross-cultural survey data should, therefore, be treated delicately as we can never be certain that they are in fact capturing what they advertise.

During the renaissance of political culture studies of the 1980s and 1990s, the renewed debate over the usefulness of culture often covered familiar ground, largely centering on measurement issues and causal inference problems that had been raised in response to earlier research. In addition to the debate among those who hold culture as a profitable area for research and those who reject it altogether, however, there are those friendly to culture as a social science concept who nevertheless find fault with the prevailing usage. Following Almond and Verba, the ontological makeup of culture was assumed by most friends and critics alike to be found in beliefs, values, and norms. This approach, however, has been subjected to a number of attacks from those who adhere to the cultural perspective but are dissatisfied with the positivistic manner of its study.[57]

The Interpretivist Turn

In light of the perceived weaknesses in the view of values as the fundamental units that, bundled together, comprise a national culture, some scholars have responded by turning to alternatives rather than abandon the promise of cultural theories altogether, and in doing so escape the problems inherent in positivism and provide surer ground for cultural studies. An interpretive approach (the name calling attention to the nature of enterprise) to culture derives from a holistic conception of culture that cannot be reduced to discrete variables. Influenced heavily by symbolic anthropology, interpretivists adopt a view of culture as a context in which events are

[57] Chabal, Patrick, and Jean-Pascal Daloz. 2006. *Culture Troubles: Politics and the Interpretation of Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 85-88.

given meaning rather than as an identifiable set of attitudes, beliefs, or values that reside within individuals. An interpretive approach to culture can, though, identify the sources of those subjective ideas held by members of a cultural community, and thus shed further light on positivist studies of political culture.

Much of the recent interpretivist cultural research has rather been influenced by Geertz's view of culture as a system of symbols that gives participants a common language to express meaning. Cultural symbols impart meaning to actions and speech in such a manner that what appears irrational or inexplicable within one cultural framework is ordinary or laden with meaning in another. In his well-known example Geertz relates the fervor with which Balinese cockfighters risk prohibitive sums of money in their quest for status.[58] In this case culture provides the shared means through which members of society pursue a recognizable goal. For Geertz, the purpose of a social science cannot be to find laws as in the natural sciences, but is to uncover the meaning of social interaction. We know what actions mean not through a straightforward account of their occurrence, what Geertz calls "thin description," but through sensitivity to the context in which they are performed. This "thick description" can only be undertaken after close study, as in the participant observation normally part of the anthropologist's repertoire. With such an emphasis, interpretivists are skeptical of grand theory or any attempt to posit abstract principles that unify explanations for politics across space and time. Instead, "local knowledge" must be consulted to test the applicability of theoretical concepts in various cultural settings, and the possibility of comparison across countries is therefore more doubtful.

[58]Geertz, op cit. Ch 15.

Geertz likens culture to a "control mechanism" that regulates social interaction like "plans, recipes, rules, instructions . . ."[59] Such a control mechanism, analogous to a computer program, is necessary for ordering the world. Without these cultural control mechanisms we would be adrift, unable to make sense of the social world in which we find ourselves. Similarly, Elkins and Simeon stress that cultural explanations cannot predict outcomes but can explain agendas that include certain options and exclude others. Broad assumptions about the political world are the stuff of political culture—people are trustworthy or not, these people are part of the political community, and those not—and culture is thus "permissive, not deterministic."[60]

Swidler likewise advises that the search for culture as a set of ultimate values is misconceived, and instead argues that culture provides people with a "toolkit" with which they devise "strategies of action."[61] Rather than envisioning all participants in a culture as in some manner governed by shared ends, they instead share the means by which they pursue various, often conflicting, ends. Sharing a culture means that people understand the workings of the world in the same ways. In Ross's words, "cultures shape conflict, defining what is appropriate social action, how the motives of others are to be understood, and what is worth fighting about."[62] This conception of culture is an intersubjective one emphasizing the centrality of the shared perceptions of events and meanings among actors. Ross emphasizes further that it is not objective events that mechanistically produce political outcomes but the interpretations of events that influence peoples' reactions, and these interpretations are the proper subject of study for

[59]Ibid, p. 45.

[60] Elkins, David J., and Richard E.B. Simeon. 1979. "A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What does Culture Explain." *Comparative Politics* 11 (2):127-45.

[61] Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51 (2):273-86.

[62] Ross, Marc Howard. 2000. "Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis." In *Culture and Politics: A Reader*, ed. L. Crothers and C. Lockhart. New York: St. Martin's Press. p. 44.

cultural research. Ross writes that "At the core of cultural analyses of politics are people's accounts of their daily worlds."[63]

As a shared context, culture admits space for subcultural and countercultural variation, and does not presume actors are inescapably bound to cultural dictates not of their own making. Almond, though relying on a definition of culture as subjective orientations, also rejects the argument that cultural theories are deterministic: "Culture is unlikely to be of much help in explaining why alternative A was chosen over alternative B—but it may be of great help in understanding why A and B were considered, while no thought was given to C, D, or E."[64] Nonetheless, his definition of culture that appeals to subjective elements (psychological orientations) presumes an orientational harmony and cannot encompass competing value systems within a single cultural area. Revolutionaries, moderates, and reactionaries are unlikely to share much in the "cognitions, feelings, and evaluations" of a shared political system, yet they nevertheless share a culture. The fringe elements might even consider options C, D, or E while moderates will not.

Positivist political culture explanations sometimes account for clear differences in intra-national values and orientations by distinguishing between elite and mass cultures. Elites and masses may have separate value systems, but should not be taken as separate cultures. Dividing a national culture between elites and masses opens the door to wide extension; there can be no reason to stop with just two cultures, but we should further distinguish the cultures of various regions, urban and rural areas, religions, and any number of additional social subgroups. We are

[63] Ross, Mark Howard. 1997. "Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis." In *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, ed. M. Lichbach and A. Zuckerman. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 42.

[64] Almond, Gabriel 2000. "The Study of Political Culture." In *Culture and Politics: A Reader*, ed. L. Crothers and C. Lockhart. New York: St. Martin's Press, p. 36.

left with a panoply of competing cultures, or must reject the notion of a wider, shared culture altogether.

Elites and masses may share next to nothing in values and tastes, may never physically cross paths, but relate in some fashion, perhaps as the heirs of the national patrimony or identifiers with national myths, or perhaps only through the distinction of their respective classes in the national mosaic. Social groups understand themselves and their privileges, duties, and rituals in relation to others. The importance to politics of subjective considerations such as values and attitudes can hardly be overstated, but are distinct from culture. An intersubjective view of culture as employed by interpretivists posits that actors draw upon the resources of culture, symbols for example, to agitate for and secure their values, and is therefore better suited to making sense of subcultural variation that does not require the fracturing of cultures into mutually exclusive fragments.

The adoption of an interpretive approach to culture can further allow a better answer to the charge that cultural theories are unable to convincingly treat the problem of political change. Values and beliefs very plainly remain in a state of flux, undermining from the start the view of culture as concretely held opinions transmitted across generations that constitute group identity. Chabal and Daloz explain that shifting our attention from fixed beliefs and values to the meaning of symbolic interaction provides an escape from the trap of a notion of "timeless" culture that would make cultural explanations nonsensical, and argue that culture is indeed necessary to understand change. They argue that culture changes "tectonically," almost imperceptibly until enormous shifts have become manifest.[65]

[65]Chabal and Daloz, op cit. p. 151

Changes in politics may appear abrupt, but are most often the delayed outcome of creeping cultural evolution.[66] The pace of change makes necessary analysis that stretches across the long-term sweep of historical development; change is an indispensable component of cultural study. Wedeen emphasizes that culture cannot be assumed to be "given," an unchanging semiotic system. It must be understood as something in which people participate in creating, in "meaning making."[67] As systems of interaction to which people continuously contribute, cultures will undergo mutations through countless individual-level interactions as language does. Therefore, while values, (along with economic systems and political systems) can change quite rapidly, the context of shared meaning in which values are pursued does so only much more slowly.

Culture as Cause and Consequence

Positivist theories of culture are also weakened by their difficulties in sorting out the causal relationship between a culture variable and other variables. As alluded to above, culture has often been enlisted to show why democracy survives in positivist studies. Given the intense interest in democratization in recent decades this would be a natural field of application for a cultural theory and represents a typical exercise of social scientific explanation, wherein an independent variable produces a change in the dependent variable. Probably most famously, Weber called upon religious traits to explain the origination of capitalism among Protestant sects rather than Catholics.[68] More recently, Almond and Verba investigated the attitudes they believed were necessary for stable democracy, and Putnam and other scholars of social capital maintain that

[66]Ibid, ch. 6.
[67] Wedeen, Lisa. 2002. "Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science." *American Political Science Review* 96 (4):713-28.
[68] Weber, Max. 1958. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. [Student's ed. New York,: Scribner.

generalized societal trust encourages civic participation, which in turn lends strength to democratic institutions.

Nonetheless, culture is sometimes identified as a dependent variable itself, varying in response to some other stimulus, making culture frustratingly two-faced. Most positivist research assigns causal power to culture, as in promoting or retarding democracy, but can also implicitly take culture to be a condition acted upon by other forces. Modernization theories, for example, sometimes view culture as a receptacle of rationalization as traditional attitudes and behaviors are supplanted by the modern. Economic and technological change would reverberate in the cultural sphere, producing a modernized social system, which are approximately equivalent in all societies. Since economic development has taken one path in industrialized societies, the process and endpoint is presumably the same in the developing world. However, when political culture was deployed as an explanation for democratic stability, it became an independent variable. Ambiguity of this sort furnished material for a debate over the direction of causation between political system and culture. Cultural skeptics could take the uncertainty as grounds for doubting the usefulness of culture in any form.

Positivist political culture theorists cannot say with confidence whether political culture leads to the implementation of democratic institutions or whether these institutions provoke changes in political culture. That ambiguity cannot be surprising for a concept as multifaceted as culture, and cultural theorists have from the beginning noted that culture cannot be reduced to a single variable with a straightforwardly measurable effect on structure. Almond answered objections of determinism in political culture by stressing that cultural studies have always taken account of the mutual causal influence between culture and structure. Inglehart, too, emphasizes the reciprocal nature of causality between culture and economics, politics, and technology.[69] He

[69] Inglehart, Ronald. 1990. *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

envisions a constellation of forces including industrialization, a middle class, and emergence of a participatory population as necessary conditions interacting with a culture of widespread interpersonal trust and devotion to democratic procedure, which approximates the civic culture Almond and Verba described as the essential ingredient of democracy.

An assumption implicit in any causal connection between culture and regime is of a "fit" between culture and structure. Almond and Verba discuss this "congruence" of culture and institutions at some length, stipulating that culture and institutions are congruent when the majority of the population is favorably disposed toward the structures of government.[70] Eckstein elaborated a theory of congruence which yielded the hypothesis that "authority patterns" in society must be congruent with the decision-making institutions in government for a regime to remain stable and achieve its purposes.[71]

This species of argument was prominent during the "Asian values" debate of the 1980s. Proponents of the Asian values position—notably Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore—noted the disparity between the values underlying liberal democratic practices and the values of Asian cultures that allegedly privilege deference to authority and group harmony over individualism. Culture can be considered a prerequisite for democracy, then, or at least a necessary condition for its stability over the long term. In either case, the civic culture and democratic institutions are considered mutually supportive, but distinct, entities.

This view leads to serious defects that will further illustrate the advantage of an interpretivist approach. Though Almond insists that political cultural explanations for regime endurance were never deterministic in the way criticized by Barry, for instance, the divisibility of culture and structure is maintained along with a warning against assuming a fit between the

[70]Almond and Verba, 1963, op cit, pp. 20-21.

[71] Eckstein, Harry. 1998. "Congruence Theory Explained." In *Can Democracy Take Root in Post-Soviet Russia?*, ed. H. Eckstein, F. J. Fleron and E. P. Hoffman. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

culture and structure of every nation,[72] an assumption that would open cultural arguments to those charges of determinism. However, if culture and structure are separate, but neither deterministically linked nor necessarily congruent, one is left without a clear idea of what political culture does do that makes it consequential to social science. *The Civic Culture* does not explicate the mechanism through which attitudes affect institutions and institutions attitudes.[73]

We find that the very divisibility of culture and structure is itself problematic. Since it is central to the stated project of *The Civic Culture* of bridging micro- and macro-levels of analysis the bridge must connect distinct territories. Carole Pateman has suggested, though, that if political culture is comprised of orientations toward political structures, these have evolved along with structures and thus cannot be easily separable from them. One of the cultural orientations named by Almond and Verba, after all, is a cognitive orientation, people's perceptions of and beliefs about institutions.[74] Because they shape each other, it is impossible to conceive of either without reference to the other. The interactivity of culture and structure unites the two to an extent that they become entangled in a Gordian knot. It appears that fully divorcing culture and structure leads to the strong determinism of assuming a decisive influence of culture on structure, while maintaining that causation flows mutually between the two, as Almond does, makes their distinction untenable.

In this instance distinguishing between cause and effect, a presumably necessary distinction, turns out to lead us into a tangle. Welch describes this implicit problem of political culture theories as the "retreating cause" and "retreating effect."[75] When beginning with political culture as a cause the effects become obscure, and a similar consequence for political culture

[72] Almond, Gabriel. 1987. "The Intellectual History of the Civic Culture Concept." In *Comparative Politics in the Post-Behavioral Era*, ed. L. J. Cantori and A. H. Ziegler. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner.
[73]Barry, 1970, op cit. ch. 3.
[74] Pateman, Carole. 1980. "The Civic Culture: A Philosophic Critique." In *The Civic Culture Revisited*, ed. G. A. a. S. Verba: Little Brown, p. 67.
[75]Welch, 1993. op cit. ch. 4.

itself follows when starting with the presumed effects and tracing causation back to political culture variables. When searching for a cultural cause for certain effects, political culture variables are inevitably subsumed within more easily grasped variables pushing political culture into the residual category. When beginning with political culture as cause and searching for effects, these eventually are consumed within the cause as political culture is more fully delineated, so that effects are finally indistinguishable from the cause.

The result is to bring into question the power of the positivist conception of political culture to do any explanatory work at all as a variable influencing structure. Indeed, hypothesized effects of political culture have enjoyed scant confirmation through comparative analysis.[76] Instead we are forced to consider Welch's conclusion: "If neither cause nor effect can be given primary attention without the other fading from view, the explanation that the two are not in fact distinct presents itself rather forcefully."[77]

Denying that political culture theory makes a deterministic link between culture and structure, Almond states that political structure is not only the outcome of political culture, that "the development of specific cultural patterns in particular countries is explained by reference to particular historical experiences, such as the sequence of Reform Acts in Britain, the American heritage of British institutions, the Mexican Revolution . . ."[78] If these great events and structures are both cause and consequence of political culture, as Almond claims, political culture itself expands to include far more than just orientations and its effects cannot be distinguished as separable events and institutions.

[76] Jackman, Robert W., and Ross A. Miller. 1996. "A Renaissance of Political Culture?" *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (3):632-59.
[77]Welch, 1993, op cit. p. 72.
[78]Almond, 1987, op cit. p. 187.

Welch's conclusion that culture and structure are not separable also directs us to an interpretivist view of culture. The interpretivist school takes a more shaded view of the relationship between culture and political outcome and escapes the problematic issue of the separability of the two. The holistic conception of culture adopted by interpretivists broadens its borders beyond political attitudes and beliefs (and beyond just the political for that matter) and thus can embrace the conclusion that the effects of culture cannot be reduced to that of a variable acting in a single causal direction. Since in the interpretivist view culture is not a variable that determines outcomes or is determined by other variables but instead conditions the interplay of actions and institutions, this enmeshed character of culture and institutions becomes less problematic. Instead of a force acting upon institutions or acted upon by them, culture and institutions are viewed as interacting to create a complex whole in which political outcomes are shaped. It is not the case, from an interpretivist standpoint, that institutions of a particular character are discordant with some values and are thus more likely to be rejected in their totality; institutions and their functioning cannot be understood independently of their cultural context—culture and institutions work in tandem. An interpretive view best captures this nuanced aspect of culture.

As Putnam puts it, "the practical performance of institutions . . . is shaped by the social context within which they operate."[79] Elkins and Simeon argue that a consequence of their permissive view of culture is that institutions and culture are not "competitors, but collaborators" in accounting for political outcomes.[80] Culture does not determine the type of regime a society adopts—as positivist cultural theories are required to hypothesize—but how it performs.

[79]Putnam, 1994, op cit. p. 8.
[80]Elkins and Simeon, 1979, op cit.

Recalling O'Donnell's informal institutions, Douglass North writes similarly of "informal constraints," noting that the same formal rules produce different outcomes in different societies. He argues that these informal constraints are cultural in origin and that "the cultural filter provides continuity so that the informal solutions to the exchange problems in the past carry over into the present and makes those informal constraints important sources of continuity. . ."[81] He concludes that no society, even those that have undergone dramatic institutional redesign, can be understood without reference to cultural characteristics. These authors, some perhaps unwittingly, have pointed toward an interpretivist method by highlighting how culture and institutions interact. The argument need not be that the positivistic framework for political culture is without value, though. Indeed, studies such as the civic culture can provide valuable insights into national political tendencies, such as attitudes toward institutions and concepts such as democracy. These are limited because they cannot provide an account of the ways in which values and beliefs fit together to form a worldview. From an interpretivist standpoint, though, these data point the way toward a fuller investigation of the meanings of political concepts.

The discussion in this chapter has shown that while cultural analysis remains an important approach in political science, its appeal is matched by reservations concerning its practicality in explanation. It has further been argued the failures of the cultural approach are primarily those of the traditional positivist political culture concept, which is saddled with problems such as reification, determinism, and difficulties in accounting for political change and distinguishing cause and effect. An interpretive method, on the other hand, is not burdened with these methodological pathologies, but recognizes the complexity of social events and begins with the assumption that institutions and behaviors are embedded with a cultural context, the

[81] North, Douglass Cecil. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 37.

understanding of which is essential to grasping the significance of those behaviors and institutions.

How culture shapes political action and, consequentially democracy in Mexico, is a matter for empirical investigation. Chapter Three will turn to a discussion of the cultural background of Latin American and Mexico, and introduce the concept of symbolic narratives used through the rest of the study.

CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORICAL MATRIX AND SYMBOLIC NARRATIVES

The foregoing chapters argued that democratic consolidation must be viewed as a process of cultural change and that the civic culture model and its descendants fall prey to the various problems associated with positivist views of culture, such as determinism, reification, and the difficulty of separating culture and structures, and that an interpretivist view escapes these problems. With the aim of developing an interpretation of Mexican political culture, this chapter will begin by briefly establishing the outlines of the historical and cultural matrix of Latin America broadly and of Mexico more specifically. It will then explore a stream of literature on political culture based in symbolic politics and develop the theoretical framework of the study, describing the approach to Mexican symbolic political narratives that will be elaborated in the following chapters.

Latin American Context in Brief

Cultural explanations for Latin American politics are legion and these most often take as their starting point a historical frame of reference, beginning with the Iberian conquest and intermingling of Spanish or Portuguese cultural traits with those of native civilizations. Hartz supplies the rationale for beginning in the past in this manner, arguing that Latin America, as was the case in much of the colonized world, bears the stamp of the ideological currents of its European conquerors. As a feudal “fragment” of the Iberian world, the Latin American

ideological and institutional tradition resulted from a "migration" of the Spanish *ancien régime* with all its associated military and clerical institutions and patterns of interaction.[82] Stressing the age and depth of Latin American culture (and hence its durability), Wiarda finds its foundations in the biblical tradition and classical Mediterranean civilizations. Organicism, corporatism, and hierarchical social relations were among their primary bequests.[83]

Scholars have often compared these origins to those of liberalism in the United States and claim that the very purposes of politics took on a contrasting hue. Dealy writes that while constitutional liberal ideas are grounded in the belief that properly ordered institutions can control the vices of men in Madisonian fashion, Spanish American ideology presumes to eliminate the causes of faction rather than palliate their effects. The promotion of morality among the citizenry lies within the ambit of the state; evil can be eliminated through statecraft, which is essentially identical to "soulcraft." Spanish American regimes followed the Romans in their attempts to establish government based on virtue, a goal evident in the constitutional provisions of the independence period that took care to promote probity through religion and discourage the opportunity for vice.[84]

The organic corporatism of scholastic philosophy described by Wiarda and Stepan (who refers to "organic statism")[85] has likewise distinguished the Latin American context from the pluralism associated with the liberalism of North America. The organic and hierarchical conception of the polity derived from Augustinian and Thomistic thought which posited that the social body reflects the functionings and inequalities of the natural world. The Iberian political

[82] Hartz, Louis. 1964. *The Founding of New Societies: Studies in the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia*. 1st ed. New York,: Harcourt, ch. 2.
[83] Wiarda, Howard J. 2001. *The Soul of Latin America: The Cultural and Political Tradition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Pres, ch. 2.
[84] Dealy, Glen. 1968. "Prolegomena on the Spanish American Political Tradition." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 48 (1):37-58.
[85] Stepan, Alfred C. 1978. *The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

system that sprang from these sources dictated a natural and necessary body designed by God to ensure unity and oversee the smooth functioning of society. The Iberian corporatist model transmitted to the New World sprang from a fusion of medieval corporations and the later exigencies of centralizing power after the Conquest.[86] Groups are granted recognition by the state insofar as they play an integral role in society. Though the integrity of the body relies on each constituent part, the proper place of each group is fixed.

Corporatism in Latin America has historically been closely associated with authoritarianism, fittingly given the centralization of power and vigor of the state it implies. Dealy's description of Latin political culture presses a similar point, pointing out that the value placed on harmony and unity of the political body in Latin America yields what he calls a "monistic" conception of the political process.[87] The means to the common good for which the community strives may take the form of democracy or communism, but each is antagonistic to unbridled competition as corrosive to unity. Illustrative of the monistic posture of both the political Left and Right is the competition between the liberal reformers and conservatives in the nineteenth and twentieth century which was animated less by genuine ideological dialectic than maximalist warring. Chalmers describes this as a "politicized" state in which political institutions are fluid and malleable according to the prevailing circumstances. In the politicized state there is a sense that "anything is possible" and those with a political program may seek its realization through whatever means are available.[88] That approach has been adopted by political elites of disparate stripes: from liberals to conservatives and from socialists to military officers.

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[86] Wiarda, Howard J. 1981. *Corporatism and National Development in Latin America*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

[87] Dealy, Glen. 1982. "The Tradition of Monistic Democracy in Latin America." In *Politics and Social Change in Latin America: The Distinct Tradition*, ed. H. J. Wiarda. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press.

[88] Chalmers, Douglas. 1977. "The Politicized State in Latin America." In *Authoritarianism and corporatism in Latin America*, ed. J. M. Malloy. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Following the cardinal importance of scholasticism for Latin American philosophy, the positivism of French philosopher Auguste Comte exercised the principal influence.[89] Positivism was turned to the improvement of society through use of the scientific method. Social instability and economic weakness in Latin America was characterized as an illness requiring correction through proper positivist ministrations. Society is governed by laws just as is the natural world, Comte believed, and in many countries of Latin America, liberal reformers adopted positivist principles in social planning, placing the interest of promoting "order and progress" over the realization of democracy until a level of national "maturity" was reached at which society would be capable of self-government. In its emphasis on natural order, positivism of the Comtean variety was striking in its consistency with the classical undergirding of Latin American social order. Scholars have noted the remarkable longevity and pervasiveness of the pattern of hierarchical, state-centric social interaction, and the conservative disposition of Latin American societies in the face of ceaseless change and integration of new ideologies and practices, prompting Anderson to refer to Latin America as a "living museum."[90] Despite centuries of evolution and mutation Latin American societies will bear the imprint of their congenital characteristics. Mexico, as one of the most important economic and political centers of the Spanish empire in the New World, has been heir to the broad cultural conditions implanted throughout Latin America described above, but of course followed its unique developmental trajectory.

[89] Zea, Leopoldo. 1976. *El Pensamiento latinoamericano*. 3. ed. Esplugues de Llobregat: Ariel.

[90] Anderson, Charles W. 1967. *Politics and economic change in Latin America; the governing of restless nations*. Princeton, N.J.,: Van Nostrand.

The Mexican Context in Brief

From Mexico's rulers' point of view, opposition has been disruptive and unreasonable, more cancerous faction than participant in public affairs. To the opposition, rulers have been illegitimate and oppressive. Mexico's political history, in fact, is a long one of enemies arrayed to do battle. Immediately after independence liberal and conservative camps offering overarching views of the best polity competed for total control. Mexican historian Edmundo O'Gorman interpreted the history of Mexico since its independence as the competition between mutually hostile utopias: a liberal utopia that would ape the United States and a conservative one that looked backward to colonial institutions.[91] Neither was attainable; nor, of course, can utopias be reconciled through dialogue or bargaining. Eventually, the victorious liberals confronted an entrenched structure founded on—as they saw it—Catholic absolutism and exclusivist corporate identities. Pragmatic liberals came to see the power of the state itself as the only force capable of achieving the drastic transformation required to create a modern, progressive republic of property-holding citizens.[92]

After decades of infighting among the factions, liberals in 1857 succeeded in promulgating a constitution that made a frontal assault on the conservative colonial foundations of society sparking a civil war. Defeated momentarily, conservatives turned to European powers for aid in reestablishing a Catholic monarchy, leading to several more years of war and eventual liberal victory and subsequent political hegemony. In their attempts to reinvent the Mexican nation in the liberal image, individual autonomy and limited government were subordinated to the liberal vision of progress and improvement, and conservatives driven underground.

[91] O'Gorman, Edmundo. 1977. *Mexico: El trauma de su historia*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

[92] Hale, Charles A. 1989. *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Liberal reforms relied on state power to effect the sweeping changes toward an individualist society and market-driven economy. The unanticipated fruit of the reform period was thus the long-term dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz from the 1870s to 1910 that banished political opposition in the name of a "peace, order, and progress." Some of the elite supporters of Díaz enthusiastically embraced the positivist philosophy of Comte. This application of science to social and political administration was intended to transcend faction and overcome the chaos and confusion that politics and ideology had brought to Mexico since independence by warring liberals and conservatives. Díaz staked his legitimacy on having overcome the divisions that tore at the fabric of Mexican nation, and indeed much of Latin America, and on having found a consensus for bringing progress and plenty that was beyond opposition.

The genie would not remain in the bottle forever, of course and the revolution of 1910 begun under the liberal banner with the slogan *sufragio efectivo, no reelección* (effective suffrage, no reelection) unleashed a tidal wave of violence and along with it a dizzying array of factions and ideologies contending with one another for control over the direction of the revolution. After some two decades of organized violence and political assassinations, the precursor to the PRI managed to integrate the leaders of the revolution, establishing one of the most successful and suffocating corporatist systems in Latin America. The party effectively squelched any meaningful political dissent. A "Revolutionary Family" monopolized access to and control over the state and its resources through patronage and cooptation from the 1920s to the 1980s, selectively admitting acceptable opposition into government for cosmetic purposes. The leaders of the PRI preferred to buy off any potential troublemakers and put them safely on the state's payroll. The less cooperative, such as the PAN, were marginalized and tolerated. Revolutionary and socialistic in rhetoric, the PRI regime nonetheless differed little from the

scientific politics of the Díaz regime in squelching the articulation of alternatives. The party appealed to memory of the revolution as a great unifying event of the Mexican nation that secured national sovereignty and modernization, identifying itself as the party of the Mexican nation. Glacially-paced reforms beginning in the 1970s increased the representation of opposition parties in the legislature and the PRI at last recognized the election of the much-abused PAN to a governorship in 1989, and only finally handed over the presidential sash in 2000.

Only recently have political offices begun to be filled through relatively clean elections, and it should come as no surprise that the emerging multiparty system has been marked by obstruction and low trust among its participants, and the same suspicion toward political competitors is evident.

Clientelism is said to be an ingrained aspect of Latin life, stemming from the hierarchical, stratified construction of society. These foundations have been traced to the cultural matrix established as early as the Conquest and elaborated by scholars cited above. Despite radical gyrations in regime structure, political mandates continued to descend through a network of unequal power relations, with subordinates' fortunes dependent upon their superiors. The pattern replicated itself in the republican and revolutionary eras, and extends in many ways to social relations in more recent decades, as is evident in the rates of corruption and political parties' distribution of gifts and services to potential voters.[93]

Through much of Mexican history society has been organized as an elaborate patronage machine that incorporated the lowest social segments into a network extending up to the highest

[93] On corruption see Transparency International's Annual Reports at http://www.transparency.org/publications/annual_report. On clientelistic practices of parties see Fox, Jonathan. 1994. "The Difficult Transition From Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons From Mexico." *World Politics* 46 (2):151-84. On the PRD see Hilgers, Tina. 2008. "Causes and Consequences of Political Clientelism: Mexico's PRD in Comparative Perspective." *Latin American Politics and Society* 50 (4):123-53.

levels of government. Mexico never experienced anything resembling the authoritarianism typified by the South American military regimes of the 1960s and 1970s that actively discouraged participation; indeed, in the 20th century the PRI sought to foster public engagement, actively integrating the previously excluded masses. It was, nonetheless, a modernized corporatism, flexibly incorporating much of the population and newly emerging social strata but maintaining the pyramidal power structure characteristic of previous regimes. The political sphere widened to accommodate the participation of a host of new groups but the clientelistic networks present for so long persisted in reconfigured form. Patronage dispensed from above rather than competition on a level-playing field was the favored means of distributing values.

Individual public officials in Mexico have secured legitimacy more through particularized benefits than through ideological principles. Officials have been understood as benefactors, their constituents as supplicants. The hierarchical and clientelistic patterns of political involvement still exist, albeit in attenuated forms. Participation in politics has been conducted using a vocabulary of clientelism and hierarchical power relations. Corruption flourishes in such an atmosphere and Mexico has been no exception. The venality of public officials from the humblest of police officers to presidents is legendary. In spite of the increasing transparency of the political process perceptions of corruption have remained high in the last several years.

Due to the hierarchical political and social relations inherent in Mexico for centuries, popular participation was limited to support for sometimes competing elites. The masses have not, though, been purely passive. Resistance and revolt has been the flip side of the clientelistic coin. The masses have often taken direct action when the usual channels of patronage for too long left their needs unfilled or were fully blocked. Riots, revolts, and demonstrations have been among the tactics of peasants and laborers since independence. Most visibly, in the outbreak of

the independence movement led by Father Miguel Hidalgo in 1810, tens of thousands of peasants joined an army that rampaged against colonial authorities and landowners. The revolution and civil war one hundred years later was fought by a wide array of social segments, but largely by peasants and workers aggrieved by the collusion of state and private actors in their exploitation.

The partial democratization of the last decades of the twentieth century was impelled in part by broadly based social movements agitating for reform independently of state influence. The much discussed irruption of civil society activity tends to take the form of direct action—such as protest and strikes—designed to seize the attention of unhearing state representatives. And most famously, the Zapatista rebellion breaking out in 1994 resuscitated the older recourse available to the powerless of taking up arms.

The practice of political participation in the Mexican context has signified an exchange amongst unequal actors. In the ordinary clientelistic relationship, patrons extend favors to clients in return for loyalty and support. When one participant fails to fulfill his end of the bargain, the other is licensed to demand redress. This has in the past taken the form of violence or direct confrontation, but may also take the form of shifting loyalties. In the emerging multiparty system, party-switching is all too frequent as ambitious political climbers seek the party positions most favorable to the advancement of their careers, and labor unions and other groups have scrambled in the wake of the PRI's fall to align themselves with parties or politicians more likely to secure their interests.

Following the definition of culture elaborated in Chapter Two as a context that provides a shared system of meaning, culture is hypothesized not to determine regime type or level of economic development, but to shape the doing of politics: how goals are pursued, alternatives

explored, how motives are understood and events are interpreted. Institutions and culture cannot be fully extricated, then, but work in tandem to shape political outcomes. Some fundamental assumptions about the political world will necessarily influence the functioning of democratic institutions, and thus levels of democratic consolidation. These assumptions shape the interpretations of various participants in the struggles that have defined Mexican politics. Elkins and Simeon write of culture as "the nature of the political game."[94] In the following pages the theoretical framework employed in the rest of the study will be adumbrated, suggesting the effects of Mexican culture—the nature of its political game—on its political history.

Symbolic Narratives and the Construction of Meaning

Murray Edelman writes that "Politics is for most of us a passing parade of abstract symbols . . ."[95] and that "pictures create a moving panorama taking place in a world the mass public never quite touches, yet one its members come to fear or cheer, often with passion and sometimes with action."[96] Edelman draws our attention to the importance of symbolic communication as one of the pillars of politics and points out the role of symbols play in motivating behavior. Symbolic communication orders the political world and focuses our attention in some areas while shifting it from others. As Edelman writes, political facts are often less important than the symbolic constructions that order them and give them meaning.

To the literature on symbolic politics authors such as Brysk add the symbolic "narrative" which "describes clusters of messages intended to change attitudes . . ." These narratives are essentially stories about politics, and successful narratives "work because they contain elements

[94] Elkins, David J., and Richard E.B. Simeon. 1979. "A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What does Culture Explain." *Comparative Politics* 11 (2):127-45.
[95] Edelman, Murray J. 1985. *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*. Illini Books ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, p. 5.
[96] Ibid.

of successful communication—legitimate speakers, compelling messages, and satisfying plots" which can lead to collective action and social change."[97] Narratives orient people within their national panorama, identifying heroes and villains and supplying them with roles. Conservatives, reformers, and revolutionaries all must tell a story about the nation's origins and its destiny and how their favored political arrangements best suit its character.[98] Symbolic narratives thus arrange the beliefs and attitudes central to positivistic studies of political culture, placing some concepts at the center of importance, and pushing others to the margins.

Symbolic narratives construct expectations for appropriate behavior and establish the terms of political interaction that undergirds the regime. As Brysk writes, "Symbolic politics involves the maintenance or transformation of a power relationship through normative and affective representations." Symbolic politics therefore acts as a mechanism producing collective action.[99] Narratives give shape and meaning to political information that would otherwise remain overwhelming in its scope and quantity. Narratives select events and personalities and imbue them with symbolic meaning, creating authoritative interpretations of the national character and proper political institutions and behaviors. These interpretations are translated into action because certain behaviors are constructed as consistent with the prevailing understanding of the national political character.

There will naturally be many competing narratives at any time and the most compelling will attract adherents and produce conflict. A group or regime may successfully implant its favored narrative, dominating political communication, thus achieving premier status. Seldom will competition be extinguished outright, however, and "counter-narratives" will always

[97] Brysk, Alison. 1995. ""Hearts and Minds": Bringing Symbolic Politics Back In." *Polity* 27 (4):559-85.
[98] Anderson describes how national identities take the form of "imagined communities." See Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. 1991. *Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism.* Rev. and extended ed. London ; New York: Verso.
[99] Brysk, op cit. p. 561.

challenge the dominant narrative as opponents attempt to alter the social discourse to advance their own projects. The replacement of a dominant narrative with a counter-narrative amounts to a "paradigm shift" in which new purposes are erected for politics and meanings are attached to concepts.[100] This dialectic is a process inherent in politics and likely to continue in perpetuity.

As in a discourse, the conflict of narratives seldom breaks off and begins anew. Instead, competing narratives and their proponents act as interlocutors, addressing the same national conditions and responding to each other. Thus, despite radically divergent interpretations of society and normative prescriptions for the national good, narratives are constrained by unyielding facts that must be confronted. In Mexico, for example, the fact of the colonial legacy was the preeminent question with which independence-era elites were forced to contend. Though conservatives and liberals warred over their different judgments of the past and present and their plans for the future, neither could fail to begin their communicative efforts within the strictures of a racially divided, corporatist and Catholic society founded on medieval principles. The continuity in Mexican political behavior is visible in the underlying structures of power, in the face of sometimes radically gyrating constitutional structures and elites.

A Family of Liberal Narratives

This study argues political cultural change is a necessary component of democratic consolidation, and that political culture is best understood as the symbolic narratives that provide common interpretations of politics and license particular modes of behavior. In keeping with this argument, democratic consolidation should consist in the liberalization of the national symbolic narrative. A liberal narrative, then, coupled with liberal institutions is expected to solidify the liberal democratic regime.

[100] Ibid.

In the positivist view of political culture, liberalization consists of the normative endorsement of particular values, namely liberal democracy as the best form of government. From the symbolic politics perspective, liberalization consists of widespread participation in the symbolic language of individual rights and limited governmental power. The values that positivist studies highlight remain present; narratives stitch these values together in a story of the nation and the purposes of politics. There will not be, of course, a single liberal symbolic narrative that nurtures liberal democracy. Given the diversity of democratic experience in the world, from North America and Europe to Africa and Asia, It would be unlikely that that would be the case. Rather, just as all political regimes are distinctive, every country will be governed by a uniquely national symbolic narrative. We may speak of a family of liberal narratives, however, that unites its members with a characteristic morphology. This morphology is in essence contains the contents of liberal ideology written into a national story, a national panorama focused on freeing individuals from overbearing public power. The overarching story in the United States, for example, has privileged the value of freedom above any other political value, and continues to inspire political action. The precise contours of freedom are far from settled and are regularly contested and redefined, but there exists a broad consensus on the basic respect for individual civil and political liberties that has remained intact as these rights have been extended to a wider population from the early days of the republic.

This style of narrative resists imposition from above as in the case of a coterie of elites instructing the masses, or a revolutionary vanguard speaking in the name of the people. The liberal narrative concerns limitation of the power of the state and of its representatives, and limits the public sphere of action to prevent imposition on the individual, private sphere. Smith illustrates both the frequency with which authorities attempt to manipulate national myths to and

stories to political ends and the dangers of abuse inherent in such attempts.[101] As will be seen in the case of Mexico, narratives have since independence originated from within the domain of elite circles and been projected downward.

Taking a family of liberal narratives as a starting point in democratic consolidation, then, we may apply the symbolic narratives approach in predicting where newly established liberal democracies are more likely to survive. In viewing new democracies we look to the dominant discourse, does the narrative revolve around empowerment—of a revolution, or the people—or around limitation? Narratives that center on the need for leadership in achieving transformative goals for all of society and on breaking with the past for the creation of a new future establish the symbolic means for a dominating state that empower state officials to act beyond the scope of liberal institutions.

Symbolic Politics in Mexico

Taking these narratives as the basic structure of political culture, this study will focus on the most successful narratives in Mexico. Successful narratives are those that have reached dominant status, those adopted by powerful political actors able to capture the government and transmit their interpretations of politics widely. In Mexico, a handful of competing political narratives have dominated the symbolic political sphere since independence. The liberals' narrative gained predominance after the conservative alternative was discredited in the latter nineteenth century, and was replaced through evolution by the porfirian modernizing construction. The revolutionary narrative that followed was a repudiation of the previous regime that gripped the nation for much of the twentieth century under the PRI.

[101] Smith, Rogers M. 2003. *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership*. *Contemporary political theory*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press. ch. 1.

What do these various narratives share? These sweeping epics are built with elements that have important consequences for the way in which political concepts are given meanings. The social order in colonial Mexico was founded on rituals and ceremonies that advertised to the people the natural order of hierarchy, and everyone's place in that spiritual body, reinforcing the social distinctions and code of Spanish colonial administration.[102] The continuity in change results from the rejection of the colonial foundations of society and construction and reconstruction of national paradigms that have as their end the creation of a new Mexico. To answer the question, “What is the Mexican nation and the purposes of politics?” one can draw upon dozens of sources, including the Spanish heritage, Catholicism, hundreds of indigenous communities, creole nationalism, and others. These same and other currents have been called upon and rearranged to shape national narratives by politicians, intellectuals, revolutionaries, and social activists in countless different ways and to competing ends. What the most successful narratives have shared is their organization around grand plans to reorganize the political system and transform the nation.

Such symbolic images have transcended institutional limitations and granted wide latitude to public officials who are variously in their positions for the purposes of eliminating backwardness and to enlighten the downtrodden masses. Knight points out the “bipartisan” character of the moralizing missions the upper classes have undertaken for the less fortunate, who are held back from proper lives.[103] The narratives and counter-narratives that have constituted “official” understandings of the nature and goals of politics in Mexico have been,

[102] Beezley, William H., Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French. 1994. "Introduction: Constructing Consent, Inciting Conflict." In *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, ed. W. H. Beezley, C. E. Martin and W. E. French. Wilmington, Del.: SR Books.
[103] Knight, Alan. 1994. "Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico, 1910-1940." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74 (3):393-444, p. 396, n. 17.

essentially, evangelizing missions that call for heroic action by the state and its representatives to uplift the masses and transform society to meet its goals.

The rhetoric that composes symbolic narratives, naturally, need not match reality. Symbolic narratives condition understanding of the social and political world, motivating people to action, inspiring protest and revolt, but can also encourage quietude. Wedeen shows that symbolic communication can produce power simply by overwhelming the terms of public discourse, stressing that the construction of symbolic meaning need not immediately imply the creation of legitimacy, or that the majority of the target audience for symbolic construction even believe the rhetoric they consume. Rather, an important effect of symbolic communication can be simple compliance as a result of immersion within a dominant political discourse.[104] It is not necessary that a regime's behavior always be accepted as legitimate, but only the majority continues to participate by simply accepting it for what it is. Though in Mexico people have always been well aware of abuses of power and corruption, often complaining bitterly, they have also continued to observe laws, pay bribes, and vote.

The symbolic narratives described in the following chapters take historical conditions described above as the beginning point for political action, as the context in which political action takes place. From the early independence period, politics has reacted to the colonial heritage, accepting its terms—in the case of conservatives—or attempting to rewrite them as has been the case the successful narratives since the 1860s.

What does this cultural context mean for democracy in the 21st century? When considering political culture in this way, the importance of following the history in which symbolic narratives have their origins becomes plain. These symbolic narratives have comprised

[104] See Wedeen, Lisa. 1999. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press and Wedeen, Lisa. 2002. "Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science." *American Political Science Review* 96 (4):713-28.

the political cultural conditions and the terms of political interaction for centuries. Democratic optimists who emphasize short-term shifts have underplayed this reality and instead expect to see democratic consolidation follow institutional reforms. The cultural changes tantamount to democratic consolidation may be underway, but cultural shifts are unpredictable, and sometimes imperceptibly slow-moving. Consolidation through cultural change may be a process taking place over generations, rather than electoral cycles.

Looking Ahead

In succeeding chapters, we will observe that the public imagination shifted through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and how symbolic narratives have changed the meanings of politics. A conservative-liberal divide rent the nation in the first half of the nineteenth century, liberalism reestablished the national narrative in its own image, a revolutionary ethos took hold in the twentieth, and finally a liberal democratic nostrum in the late twentieth century. In each case, the public meanings of politics evolved subtly, while retaining some core elements. The meanings of politics are implicit in the predominant narratives of the time. The colonial mythology was a well elaborated social system that prescribed roles for each sector of society. The subsequent narratives of liberal nation-building and revolutionary modernization implied roles for various actors. The liberalism of the nineteenth century marginalized the large majority of the population, treating the masses as rabble in need of tutelage from the state, a posture shared by the conservatives. The PRI regime explicitly incorporated the masses, but by dividing them into sectors supporting the great project of the regime. In all cases, the state and its directors occupied a position of privilege and above challenge.

The following chapters of the study will develop the outline of the primary symbolic narratives of Mexican politics and society beginning with the independence period and plotting the course of their evolution through the republican period, the liberal dictatorship of Díaz and the Revolution, and the PRI era. The fledgling democratic period will be examined through the lens of potential cultural change. As the study proceeds, the development of Mexican symbolic narratives will be compared to the morphology of the liberal narrative described in this chapter. As will become evident, the dominant narratives of Mexican history have centered on the empowerment of the state to achieve great ends, even when the ostensible ideological justifications have been the creation of a liberal society of individuals governed by a limited democratic institutions.

Methodological Questions

If cultural theories have generated controversy among political scientists it is probably in most cases due to the fears that such theories invalidate comparison and generalization altogether. In Lichbach and Zuckerman's words cultural theory "usually joins strong doubts about both the ability to generalize to abstract categories and the ability to provide explanations that apply to more than the case at hand, " both of which lie at the very core of comparative politics.[105] A comparativist would be right to harbor suspicions about a research avenue that casts doubt on the utility of comparison. An inability to generalize would leave us with interesting studies of unique cases but without any explanations that "travel." Even if global comparisons of radically different political systems are not feasible, a critic would say, regional comparison comparisons

[105] Lichbach, Mark Irving, and Alan S. Zuckerman. 1997. *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*. Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, p. 6.

should be our target. Cultural approaches might obviate even these more modest aims. The fears, however, are misplaced.

Comparative politics is premised on the comparison of similar units of analysis. The problem of comparability has been one confronted by all comparativists, regardless of approach, given that units will always differ in much more than just the variables under study. The "many variables, few cases" problem is endemic to comparison.[106] In cross-cultural analysis, the problem is multiplied because outwardly similar structures (parties and legislatures, for instance) often perform quite different and hardly comparable functions across societies. Lijphart recommends focusing on the most comparable cases (as one might find among the political systems of Latin America, or in Sub-Saharan Africa) which requires careful selection of cases and attention to context to ensure the propriety of the research design. He indeed concedes that the rarity of such comparable cases remains a problem for comparison, but that the smaller number of cases involved in a study, the better equipped is the analyst to determine their propriety and assess the reliability and validity of data.[107] The strategy of the smaller comparative design must in the end approach an interpretivist one.

The present study is not an explicitly comparative one, but consists of detailed attention to a single case—Mexico. As such, it resembles Lijphart's category of "interpretive case study," which is distinguished from the "atheoretical case study" in its examination of theoretical propositions by reference to the case at hand; so far, this study conforms to his definition. Like the atheoretical type, though, the interpretive case study's contribution to theory-building is "nil" because it does not make "empirical generalizations," an assertion I reject. This study seeks to

[106] Lijphart, Arend. 1971. "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method." *American Political Science Review* 65 (3):682-93, p. 67.
[107] Lijphart, Arend. 1988. "The Comparable Cases Strategy in Comparative Research." In *Comparative Politics in the Post-Behavioral Era*, ed. L. J. Cantori and A. Ziegler, Jr. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, p. 67.

make a contribution to empirical democratic theory and to the literature on culture's role in democratic consolidation; its purpose, therefore, is in wider application, but not in the variety of generalization Lijphart has in mind.

The basis of an interpretive approach is the recognition that the method of a science of human behavior cannot rely on replicable experiments derived from deduction that apply in all places, but must instead issue from the interpretation of patterns of behavior. An interpretivist approach takes the validity and reliability problems inherent in comparative political analysis as a departure point and not an embarrassment; rather than comparison of institutions, behaviors, or survey data alone, the meaning and practice of politics across countries is compared. An interpretive methodology ensures greater objectivity in observation and validity in measurement. Indeed, sensitivity to context ensures that questions and concepts are formulated in a way that better allows their comparability across cases.[108] As mentioned in Chapter Two, we are led astray by the assumption that institutions and behaviors that bear morphological similarities perform similarly or have the same meanings. Cultural explanations that rely on intimate familiarity with the case at hand are better equipped to make compelling explanations of how and why political outcomes occur by focusing on the mechanisms by which political outcomes are effected, and are thus more reliably compared across cultures. Uncovering the processes of politics is a more appropriate standard when investigating the vagaries of so complex a world as that of human behavior than the standard goals of social scientific explanations which proceed from a view of social events as bounded by an identifiable beginning and end point.[109]

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[108] Chabal, Patrick, and Jean-Pascal Daloz. 2006. *Culture Troubles: Politics and the Interpretation of Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, ch. 7.

[109] Zuckerman, Alan. 1997. "Reformulating Explanatory Standards and Advancing Theory in Comparative Politics." In *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, ed. M. Lichbach and A. Zuckerman. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Furthermore, a cultural perspective better corrects the normativity inherent in treatments of democracy. Studies of regime change and consolidation have suffered from liberal expectations about the propriety of democracy around the globe. As a result, our predictions in political science concerning democratization and consolidation have been biased toward our own understanding of the best political system. A cultural approach can overcome normativity by providing the contextual familiarity that carries with it the understanding of how politics is interpreted by its participants in different cultural areas.

CHAPTER 4

ESTABLISHING THE LIBERAL NARRATIVE

Chapters One through Three established the framework for interpreting Mexican political culture. Chapter Three notes that social behavior in Mexico has long been shaped by hierarchical and exclusivist political behavior among political participants and further made the case that the predominant symbolic narratives—interpretations of Mexico's political origins and destiny—have since independence centered on grand plans to reshape society root and branch, licensing an active and powerful public authority to act in the name of a pliant and submissive population.

Chapter Four begins with a brief review of the political conditions established by the conquest of Mexico and three centuries of colonial rule, but focuses the majority of analysis on the post-independence conditions in which a republican regime took root. It would be a mistake to consider pre-Hispanic and colonial Mexico static, and the conflict and change during this period is the subject of many volumes, but our interest lies primarily in how these conditions contributed to the rise of competing symbolic political narratives in the more politically open atmosphere of the independence era and how the liberal paradigm and its modernizing impulses became the predominant one. The chapter will demonstrate that, in large measure, the political competition between liberals and conservatives after independence consisted of efforts at "symbolic engineering," the attempt to define the terms of debate and establish the meanings associated with the Spanish colony, the Mexican nation, and the ends of politics

The first fifty years of Mexican independence is the story of the creation of a liberal understanding of the Mexican nation and the crystallization of the liberal mission that demanded the reordering of Mexican institutions and the creation of a new society. The transformational aims of the victorious liberals set Mexican political dynamics on a course in which the great symbolic narratives create expectations that political actions be understood according to the attempt to reshape society. The “symbolic vocabulary” crafted in this period would have lasting effects for subsequent eras, as subsequent politicians inherited the conceptual constructions established in this period. To demonstrate the effects of these symbolic narratives, the study will now turn to a survey of the historical development of the predominant symbolic narratives and how these grew from social conditions that political actors faced.

In many centuries of history Mexico has experienced a scant few decades of what we would consider genuine popular rule and civic freedom, a large portion of those years being the first years of the twenty first century. The first Mexican republic, established after the brief reign of an indigenous emperor, was, however, a vibrant democracy in which truly competitive political programs vied for public support and public discourse was open and trenchant.

Though often overlooked as a comedy of errors, a prelude to the rule of the caudillo regime of Santa Anna and the War of the Reform, the early republic that lasted from 1824 to the beginning of Santa Anna's dictatorship in 1836 was a study in democratic politicking and laid the foundations for much of what was to come in the next century. The final victory of the liberal faction over the conservatives in 1867 would produce the first of the great transforming projects that have characterized post-independence political narratives.

The Colony

In 1521 the Spanish monarchy integrated the Aztec empire into its own, effectively exchanging one emperor for another. The merging of these two empires reinforced two vertically organized and religiously sanctioned political systems. As the Spanish monarchy rested on the divine right of kings and the great chain of being institutions were highly stratified, with power flowing from the divinely-sanctioned kings through many layers of authority until it finally reached the largest group of subjects.[110] Similarly, the Aztec religion and political institutions were fully intertwined and the emperor enjoyed his position as the result of divine favor.[111]

The Spanish institutions imported to the New World had been forged in the centuries of the Reconquest, in which the Moors were driven from the Iberian Peninsula over a period of seven centuries. A crusading spirit was thus transmitted to the conquest of the New World as an extension of the campaign against the Moors, and the divine mission found new purpose in spreading Christianity in civilizations that had never heard its name.

In contrast to the colonists of North America, the Spanish encountered many millions of indigenous people who would be subjugated and subjected to their rule, a brute demographic fact that would set the stage for a racialized social stratification that formed the core of conservative rule and would vex generations of liberal elites in their quest to create a unified nation. The conquest was not completed in a day or a year, of course, but the military portion extended into the next century, while the spiritual, intellectual, and political conquest could be seen as continuing even farther into the future.

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[110] Wiarda, Howard J. 2001. *The Soul of Latin America: The Cultural and Political Tradition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p. 79-82.

[111] Prescott, William Hickling, and Keith Henderson. 1922. *The Conquest of Mexico*. New York: H. Holt and Company, p. 36.

As one of four viceroyalties, Mexico was the jewel in the Spanish crown; it produced coveted metals, exotic crops and animals, and the prestige of an expansive population. Decades before the English colonies were established on the Atlantic coast, Mexico was home to cathedrals, printing presses, and a university. Rather than the backward province of an empire in decline as it is often viewed, MacClachlan and Rodríguez emphasize that colonial Mexico was at the center of a newly emerging global system and was itself a dynamic developing capitalist economy.[112]

Despite this, the anchors of colonial society, besides the far-away monarch in Spain, were the Catholic Church and the military,[113] two institutions that stubbornly protected their corporate interests for centuries, and well into the independence period. The privileges and positions of these bodies would indeed cast a long shadow on the Mexican political landscape and shape political debate between liberals and conservatives for several decades.

During the colonial and early independence period, there was next to no commitment to a shared national identity. In a metropolis such as Mexico City, the white European population, Indians, and mestizos were integrated into a complex system of socioeconomic hierarchy by which people's occupations were to a large extent determined at birth. The hierarchy and the relative positions of various racial groupings was not so clearly defined as a caste system like that of India,[114] but life chances were to a large measure fixed. Indeed, there was little communication among the various classes given the sometimes scarce interaction between those of European extraction and Indian peasants, particularly since many Indians did not speak

[112] MacLachlan, Colin M., and Jaime E. Rodríguez O. 1980. *The Forging of the Cosmic Race: A Reinterpretation of Colonial Mexico*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
[113] On the military in Latin America see McAlister, L. N. 1961. "Civil-Military Relations in Latin America." *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 3 (3):341-50. On the church see Gill, Anthony James. 1998. *Rendering unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
[114] Seed, Patricia. 1982. "Social Dimensions of Race: Mexico City, 1753." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 62 (4):569-606.

Spanish—a linguistic fragmentation not uncommon for any number of European countries at the time.[115] Both colonial and independent Mexican authorities consciously undertook to fashion a national culture by attempting to integrate Indians and promote national symbols and rituals to publicize each person's inclusion in the social body and the essential unity—but separateness—of the multitudinous social groups in Mexican society.[116] This was the social tapestry that elites grappled with at independence. After three centuries of Spanish colonialism, the social order to prevail in the newly created Mexican nation was an open question.

Independence

Almost universally, Mexicans now consider the revolt of Father Miguel Hidalgo breaking out in the town of Dolores in the state of Guanajuato on September 15, 1810 as the beginning of the independence movement. This creole priest would lead a chaotic army of Indians and peasants against the Spanish and creole political and social establishment for less than a year before his capture, repentance, and execution. Nevertheless, Hidalgo became the much celebrated "Father of the Nation." This consensus would only be achieved much later, and was, in effect a liberal construction. The saintly aura that came to surround Hidalgo was a far cry from his reception in the fall of 1810. A progressive with an unorthodox lifestyle for a clergyman—gambling, fathering children, associating with the lower orders—Hidalgo came to resent Spanish rule and after the ejection of a liberal viceroy became involved in a conspiracy against the government. The plot having been found out, Hidalgo issued his famous "Grito de Dolores" (Cry of Dolores)

[115] Van Young, Eric. 2003. "In the Gloomy Caverns of Paganism: Popular Culture, Insurgency, and Nation-Building in Mexico, 1800-1821." In *The Birth of Modern Mexico, 1780-1824*, ed. C. I. Archer. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., p. 49.
[116] Curcio-Nagy, Linda A. 1994. "Giants and Gypsies: Corpus Christi in Colonial Mexico City." In *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, ed. W. H. Beezley, C. E. Martin and W. E. French. Wilmington, Del.: SR Books.

urging the people to arms. The resulting rebellion nearly careened out of the control of Hidalgo, as Spaniards and creoles were massacred and property destroyed.

After the capture and execution of Hidalgo, leadership of the rebellion fell to another priest, the mestizo José María Morelos who won fanatical backing by his soldiers. Morelos, though, was captured and executed in 1815. The movement waxed and waned in power and might well have stagnated or been defeated through attrition had not a group of creole officers led by Agustín de Iturbide and including the infamous caudillo Antonio López de Santa Anna switched sides and proclaimed in favor of independence in 1821 after the Spanish government took a liberal turn, giving new life to the teetering revolutionary movement. The conservative royalist-turned rebel Iturbide fashioned a unified military force to effect independence, accomplishing what the radicals Hidalgo and Morelos could not by uniting the creole class to the cause of independence. For his efforts he was rewarded with the title of Emperor Agustín I. Immediately upon independence, empire appeared a reasonable answer to the question of how to organize the vast territories of New Spain into an independent state. His support wore thin as his behavior grew capricious, and after Iturbide had reigned less than a year he was turned out of office and a republican form of government was adopted. The manner of his departure from office was an occurrence that would become all too common in the coming years.

Despite its essentially conservative origins, independence had the effect of redefining the terms of political discourse. Independence was finally achieved through a comparatively uneventful concord between rebels and former loyalists, but the independence movement since 1810 had mobilized the masses, widening the public space of participation; the keys to power were no longer held exclusively by a coterie of colonial officials. Though not thoroughly democratized, public participation was widened and some appeal to mass sentiment was required

for the legitimacy of any potential governors' actions. In the vacuum left by the disappearance of Spanish rule, the terms of political power were not clearly drawn, and the early republic was a period of upheaval and political experimentation.[117]

The Republic

In 1824 the country's first president assumed office in an age of optimism. Guadalupe Victoria, a steadfast champion of independence and republicanism, intended to preside over a united republic unblemished by faction. The country was governed by a constitution that organized a federal republic and allowed for wide suffrage. Well-meaning in aim, Victoria was overwhelmed by the growing divisions among Mexican political elites and was incapable of reining in the factions that had sprouted and grew uncontrollably in only a few years. In 1827, the vice president, Nicolás Bravo, took up arms against the government in an ill-fated bid for centralism against the increasingly powerful and assertive federalists. The next year constitutional rule was fatally undermined after another revolt compelled the government to overturn the outcome of the second presidential election. Santa Anna would assume the presidency on a number of occasions beginning in 1833. Santa Anna dominated Mexican politics until his final overthrow in 1855, swinging the country between political extremes; Santa Anna rebelled various times as partisan of republicanism and federalism, but also against liberal reformers, and himself oversaw the implementation of a conservative, centralized constitution. Santa Anna's tenure was marked by extreme instability; no president would serve a full term after Victoria and constitutions would be written and rewritten several times before the more durable 1857 charter took effect.

[117] See Hale, Charles A. 1968. *Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1821-1853*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Institutions were present that were intended to channel participation and opposition into peaceful channels, and yet they failed to do so. As Stevens writes, politics in the early independence period of Mexico is often taken to be unusually affected by unscrupulous and unprincipled political leaders, an assumption that overlooks the evidence of principled ideological cleavages.[118]

This time of endless revolts and *pronuncamientos* was for many years deplored by contemporaries and historians alike as chaos. The entire era of early independence is sometimes simply called the "Age of Santa Anna," a name that invokes the bewildering shuffling of presidents and internecine rivalries. Despite falling to armed struggle and strongman rule, it was a regime founded on remarkably open political participation, foreshadowing similar periods of democratic experimentation in subsequent centuries.

The Liberals and Conservatives

The period of the early republic was one in which the conservative and liberal contest took form. This competition threw the country into an extended period of upheaval, with factions continually vying for control over the national government, plans revolutionary and reactionary flying seemingly every few months. The political system reflected those twists and turns in its gyration from the notably democratic constitution of 1824 to the centralized, conservative constitution of 1836. Although there would be no formal political parties for several decades following independence, elite factions abounded since the independence wars and liberal and conservative tendencies were already taking shape, anticipating the ideological struggle that defined Mexican politics throughout the nineteenth century. None of the questions surrounding

[118] Stevens, Donald Fithian. 1991. *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press.

monarchism and republicanism, centralism and federalism, the status of the church, and of the various social classes inspired consensus, and factional infighting frayed the edges of the country immediately.

Liberalism in Mexico was largely influenced by continental thought. French and Spanish reformers inspired Mexican liberals given their similarities to the Mexican historical experience. Hale sees the preeminence of the French politician and writer Benjamin Constant and the Spanish minister for Charles III Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos in the more moderate liberal Mexican project; French thinking provided the plan of attack against the old order and Spain furnished the most direct parallel for liberal reformism.[119] The Spanish liberal example came most visibly in the creation of the Cádiz constitution of 1812, wherein a liberal Córtes proclaimed a progressive charter with the participation of deputies from the Americas. This document introduced a host of reforms and would reverberate throughout the Spanish speaking world, establishing the foundations for liberal government in Mexico.[120]

Unifying liberals was the principle of enlightened progress. In the eyes of liberals, Spanish rule was a burden to be overcome. Spanish institutions had shackled the new state with a fractured society, with privileged classes among the clergy and military enjoying special rights. Indeed, it was hardly a nation at all. Many liberals subscribed to the Black Legend of Spanish cruelty and intolerance. In these early days of Mexican liberalism there prevailed an optimism in the power of constitutional engineering and legal reforms. Individual freedom, a modern commercial economy, property rights, political equality, all should be enshrined in a well-designed constitution, and progress and plenty should follow.

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[119] Hale, Charles A. 1968. *Mexican liberalism in the age of Mora, 1821-1853*. New Haven,: Yale University Press, p. 62.

[120]Rodríguez O, Jaime E. 2005. "The Origins of Constitutionalism and Liberalism in Mexico." In *The Divine Charter: Constitutionalism and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Mexico*, ed. J. E. Rodríguez O. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, pgs. 13-14.

Lorenzo de Zavala emerged as one of the most ardent and radical liberals of the day, representative of the so-called *puro* faction of purist liberals. He served as a deputy and governor of the State of Mexico and was the author of one of the principal histories of the Mexican independence movement. For Zavala, Spanish domination had been pernicious and arbitrary, its benefits so negligible that "the interesting history of Mexico does not truly begin except in that memorable year [of 1808]."[121] In these early years following independence, the question of the status of the remaining peninsulares—those of Spanish birth residing in Mexico—constituted a hotly contested issue. For Zavala and his liberal fellow-travelers, the remaining peninsulares were a continual threat to national sovereignty and an insult to national dignity as they continued to cleave closer to Spain than to Mexico.

Conservatism in Mexico only grew as an enunciated body of thought after the war with the United States in mid-century.[122] It nonetheless germinated as a reaction against the extensive plans for reworking society initiated by the liberals beginning with independence. Those more comfortable with continuity than experimentation preferred first the constitutional monarchy of Iturbide, then hoped to maintain integrity of the state through a centralized scheme of government. To them, Spanish rule was marked by its mistakes and instances of incompetence, but was essentially beneficial. Independence was not necessarily a disaster, and could be seen as necessary step in the advancement of the country. Conservatives particularly were inclined to view Iturbide as the real father of independence, and to have supported his rule.

They also turned a sympathetic eye to the peninsulares, viewing the anti-Spanish sentiment of the liberals as a blind prejudice and as a threat to economic stability, given that

[121]Zavala, Lorenzo de. 1845. *Ensayo histórico de las revoluciones de México, desde 1808 hasta 1830*. México,: Manuel N. de la Vega, p. 11.
[122]Hale, Charles A. 1968. *Mexican liberalism in the age of Mora, 1821-1853*. New Haven,: Yale University Press, p. 15.

much of the economy was controlled by them. While organized attacks on the privileges of the church would be delayed for several years after independence and practically all members of the factions considered themselves faithful Catholics, conservatives would be the most redoubtable defenders of religion as the guarantor of morality and stability.

Among the conservatives, Lucas Alamán stands out as the premier figure. A creole from a landowning family in the state of Guanajuato, Alamán was a direct witness to the upheaval and destruction of the Hidalgo revolution, his family's estate coming under siege in the first days of the revolt in 1810. As was the case for many future conservatives, Alamán was a liberal in the context of the independence movement, viewing independence as natural progression under the moderating power of Iturbide, but turned toward outspoken conservatism as he came to blame the pandemonium of the republican years on its un-Hispanic liberal institutions.

There were also middle of the road views. The so-called *moderados* tended toward a moderate liberalism and would sometimes feel greater affinity with the conservatives than the more radical of their liberal counterparts. José Maria Luis Mora was a luminary among liberals and provided a bridging perspective in the independence period. Moderates such as Mora could consistently uphold liberal ideological values and goals while resisting the immediate changes that were demanded by the radical faction of the liberals. The *moderados*, however, would often see threats to political and social order in the same ways the conservatives did, as emanating from below. Even a progressive like Mora who hoped to reform society in the liberal image saw the threat of disorder from too rapid a transformation.

Convergences

Despite differing views on the best society, the intrigues in Mexico City were the exclusive affair of the *hombres de bien*, or gentleman of the small but rising middle class; radical liberals such as Zavala and conservatives such as Alamán were drawn from their ranks. The exclusivity of politics stretched back to the days of the conquistadors, the higher classes always speaking for the lesser. In an elaborate social patchwork of differentiated socioeconomic classes, races, and linguistic groups such as post-independence Mexico, clientelistic relations were the embedded norm and few people of the middle and upper classes held faith that the toiling masses were fit for self-government, particularly in an era in which democracy was not always held in the highest esteem even in the United States.

The establishment of a republic in 1821 did little to change these attitudes, and the governing classes tended to agree that the propertyless laborers should not have a great say in the political arena. Even the polarizing liberal Valentín Gómez Farìas, several times president in the 1830s and 1840s and committed reformer, voiced his doubts about extending participation too widely. He warned Santa Anna against allowing representation of all the classes in the legislature since "very few of them have the people of sufficient aptitude and understanding to be able to carry out the arduous and difficult task which has to be entrusted to their care."[123] Liberals and conservatives alike could agree that political office should be restricted to the gentlemanly class.[124]

There was no doubt for a moderate such as Mora that political order could only be maintained by property owners.[125] His constitutionalism was not confounded with democracy; he

[123] Wasserman, Mark. 2000. *Everyday Life and Politics in Nineteenth Century Mexico: Men, Women, and War*. 1st ed. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, p. 51.
[124] Costeloe, Michael P. 1993. *The Central Republic in Mexico, 1835-1846: Hombres de bien in the Age of Santa Anna*. Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, pp. 17-18.
[125] Mora, José María Luis. 1963. *Obras sueltas de José María Luis Mora, ciudadano mexicano*. 2. ed. México,: Editorial Porrúa, p. 294.

was convinced by the rioting and lawlessness of Hidalgo's rebellion was evidence enough of the need to restrain the multitude. The radical Zavala, too, agreed that only property holders had the foresight and restraint to recognize the public good.[126]

In this important aspect, mainstream liberal elites agreed with conservatives about the degraded status of the mass of Indians and mestizo peasants. In conservatives' eyes, these were simple people whose interests were best served by tutelage under the aegis of church and state. Their dim view of human nature led them to believe that the temporal and spiritual powers of Hispanic tradition were the surest means to protect social harmony. Liberals, of course, looked forward to an age of popular sovereignty and equality under the law, guided by reason rather than church doctrine. Nonetheless, after a period of liberal purism immediately following independence, many liberals throughout the nineteenth came to appreciate that because the multitudes had been raised as children since the conquest, their capacity for self-government was stunted and they would require paternalistic guidance before having the capacity to take charge of their own destinies.

Though the political climate was deeply divided among ideological projects, the act of opposition freighted with rancor, convergence could be found, therefore, in some areas, particularly horizontal relations between elites and masses. These were, after all, a small core of privileged European elites living among many more members of the lower orders, sometimes disparagingly described as *léperos*. Society in independent Mexico was highly stratified, bearing the birthmarks of the European conquest of a large indigenous population. There was, in reality, no Mexican nation, but many *patrias chicas* (little nations) defined by race, ethnicity, language, and region.

[126] Hale, op cit. 1968, p. 96.

Factions

Despite this agreement among the middle and upper classes, the liberals and conservatives differed sharply in interpretations of the colony and independent nation. From the beginnings of the republic, them, contenders were approaching politics from different realms, viewing the same history and social context with radically different eyes. In these formative years of the political divide, Masonic lodges formed the core of political competition. Masonry was only introduced into Mexico in 1820, but quickly gained adherents and served as the vehicles for emerging political tendencies. The *escocés* faction—named for its adherence to Scottish Rite Freemasonry—attracted the well-to-do and maintained an exclusive membership, while the *yorkinos*—those of the York Rite—threw the doors wide to recruit from the lower orders, giving them the upper hand in public popularity.[127] Though the leadership of each rite was staffed by the highest echelons of Mexican society and membership was fluid, the *escoceses* and the *yorkinos* formed protean conservative and liberal factions, respectively. At the birth of the republic the dividing lines were still ill-defined. In a matter of a few years, though, ideological positions hardened. Though not formalized political groups, the emerging factions coalesced around the issues of the day. Among the primary controversies to arise during the independent country's first years and the writing of the first constitution was over the degree of centralization that would be adopted for the new political system. The more conservative had less faith in the ability of far flung provinces to manage their own affairs properly, and the more liberal tended to view federalism as a guarantee against arbitrary domination. There was no federalist litmus test for liberals, though, and the question divided liberals, as well. These could legitimately appeal to France and the liberal Spanish constitution as models for devolution within a centralized system,[128] and the more

[127] Green, Stanley C. 1987. *The Mexican Republic: The First Decade, 1823-1832*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
[128]Hale, 1968, op cit.

enduring cleavage that would embitter the rivalry between liberals and conservatives was the divergence of attitudes toward the old order. Nonetheless, the battles over federalism constituted the first ideological split of the nation and would occupy the elite class for first years of the republic.

The battles commenced with the drafting of the 1824 Constitution. Federalists worried that the military vested too much power in the executive and would serve as a bastion of conservatism. Federalists, among them Santa Anna, felt strongly enough about their cause to sound the call to arms and revolt to ensure the provinces would maintain their autonomy. The variegated provinces, the country's vast territories, and the centrifugal tendencies put in motion by the constitutional crisis leading to independence made federalism a natural and probably unavoidable choice for the new constitution, something even Alamán had to admit.[129]

Centralists and later conservatives would nonetheless develop deep antipathy toward the new charter, and its principles would be revisited countless times, not only by legislators and presidents but by generals and mutineers. To the conservative mind, the constitution embodied ideals foreign to Mexico and its heritage, and was a recipe for disaster. Alamán considered the constitution an improperly conceived copy of the US plan of government, unsuited to the realities of the Mexican social condition in which the same institutions would have entirely different effects.[130] Even Zavala described it as model of the US Constitution appended with clerical and military fueros and an official religion.[131] The constitution and its federalism would be viewed askance by conservatives for decades, with later generations of Catholic faithful

[129] Quinlan, David M. 1994. "Issues and Factions in the Constituent Congress, 1823-1824." In *Mexico in the Age of Democratic Revolutions, 1750-1850,* ed. J. E. Rodríguez O. Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner.
[130] Alamán, Lucas, and Andrés Lira González. 1997. *Lucas Alamán.* 1. ed. México, D.F.: Cal y Arena, pp. 168-169.
[131] Zavala, 1845, op cit. p. 23.

pinpointing the 1824 constitution as the beginning of Mexico's woes.[132] They had at least the historical record on the side of their argument, given the tumults that followed.

Victoria limped through his term in office without succumbing to the attempts to unseat him, a financial crisis, and faltering legitimacy, but none of his successors would be as lucky. In the presidential election of 1828 the previously influential *escoceses* had been sidelined and the disputes over republicanism and federalism had momentarily been decided by their inclusion in the 1824 constitution. Both candidates were *yorkinos*, but this fact did obviate the plotting already rampant in the republic and would culminate in another *pronunciamento* to install the losing candidate. When the populist independence hero Vicente Guerrero lost the election despite his greater popularity, his followers determined to ensure the respect of the general will. Zavala, a luminary among the yorkinos, led the charge in Guerrero's favor, along with the ardent Guerrero supporter Santa Anna. The matter was decided when soldiers in Mexico City fort the Acordada declared for Guerrero and the legally winning candidate gave up the fight. While the popular will was done, the constitution—and the rule of law—were disregarded. Zavala, though, portayed the revolution as the culmination of a enduring struggle for liberty, declaring that "the wicked tremble before the majestic voice that reclaims the sacred rights of a people oppressed for centuries."[133]

To the chagrin of the Mexican political leadership this was only the beginning; the pattern had been cut and opposition would continue to fit it. Guerrero's presidency lasted less than a year. His political program was derived from the platform of the populist *yorkinos*: a decree requiring the expulsion of Spaniards; the abolition of slavery; limiting the free trade

[132] Connaughton, Brian. 2005. "The Enemy Within: Catholics and Liberals in Dependent Mexico, 1821-1860." In *The Divine Charter: Constitutionalism and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Mexico*, ed. J. E. Rodríguez O. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
[133] Zavala, Lorenzo de. 1845. op cit, pg. 144.

which was viewed as favoring prosperous industrialists over small scale artisans. His conservative vice president Anastasio Bustamante took part in a plan to drive Guerrero from office, after which Guerrero was executed. Alamán declared that the revolution against Guerrero was the "happiest" of the republic, restoring as it did, the laws and constitution, and met the approval of all "sensible people."[134]

Bustamante's regime would not last, as Santa Anna would return from retirement to eject him from office in favor of Manuel Gómez Pedraza, the winning candidate of 1828 whom Santa Anna had helped depose. Santa Anna himself would assume the presidency in 1833, and from there the list of presidents and revolts grew longer and longer.

During one of his several presidencies, however, Santa Anna turned against the decentralization that had been regnant since the founding of the republic and oversaw a shift toward conservatism and the abolition of federalism under a new constitution in 1835.

The radical liberal Valentín Gómez Farías government had undertaken in 1833 a far-reaching reform intended to place Mexico on a new path to the development of a liberal republic. He sought to rein in the power of the Church and military, attempting a major reshuffling of the military and a bid to assert the power of the state against the Church hierarchy. Liberal federalists viewed these corporate institutions as incompatible with a sovereign republic and were firing the first salvo of many against these entrenched interests. The reforms of 1833 presaged the reforms that would ignite a civil war twenty five years later, and stirred enormous controversy. Santa Anna would again determine the winning faction, this time by leading a conservative revolt and instituting a new constitutional order that recentralized power in the national government, restricted the franchise, and tamed the press.

[134]Alamán, Lucas, and Juan Bautista Alamán. 1968. *Historia de Méjico*. 2. ed. Méjico,: Editorial Jus., pp. 532-533.

To conservatives, the new arrangements would more accurately reflect the social reality of Mexico and reverse the disintegration of the nation toward chaos that conservatives attributed to foreign ideologies and institutions. The 1824 constitution was heavily amended so as to fully alter its democratic and federalist content. Citizenship rights were restricted and the president was granted wider powers. The formerly sovereign states were relegated to the status of "departments" of the central government. From 1835 to 1846 the country was governed by this centralist constitution. Federalist revolts became the norm and Santa Anna, sometimes as president, often personally rode into the field to quell them.

Recentralization of power also set in motion the events that would lead to the most catastrophic event of the young nation's history. The end of federalism provoked the ire of the fiercely independent Texan settlers from the US. The Mexican government had encouraged colonization as a means to assert Mexican sovereignty over the scarcely populated northern territories and soon lost control as Texans openly disregarded Mexican law. The attempt at reasserting control as a department of the central republic led only to the Texas secession and the confrontation of 1836 in which President Santa Anna was captured and held in confinement for nine months before being returned to Mexico in disgrace. National humiliation did not end with the secession of Texas and its declaration of independence, but was only aggravated further when Texas was annexed to the US, and border dispute between the countries mushroomed into a full scale conflict from 1846 to 1848. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war after the US had occupied Mexico City and the Mexican government agreed to cede nearly half its territory. Even during the war the intrigues and plots had continued. A liberal government was forced to contend with a coup attempt by conservatives while awaiting invasion by the forces of the U.S. The internal division and wrangling provided the U.S. the perfect opportunity to invade.

Beyond separating the country from an enormous piece of territory and darkening attitudes toward their northern neighbor, the secession of Texas and subsequent war with the United States heightened the competition between liberals and conservatives. The war and its aftermath was an occasion for national soul-searching. Conservatives tended to lay blame for the war on the liberals who had courted disaster by embracing the United States and its institutions. Conservatives felt vindicated in having issued warnings against neglecting the more civilized European world in favor of the vulgar individualism of the US.

The Liberal Reform and French Intervention

The 1850s produced what would become a defining moment in the development of a dominant liberal understanding of the Mexican epic. A drive to secularize and modernize society, much like those of previous decades, known simply as *La Reforma*, the Reform, set off a chain of events that handed the liberals a decisive victory over the conservatives and redefined the language of political debate in Mexico to the present day. After the liberals gained a political edge over the conservatives in 1857 and attempted again to reshape the country in the image of the liberal ideal, a civil war broke out between the rival factions, leading to a French intervention on behalf of the conservatives intended to reestablish a European monarchy.

The roots of the Reform were in the final overthrow of Santa Anna by a liberal movement in 1855 known as the Revolution of Ayutla, marking the end of the caudillo's direct influence over Mexican political affairs. Though the liberals could unite in revolution, governing was a different matter. The split between the radical *puros* and centrist *moderados* became apparent soon after the wresting control from Santa Anna and led to stasis in the progress of reforms. Ignacio Comonfort, a revolutionary war hero and a moderate, assumed the presidency intending

to make evolutionary changes.[135] Soon, however the radical *puro* faction asserted itself, pressing for far-reaching, immediate reforms. Members of the new administration quickly began to enact a modernizing overhaul of the very bases of Mexican society.

A broadside against the conservative bases of society came in the form of the Ley Juárez, which abolished special privileges and *fueros*, the civil tribunals reserved for military personnel and clergy which liberals detested as flouting equality before the law. The law took its name from Benito Juárez, a figure that towers above any other of the Reform period. Though his national career only began with the success of the Revolution of Ayutla, this full-blooded Zapotec Indian, Governor of the State of Oaxaca, President of the Supreme Court, and President of the federation from 1858 until his death in 1872, would assume the leadership of the liberal resistance against the French intervention and Juárez would thereafter became the apotheosis of Mexican liberalism and nationalism, inextricably uniting the two.

The Ley Juárez was followed by a law coming from Comonfort's Treasury Secretrary, Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, who introduced legislation that would sell off the property of corporate entities not used directly for the corporation's stated purposes. As the largest landholder in the country, the Church found itself directly in Lerdo's crosshairs. The Ley Lerdo, as it was commonly called, and the Ley Juárez led to immediate protests by the clergy and military, who saw these reforms as a direct threat to their ancient privileges. Together the two laws were part of the culmination of the liberals' attempt to create a society of equal citizens, free of the corporate character that had dominated for centuries. The decrees represented the first salvos in what would become a civil war.

[135] Scholes, Walter V. 1952. "A Revolution Falters: Mexico 1856-1857." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 32 (1):1-21.

The Reform reached its culmination in the Constitution of 1857, modeled essentially on the 1824 Constitution but pressing the liberal ideological program further than before. The new charter proclaimed a litany of rights presumed by liberals to be the foundation of social life. Life and liberty were guaranteed, freedom of speech and assembly recognized, private property enshrined as a fundamental right. The liberals' individualist program naturally included an economic plan to remake Mexico into a capitalist economy driven by property holders. This generation departed from the populism of Guerrero, demanding that equal rights and the rule of law extend to economic relations, and that free trade be allowed to determine winners. Indeed, the original Plan de Ayutla, the manifesto proclaimed by the leaders of the Revolution of Ayutla, included a provision to lower protectionist barriers to trade.[136]

Also, and fatally for Conservatives, the charter did not require that Catholicism be the official national religion. Conservatives could not let the attacks against Hispanic institutions of the Reform go unchallenged, and the response came in the same year the Constitution went into effect. The conservative Plan of Tacubaya that nullifed the constitution was not only the project of reactionaries, but of moderate liberals who feared that radical measures would compromise the reforms and drive the population into the hands of the conservatives. Indeed, the moderate Liberal President Ignacio Comonfort, who had supported the Plan de Ayutla that finally removed Santa Anna from power, acquiesced to the coup and agreed to remain president as a new constitution was drafted.[137]

The coup sent the country spiraling into war as contending governments claimed legitimacy and competed to the death. By 1861 the Liberals were able to gain the upper hand against the Conservatives (due in part to the support of the U.S.) and decree yet further

[136]Plan de Ayutla, http://www.ordenjuridico.gob.mx/Constitucion/CH4.pdf.

[137] Hamnett, Brian. 1996. "The Comonfort Presidency, 1855-1857." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 15 (1):81-100.

secularizing reforms. Any peace would be short-lived, however, as the beleaguered liberal government led by Juárez was forced to suspend foreign debt payments, leading to an invasion by France, Spain, and Britain, which became the longer term French Intervention and the attempt by Napolean III, with the collusion of the routed Mexican conservatives, to establish a European monarchy in Mexico. The Austrian Habsburg Ferdinand Maximilian began his rule as emperor of Mexico in 1864, plunging Mexico into three more years of war until the French withdrew and the forces of Maximilian were defeated and the hapless prince was executed.

The Republic Restored

The French intervention proved to be a turning point in the struggle of liberals and conservatives, and would have lasting effects for the construction of political narratives. The ejection of another European power and toppling of another emperor became a "second independence." The struggle flawlessly recreated the liberal historical narrative of the Independence War in which enlightened Mexican republicans repel European tyranny and backward absolutism and established the liberals as patriotic heroes and their vision of the Mexican nation as a quasi-official ideology still occupying a position of reverence today. Liberalism became equated with patriotism and the liberal national narrative became ingrained as the only respectable one for an independent nation. The Reform was intended as a revolutionary break with the past and reformulation of Mexican society. From the 1860s forward, a secular modernizing mission to transform Mexican society would be the overarching goal of every subsequent regime. Though the regimes shifted between more conservative and more radical, the promise of liberal, and later revolutionary change, demanded the subjugation of rivals and action in the name of the masses, conditioning the understanding of what constitutes legitimate political action. Very clearly, the liberal project

consisting of a federal republic, separation of powers, and a productive citizenry of small property owners remained a very distant ideal in 1867, and the goal would always remain somewhere beyond the horizon.

Instead of a decentralized state with power held by an informed citizenry the Restored Republic, as it would become known, in reality exhibited a strong family resemblance to the previous regimes of proudly authoritarian character. Only the ends to which power would be wielded were changed. Instead of defending a state founded upon monarchy, religion, or military privileges, the state was directed toward uprooting those vestiges of the past and creating a strong constitutional and egalitarian state, a sight unseen in Mexico that would require as stern a hand as Iturbide's or Santa Anna's. The Restored Republic reflected the shared conservative assumptions about the proper use of state authority and in short order gave birth to the long dictatorship of Porfírio Díaz, who took power in 1876 and held the reins of power until he was overthrown in the great upheaval of the Revolution of 1910.

The task the liberals gave themselves was herculean; it was not simply a matter of undercutting the military and church. Rather, they confronted a deeply religious and reflexively conservative population. The measures taken by the reformist government threatened ancient patterns of living cherished by rich and poor alike. The Ley Lerdo, for example, not only applied to the property of the church, but to the communally held properties of Indian villages. In conformity with the intention of creating a prosperous middle class, these lands were to be divided and auctioned off to the highest bidder. The effect, however, was simply to deprive the tenants of the common lands held in their family for centuries. Such rigid application of the rule

of law in many cases drove the peasantry into rebellion[138] and to the church's fold where many of the deeply religious felt most at home in any event.

Juárez occupied the presidency from 1858 to 1872, ruling by decree during war and being twice reelected after the restoration of the republic, only finally leaving the presidential palace upon his death. His commitment to an abstract constitutionalism and the rule of law are unquestioned, but he was pressed by the same paradox the liberal regime faced on a larger level: he saw circumstances as forcing him to violate the Constitution in order to preserve it, creating what in essence was a constitutional dictatorship, ruling by emergency decree, and using prosecution to neutralize his enemies. Even after the war ended, he could not bring himself to hand over power as he contended with continual crime and rebellion in the countryside, alienating Liberal allies who viewed his actions as those of an unprincipled caudillo.[139]

Nor did Juárez shrink from electoral fraud. His period in office witnessed the construction of a party machine not unlike that of the long dictatorship of Porfírio Díaz that followed the death of Juárez.[140] In fact, competition between various personalist liberal leaders consumed the country for some years, degenerating into what resembled personal vendettas, including that between Juárez and Díaz themselves.[141]

After his death, Juárez's partner in the Reform and former opponent in presidential elections, Lerdo de Tejada, assumed the presidency in accordance with the constitutional secession. Lerdo duplicated Juárez's strong-armed tendencies, relying on the strength of the state to press his agenda. Juárez and Lerdo were wary of the strength surrendered to the legislature by

[138] Thomson, Guy P. C. 1991. "Popular Aspects of Liberalism in Mexico, 1848-1888." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 10 (3):265-92.
[139] Krauze, Enrique. 1997. *Biografía del poder : caudillos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1910-1940*. 1a. ed. Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, p. 197.
[140] Perry, Laurens Ballard. 1978. *Juárez and Díaz : machine politics in Mexico*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.
[141] Falcone, Frank. 1977. "Benito Juárez and the Díaz Brothers: Politics in Oaxaca, 1867-1871." *The Americas* 33 (4):630-51.

the Constitution of 1857 and labored to restrict its power. Juárez unsuccessfully attempted to reestablish the senate, which had been abolished by the Constitution, but Lerdo was able to reinstall the upper body, diluting the strength of the legislature.

As is evident and reflecting the assumption that Mexican society was backward and required far-reaching reform, the Liberal project presumed a paternalistic handling of the masses. To the chagrin of the liberals, peasants often participated in rebellions led by conservatives and liberals due to the latter's promises of land.[142] The Indian peasantry posed a particular problem for liberals in particular, given that Indians tended toward religion and communal landownership. Peasants often rallied to the cause of the conservatives, given the liberal penchant for private property which attacked the core principle of Indian communal landholdings.[143] Indians were thus in need of instruction in their own good.

The end of the civil war did not bring immediate peace. Juárez faced uprisings across the territories and much of his energies were spent in stamping these out through his entire tenure, and he oversaw an increasingly sclerotic authoritarianism in his remaining years in office. The Reform, Juárez, and liberalism had secured their place in the Mexican symbolic panorama, though their legacy was far from the state of law and equality that were proclaimed as their end.

The "Symbolic Engineering" of the Liberal Nation

The purpose of the foregoing discussion has been to establish what Geertz described "the flow of social discourse."[144] The epic and tragic events of the first fifty years of the republic were themselves such a discourse, a symbolic drama that continued to unfold throughout the

[142] Krauze, Enrique. 1997. *Biografía del poder: caudillos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1910-1940*. 1a. ed. Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, pp. 156-157.
[143] See e.g. Meyer, Jean. 1969. "El ocaso de Manuel Lozada." *Historia Mexicana* 18 (4):535-68.
[144] Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures; Selected Essays*. New York,: Basic Books.

independence period and beyond. As discussed in Chapter Three, symbolic narratives may fall within a family of liberal narratives marked by the privilege of individual freedom and limited government over other values, working to curtail the reach of the government. As has been an evident irony in the Mexican case, a liberal ideology was successfully implanted as the predominant symbolic narrative of the nation, but empowered rather than limited the actions of the state.

Institutionally, Mexico took the favored forms of the liberals relatively early. After the short-lived empire of Agustín Iturbide there was no realistic alternative to republicanism. The political system oscillated between more centralized and more federal, more democratic and less so, but by the mid-nineteenth century there was simply no returning to monarchism through indigenous channels, even as disillusionment with representative government grew and seemingly committed liberals adopted more conservative viewpoints. A suggestion by the statesman José María Gutiérrez Estrada in 1840 that Mexico establish another monarchy drew outraged denunciation and the author was forced into exile. The intervention of the French in the aftermath of the Reform War would, of course, return a monarchy to Mexico, but simply had the effect of propelling liberalism to victory over the conservatives and effectively quashing the conservative movement as an organized alternative and of sealing the republican character of the Mexican nation. Since the ejection of the French-backed monarchy Mexico has remained a democratic republic in name and in institutional form.

The creation of the liberal nation was not simply the story of the adoption of the republican constitutions, though. Indeed, the solidification of institutions did not result in the peaceful resolution of political controversies through democratic channels that had been hoped for. It was customary in the age of revolts and confusion following independence for the latest

victors to persecute the vanquished and attempt to eliminate the opposition's base of support, and this would continue to be the case in apparently more tranquil times. By the time of the consolidation of the Reform in the 1870s, the institutionalization of the Republic was irreversible. It was no longer the case that any means to power could be regarded as legitimate because of the justice of the aims, political action was required to be consistent with republican and liberal prescriptions. The meanings and purposes attached to political behavior, however, were distinctive and not those of the traditional western liberal.

At independence both past and future were opened to interpretation and immediately two broad tendencies were established: the liberal interpretation of Mexican history as a struggle against the despotism of a dark age, and the conservative one of the same history as the defense of civilization and order. Accordingly, two versions of the epic of independence took shape, one in which the radical creole priest Miguel Hidalgo took the starring role as the prime mover of the independence movement that only culminated in 1821, and another wherein the authorship of independence is attributed to the conservative Iturbide and the earlier rebellions deprecated as corrosive rioting.

The confrontation between conservatives and liberals was, therefore, conducted not only in the halls of power and the battlefield, but equally importantly, in the writing of history, the manipulation of symbols. The rioting of underclasses, the coups of Santa Anna, the war with the United States, and the Reform were not simply brute facts that determined the balance of power, but events that underwent a continual process of interpretation, of attachment of meanings.

The historian Héctor Aguilar Camín has called the nineteenth century the period of “the Invention of Mexico” wherein the liberals employed “symbolic engineering” serving their own political purpose, constructing the idea of a unified Mexican nation with its beginnings in the

Aztecs struggling for liberation from the oppression of the Spanish.[145] Mexico has dozens of traditions to call upon. The conservative vision was as realistic as the liberal and the liberals' triumph was in no way predetermined. The practical annihilation of the conservatives' claim to legitimacy narrowed the menu of political goals to those of the transformative mission of the liberals, and created the dominant modes of political communication for the next several decades, with effects continuing today.

The liberals of the Restored Republic employed a symbolic arsenal to reshape the understanding of what it meant to be Mexican from monarchical, Catholic, and Spanish to republican, secular, and federalist. The independence movement of Hidalgo, the republican constitutions, and the Reform laws themselves could not restructure Mexican society, of course, and those goals remained distant ideals in the 1860s and 1870s, but the nationalistic cachet of liberalism allowed the dominance of the liberal symbolic narrative and the creation of the expectation that power be used in the advancement of liberal political goals, and liberals such as Juárez unflinchingly used dictatorial methods. Like the colonial authority and conservative cuadillos, the tradition of Mexican liberalism was in no way averse to the use of state power. Liberalism only departed from conservatism in the attempt to deploy state power toward the reconstruction of social and political relations, rather than the maintenance of the Hispanic order.

A Member of the Liberal Family?

As is evident, the symbolic narrative created during the first decades of independence, though carrying the name of liberalism, was deeply illiberal in its aims. Liberal elites were in the end willing to use the power of the state to implement a far-reaching agenda that elevated the state to

[145]Aguilar Camín, Héctor. 2008. *La invención de México: historia y cultura política de México*. Mexico, D.F.: Planeta, ch. 1.

a position of power inconsistent with the limited liberal state. For the Mexican liberals, the state would serve as a tool for the enactment of a wide-ranging program of extirpating the conservative foundations of Mexican society. Though the final goal was the achievement of the liberal society of free individual property-holders, the symbolic narrative centering on the transformation of Mexican society through the use of the state conflicted with the limited aims of a the family of symbolic narratives.

Reform era liberalism was the first of great symbolic narratives to bend political action toward the transformative goals of the regnant political elites. Subsequent regimes drew upon political narratives that evolved as if in conversation with Reform liberalism. Porfirian positivism of the later nineteenth century and revolutionary ideology of the early twentieth century responded to shifting economic and social conditions while retaining certain elements of what came before. Porfirism in particular would draw on the liberal symbolic construction for sustenance of its own regime. They shared, in particular, the transformative vocabulary of liberalism and similarly privileged state action designed to achieve a social restructuring that required the continuation of top down and authoritarian political action. Such projects for the greater good gave political leaders claim to vast power.

It may once again be pointed out that authoritarianism, clientelism, and hierachical social relations that characterize this period are not claimed to be ingrained in the Mexican character. The beginning point of independence politics was a confrontation with the social conditions created and sustained for centuries by the Spanish colony. The liberals' perceived need to redefine those conditions would have significant ramifications for the kind of social discourse established by the first generations of liberals. The irony of the success of the liberal narrative, of course, was that in practice the creation of the egalitarian society of active citizens and limited

state demanded the use of a strong state and the tutelage of the population. The goal of the liberals to remake the political and social relations, their grand design, privileged decisive action over legal niceties. Though liberals dreamed of a republic founded on popular sovereignty and nourished by a citizenry of independent property-holding citizens, the means to achievement of the goal required adaptation and ultimately the evolution of liberalism into an ideology of power. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, the grand narratives of subsequent periods, though different in particulars, take this same point of departure.

CHAPTER 5

FROM SCIENTIFIC ADMINISTRATION TO REVOLUTION

Chapter Four described how the final victory of the liberal political faction brought forward the contradictions inherent in the liberals' ideology. Liberalism in government confronted a society of largely Indian and mestizo peasants and laborers and, despite legal reforms, could not easily extirpate social conditions dating to the colony. Despite their libertarian convictions, post-Reform liberals would come to rely on the power of the state to construct a market economy and counter the power of traditional corporations. The paradox produced the constitutional dictatorship of Juárez and his allies, the recentralization of political power, and finally the decades-long modernizing despotism of General Porfirio Díaz. Chapter Five reviews developments during the Porfirian dictatorship and the outbreak of the Revolution of 1910, emphasizing the evolution of symbolic narratives.

The early liberals' narrative viewed the route to progress as countering the colonial heritage. Reflecting the new era, a new national history was being written wherein the administration of Díaz occupied the pinnacle of Mexican social and political evolution. The narrative of the independence period shifted toward new territories, leaving behind the preoccupations of the past, but was nonetheless a continuation of the previous discourse, its starting point the place where the previous one had ended. Thus, the narrative of the Porfiriato claimed to have fulfilled and surpassed the classical liberal mission: the pre-Hispanic past would be glorified as an enlightened classical civilization uprooted and destroyed by barbarous Spanish

invaders, radical independence leaders such as Hidalgo and Morelos hailed as the heroic founders of an independent nation, and Juárez honored as the patriotic defender of the national integrity and of enlightened reform. But the new canonical story went further, appending a new chapter wherein the Díaz regime was the culmination of the liberal epic. As the earlier liberals had done, the Díaz regime set itself to remaking society, reeducating, and molding Mexico, a task that necessitated a strong hand and compliant population.

The Porfiriato's narrative drew the countering narratives of opposition from various sides, liberal, anarchist, socialist, and conservative. The Revolution erupting in 1910 and finally being consolidated only in the 1920s created in the end yet another modernizing despotism and new transformative, utopian symbolic discourse. Again a strong hand and compliant population were required, but this time in the service of social justice, populism, and nationalism. The revolutionary mythology presented an aggressive counter to the Porfirian narrative with a repudiation of the previous regime as founded on greed and servility to foreign powers, but the new narrative served to propagate essentially the same means of achieving a redirected end. Each of the symbolic narratives propose a new transformative mission, beginning where the last had apparently failed.

The Porfiriato

General Porfirio Díaz, a mestizo from Juárez's home state of Oaxaca, was among the committed liberals who had revolted against Santa Anna and served heroically in the armed struggle against the conservatives in the Reform War and again against the French-backed government of Maximilian. He subsequently turned against Juárez, decrying his continuation in office as an affront to liberal values. He contended for the presidency against Juárez in 1871 as did Lerdo,

effectively splitting the vote of the opposition and handing the election to Juárez. Díaz, representing a younger generation of liberals, stormed the national political stage as a populist democrat. Claiming Juárez had stolen the election from him, Díaz led a rebellion against Juárez in 1872 with the slogan *sufragio efectivo, no reeleción* (effective vote, no reelection). He revolted again in 1876 against the Lerdo government. Successful in his second attempt to oust an overbearing government, he immediately revealed himself to be less interested in upholding democratic procedure than defending his rule and would launch the longest personal dictatorship in the country's history.

Krauze writes that in the aftermath of the War of Reform and the French Intervention Mexico had finally become a single nation with an integrated state,[146] a legacy upon which Díaz would build his new Mexico. Upon assuming power he set about to pacify the countryside and attract investment, to finally bring peace and prosperity to Mexico after so many decades of upheaval. His strong guiding hand was consistent with, indeed an extension of the liberal dictatorship fashioned by Juárez, and represented a new phase in liberal philosophy in action. He constructed a paradigm of Mexican politics that dominated the public sphere for decades and gave rise to a counter-paradigm, the Revolution, that still exerts its influence today.

The promises of the Díaz platform were encapsulated by the popular slogan “Peace, Order, and Progress.” In attempting to produce peace, Díaz set about immediately to pacify what remained a turbulent nation, still racked with rebellions and banditry. Juárez had spent much of the latter period of his presidency suppressing revolts in far-flung corners of the republic, and these continued for many of the early years of Díaz's tenure. Criminality was a persistent problem for every independence era government, and many Reform era liberals became convinced of the need for federal management of police forces given the states' inability to

[146]Krauze, 1997, p. 202.

effectively pacify their territories. Díaz set about to modernize and systematize the police forces, infamous for lawlessness, drunkenness, and incompetence.[147] Reforms increased the number of police on the streets, and established stricter standards for recruitment.

Central to the pacification project were the Rurales. The Guardia Rural, the rural police force, had been created during the Juárez government, but gained infamy under Díaz. Díaz threw more funds and support to the organization, making the Rurales a centerpiece of his efforts to transform the further flung reaches of the national territory from a hazardous gamble for travelers to an attractive environment for investment.

The image of the Rurales promoted by the government was one of tirelessness and model efficiency. As Vanderwood notes, however, the reality was more complex. The Guardia Rural became a symbol itself of a resurgent Mexico, confident and orderly. The Rurales were key in projecting an image of an orderly Mexico, and Mexicans, particularly those in the capital, took pride in the international reputation that the force enjoyed.[148]

Díaz took a special interest in projecting an image of cleanliness, prosperity, and modernity. Chief among the aims of the longterm government was to attract foreign investment. The United States was best positioned to funnel investment into the country and, by the end of the century, U.S. investment exceeded $200 million, more than any other area in the world.[149] American investors also owned twenty seven percent of the country's land.[150]

The courting of foreigners extended to immigration as well as finance. Elites bemoaned the lack of population to exploit the expanses of resource-rich territory. As was the strategy in

[147] Santoni, Pedro. 1983. "La policía de la Ciudad de Mexico durante el Porfiriato: los primeros años (1876-1884)." *Historia Mexicana* 33 (1):97-129.
[148] Vanderwood, Paul J. 1972. "Los Rurales: Producto de una necesidad social." *Historia Mexicana* 22 (1):34-51.
[149] Cockroft, James D. 1983. *Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulation, and the State*. New York: Monthly Review Press, p. 93.
[150] Hart, John Mason. 1998. "Social Unrest, Nationalism, and American Capital in the Mexican Countryside, 1876-1920." In *Rural Revolt in Mexico: U.S. Intervention and the Domain of Subaltern Politics*, ed. D. Nugent. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, p. 73.

several Latin American countries, the Mexican government encouraged immigration, especially from Europe and the United States. Elites encouraged immigration from advanced countries in order to bring productive skills to a country they viewed as sorely lacking in talent. The welcoming posture of the regime grew infamous and chafed the public. Mexicans resented what they perceived as favoritism toward foreigners, and a nationalist reaction was gaining traction by the early 1900s. The phrase “Mexico for the Mexicans” circulated as a denunciation of the regime's xenophilia.

To a significant extent, Díaz delivered on his promise of progress. Railroads proved key in the economic explosion that took place during the dictatorship, dramatically reducing transport costs and bringing access to outside markets to previously hopelessly isolated areas of the country.[151] Agricultural and mining exports underwent growth unprecedented in the modern world. The progress was double-sided, however. The benefits of economic expansion were, of course, skewed, reinforcing existing inequalities.[152] The persistence of inequality and often miserable conditions of the working classes served as a rallying point for the opposition.

Díaz also took long strides in reconciling the two most intractable enemies in Mexico since the Reform: The Catholic Church and the secular state. Efforts at rapprochement abated the open friction of the government of Reform-era Liberals toward the church. The church even recovered much of the wealth lost to the earlier generation of ardently anticlerical liberals.[153] While many of the Reform laws limiting the power of the Church over society remained in place, the more draconian measures restricting religious ceremonies and clerical activity were openly

[151] Summerhill, William. 1997. "Transport Improvements and Economic Growth in Brazil and Mexico." In *How Latin America fell behind : essays on the economic histories of Brazil and Mexico, 1800-1914,* ed. S. H. Haber. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
[152] Coatsworth, John. 1979. "Indispensable Railroads in a Backward Economy: The Case of Mexico." *The Journal of Economic History* 39 (4):939-60.
[153] Grayson, George W. 1992. *The Church in contemporary Mexico*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, p. 10.

violated without punitive action by the state. Catholic leaders, in return, removed objections to the faithful participating in the government and even attributed Díaz's political successes to divine providence.[154]

The regime also made a priority of moral reform with the goal of eliminating popular vices. The regime undertook to instill in the workforce the values consistent with wage laborers. Government officials struggled to redirect popular passions from drinking and gambling toward hard work, sobriety, and punctuality, seeing these as the proper characteristics of good citizens .[155] These attempts met with resistance and limited success, but would be employed as an integral part of developmentalist strategies not only during the Porfiriato but the subsequent revolutionary regime as well. The use of the state as an agent for changing the moral life of the state strikes a discordant tone to Anglo-American liberal ears, but was fully consistent with the liberalism of Mexico and an extension of the earlier liberals' reliance on the state to overturn the power of the military and ecclesiastical corporations.

The balance sheet of the regime was, on many accounts, positive. When measured by the goals established by Díaz himself, much of what had been promised was achieved and the regime made every effort to communicate its successes to the public, its supporters as well as to its opponents. Díaz was constructing a new national mythology, opening a new chapter of Mexican history and patching together a new interpretation of political and social events, beginning where the Reform had ended, but pioneering a new narrative in which social and political development culminated in Díaz himself, and the very need for politics was overcome.

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[154] Schmitt, Karl M. 1962. "Catholic Adjustment to the Secular State: The Case of Mexico, 1867-1911." *The Catholic Historical Review* 48 (2):182-201, pp. 188-189.

[155] French, William E. 1994. "Progreso Forzado: Workers and the Inculcation of the Capitalist Work Ethic in the Parral Mining District." In *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance : Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, ed. W. H. Beezley, C. E. Martin and W. E. French. Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, p. 192.

Some of Díaz's supporters expressed this political transcendence as the convergence of liberalism and conservatism. These “conservative liberals” believed, in principle, in the efforts of the earlier generations of liberals and endorsed the ideals of the Reform, but were skeptical of its implementation, believing it to be unrealistically accelerated. The constitutions of 1824 and 1857 were considered utopian. Mexico was simply not mature enough to introduce the full range of political liberties envisioned by the leaders of the Reform. Recognizing that the social backwardness engendered by centuries of Spanish rule would require years of guidance toward enlightened self-interest, the newly ascendant liberals concluded that an enlightened despotism would be the best mechanism for achieving the future liberal society. In abstraction, this was not far from the liberalism of Juárez. As discussed in Chapter Four, the restored republic of Juárez and Lerdo turned toward the dictatorial in practice as these leaders attempted to conserve their vision of the Mexican polity. The Porfiriato was by all accounts brutally repressive, and even Díaz himself conceded toward the end of his career that “sometimes we were harsh to the point of cruelty.”[156]

Positivism

During the Díaz dictatorship Mexico was enmeshed in the international market, population grew, education expanded, transportation and communication networks sprang up around the country. The Porfiriato also went further than any other regime in building a single national identity and fortifying the state, extending its reach across the national territory at the expense of autonomous political chiefdoms that had dotted the political landscape for so long.

[156]Interview with James Creelman in *Pearson's Magazine*.
http://www.emersonkent.com/historic_documents/creelman_interview.pdf

The latter nineteenth century was a period of similar intense change in Latin America more generally, a period corresponding to the "preconditions for take-off" in W.W. Rostow's scheme. Such wide ranging shifts in social and economic conditions were accompanied by new perspectives in political thinking, and among the most influential of currents would be positivism.[157] This period is also well-known as the era of positivist philosophy in Latin America, and Mexico is considered one of the countries to most enthusiastically embrace the philosophy grounded in science and progress.[158] In positivism, Díaz found an ideal pillar on which to rest his rule.

Underlying the various assumptions of positivists and their fellow travelers was the expectation that the administration of society should be based on objective principles, rather than politics. The French philosopher Auguste Comte—the most influential positivist in Latin America—subscribed to an organic view of human society and posited a stage theory of social development, developing from a "supernatural" stage, to a "metaphysical" and finally the most advanced stage, the "positivist," or scientific stage. His tidy view of social evolution seemed to mirror the historical progress of many Latin American nations from colonial order, independence, and finally the relatively stable dictatorial regimes taking root throughout the region.[159] Mexican elites, too, found much in positivism to give them hope concerning their own troubled nation as a strong figure appeared capable of steering the country from chaos into peaceful development.

The positivism of Mexico was not uniform among the elite of the latter nineteenth century. Though derived in good part from the philosophy of Comte, the positivism of Mexico was transmuted for implementation in another context. In addition to the Comtean strand of

[157] Wiarda, Howard J. 2001. *The Soul of Latin America: The Cultural and Political Tradition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, pp. 145-146.
[158]See Zea, Leopoldo. 1974. *Positivism in Mexico*. Austin,: University of Texas Press.
[159] Wiarda, Howard J. 2001. op cit. p. 159.

positivism, the Mexican melange included Bentham's and Spencer's utilitarianism and Darwinism. Permeating the entire mix was a fascination with the potential of science to provide the bases for material growth, and this scientism formed the essential core of Mexican positivism.[160]

The educator Gabino Barreda is credited with introducing positivism to Mexico through his attempts to reform the educational system using the scientific method. A student of Comte, Barreda served as an education secretary under Juárez. His speech introducing positivism to the Mexican case, *Oración Cívica*, was delivered in 1867 and describes the sociological development of Mexico. He put forward an interpretation of Mexican history applying Comte's theory of social evolution from a theological to metaphysical to positivist stage, and promotes a vision of an enlightened Mexico enjoying the fruits of modern scientifically organized educational system.[161]

Juárez, then, was the original patron of positivism in Mexico, directing its use toward the reform of the educational system as a counterweight and corrective to the indoctrination of the Catholic Church. The Porfirian regime, however, would oversee the expansion of positivist influence beyond education into the realms of economic and social planning.

The presumption of the porfiristas was that the keys to orderly development had been uncovered, and the chaotic past had been left behind. The scientific optimism of many liberals led them to believe that the forces underlying social, economic, and political development could be discovered and harnessed toward optimal ends. Díaz is said to have described his approach to governing as *poca política, mucha administración*, an admonishment to minimize politics and focus on administration.

[160] Raat, William D. 1973. "Ideas and Society in Don Porfirio's Mexico." *The Americas* 30 (1):32-53.
[161] Cardoso Vargas, Hugo Arturo. 2005. "La Oración Cívica de Barreda: Primer análisis sociológico de la sociedad mexicana." *Espacios Públicos* 8 (16):171-90.

The elitist assumptions of the positivist brand of thinking are immediately discernible. The notion that objective principles underly the social world, and that the proper method is necessary for uncovering them leads in short order to the presumption that those possessing, in this case, the proper scientific credentials for understanding these hidden processes constitute a natural elite, while those unfortunate enough to remain uninformed require proper instruction and guidance.

This instruction and guidance fell in part to the so-called *científicos*, the coterie of advisers to Díaz known primarily for orienting economic policy toward growth. Given their name by critics of the positivism espoused by many, this group has become legendary in Mexican mythology. Prominent among them were a Treasury Secretary José Ives Limantour and the historian and statesman Justo Sierra, intimate members of Díaz's inner circle and men of considerable influence.[162]

The influx of positivistic thinking led to a split within the ranks of the liberals. Classical liberals objected to the materialist leanings of positivism and its recasting of society as an organic whole, rather than the collection of rights-bearing citizens classical liberals envisioned. The positivist and conservative liberals did not abstain from criticizing the classical liberals of the independence and Reform eras. Claiming that attempts to recreate society from the ground up were unrealistic and utopian, they claimed to have found the appropriate balance between liberal principles and the conservative temperament.

[162] The utilitarianism of positivists could bring them to recommend the occasionally bizarre from a Mexican perspective. Isidro Epstein, a German immigrant devoted to the betterment of his adopted homeland through the application of social science, registered a tin ear for Mexican tradition by publicly calling for the substitution of bullfights, and all its attendant gambling, with a “tournament of flowers,” a position which Epstein vigorously defended using empirical evidence of the better use to which the money could be put. The self-assuredness with which the proposal was made stemmed from the conviction of the greater understanding of the cost of public vices and the sense of obligation to direct public energies toward more useful ends. See Azen Krause, Corinne. 1976. "Positivist Liberalism in Mexico: The Career of Isidro Epstein, 1851-1894." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 18 (4):475-94.

Zea argues that Mexican positivism was essentially ideological prop for an upwardly mobile middle class dependent on the Díaz regime for its material well-being.[163] While we can be sure that this was the case for some involved, it is equally certain that positivist doctrines for many represented timeless truths. More important is that positivism provided the state a claim of scientific authority and a pretext to declare ideological opposition outmoded and unneeded in modern Mexico. Radical liberalism and conservatism alike could be consigned to a bygone and barbarous era that none should lament. Whether a fraudulent veil or a firm conviction, the scientism of the Porfirians provided sympathizers a new language in which to ground their regime. The Porfirian state filled the public square with a newly invented story about the national origins and destiny, one that featured a logical progression toward a particular end. The Porfirian scientific narrative, as did the previous narratives of Liberals and Conservatives, included the symbols of the Mexican nation, and of acceptable political means and ends.

Porfirian Mythology

According to Díaz and his hagiographers it was, to use an anachronism, the end of history. There was no space for further politicking. Liberalism (a modernized form of it) had triumphed over the backwardness of conservatism, sealing Mexico's progressive character, and the job of the regime was simply to oversee the transformation. Part of the task of the regime was to communicate the achievement to the nation.

In a context like that of Mexico, where the population was largely illiterate, public rituals and architecture were effective forms of securing loyalty to a national myth. Díaz filled the public space with nationalist imagery which functioned as symbols of his own power. The Porfirian age saw the canonization of Juárez in earnest. Díaz oversaw the creation of the

[163] Zea, Leopoldo. 1974. *Positivism in Mexico*. Austin,: University of Texas Press.

Hemiciclo a Juárez, a monument in Mexico City's Chapultepec Park that practically deified his former enemy, the man against whom he revolted raising the banner of “no reelection.” Statues of Juárez also look down on town squares everywhere, his stern patrician image a constant reminder of austere republican values. Díaz was particularly concerned to enshrine his own person into the hall of liberal heroes, as well. The Grito de Dolores, formerly a minor part of independence celebrations, was promoted to the centerpiece of the activities, also being moved forward a day to be celebrated on September 15th, the day of Díaz's birthday, further intertwining Díaz with the Mexican nation and its liberation [164]

Part of Díaz's strategy for recreating Mexico in his image was to revitalize Mexico City and showcase to the world the modernized Mexico. Mexico suffered from an image of an uncivilized, filthy denizen of barbarians, an image held abroad and at home.[165] New buildings, monuments, and neighborhoods were all constructed in a manner to demonstrate Mexico's equal footing with the most cosmopolitan urban centers in the world. The expansion signaled the expansion of Mexico and the enormous resources of the government. The neoclassical architecture used in public works linked the republican institutions of Mexico to those of the ancient world, linking the Porfirian regime to foundations of western civilization.[166] Official history literally crowded out alternative versions, with the regime expanding the Paseo de la Reforma, the principle avenue in Mexico City, adding additional monuments to liberal heroes to the avenue. Notable was the addition of a monument in 1887 to Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec emperor, and during the centenary festivities of 1910, the Columna de la Independencia, while placing countless statues of liberal figures throughout the surrounding areas of the city.

[164]Krauze, 1997, 12.
[165] Pike, Frederick. 2007. "Wild People in Wild Lands: Early American Views of Latin Americans." In *Neighborly adversaries : readings in U.S.-Latin American relations*, ed. M. LaRosa and F. O. Mora. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, pp. 38-42.
[166] Moya Gutiérrez, Arnaldo. 2007. "Historia, Arquitectura y Nación Bajo el Régimen de Porfirio Díaz. Ciudad De México 1876-1910." *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 117-118 (3-4):159-82.

Though reaching a far smaller audience, the written word was also enlisted to construct a monument to Díaz. The novel and newspapers are powerful methods of constructing a national identity, as Anderson has demonstrated.[167] There was a long history of lively journalism in Mexico, with many different outlets offering readers a panoply of views and interpretations of noteworthy events, but newspapers were largely in the pocket of Díaz by the end of the century. The newspaper *La Libertad* was representative of the pro-Díaz press. Patronized by the regime, the newspaper publicized to all its readers the necessity of order, and, it followed, of Díaz.[168] The model of the state-sponsored press was one that would prove attractive and useful to the revolutionary regime following the demise of the Porfiriato.

The novel, never a popular form of literary expression in Mexico, experienced a florescence in the latter nineteenth century. The Romantic literature of the period, much of it written by men who participated directly in national public affairs, answered the upheaval of the previous decades by searching for unity through the creation of a national literature. In doing so, they established ideal roles for Mexicans and sanctioned particular modes of behavior.[169] The common sentiment among elites had it that there was no Mexican national culture and that the masses required instruction in liberal modes to overcome their backwardness, and literature was enlisted to promote this goal.[170]

Manuel Altamirano, for example, was a central leader of the Liberal party and minister in the Díaz government and also regarded as the father of Mexican literature. He considered the role of literature paramount in creating and transmitting a Mexican identity. Altamirano's *El*

[167]Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. 1991. *Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Rev. and extended ed. London ; New York: Verso.
[168] Saez, Carmen. 1986. ""La Libertad," periódico de la dictadura porfirista." *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 48 (1):217-36.
[169] Vargas, Margarita. 1994. "Romanticism." In *Mexican Literature: A History*, ed. D. W. Foster. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
[170] Denzin, Jason C. 2006. Writing the Nation: Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's Romantic Vision and Porfirian Development, Department of History, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, p. 18.

Zarco, probably the best known example of popular literature of nineteenth century Mexico, portrays the pacification of bandits in the countryside by the strong government of Juárez and valorizes manual laborers in a modern economy as folk heroes. The novel is read by Herr as an advertisement for current economic policy and as a Porfirian morality tale.[171]

As much as military and police power and financial incentive, then, the regime made its case for its rule in the realm of ideas. Later regimes would turn to film and television to achieve the same effect.

Opposition

During the Porfiriato the liberal institutions erected earlier in the century went largely untouched while, substantively, Mexico returned to monarchism in republican dress. Institutions, the constitution and elections remained important links to the patriotic liberalism that upheld the nation's sovereignty. Institutions were only adornments, of course, and Díaz himself was understood universally to be the final arbiter of important national, and even personal, questions. Díaz was barraged with requests for intervention by supplicants seeking everything from jobs to protection.[172]

The opposition during the Porfiriato, though harassed and gaining some prominence only after 1900, responded to oppression by constructing a competing narrative. Indeed, positivism came most clearly into focus when constructed by its enemies. Raat demonstrates how labor and liberal publications flagellated the positivistic *científicos* as the parties responsible for the low state of the working and middle classes.[173] Positivism was equated with simple exploitation, and

[171] Herr, Robert. 2007. "De bandidos a trabajadores: el proyecto económico liberal en *El Zarco* de Ignacio Manuel Altamirano." *Revista Literatura Mexicana* 18 (2):121-39.
[172] Krauze, 1997, p. 217.
[173] Raat, William D. 1977. "The Antipositivist Movement in Prerevolutionary Mexico, 1892-1911." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 19 (1):83-98.

thus came to be derided by the opposition as an illegitimate and corrupt perversion of liberalism that only enabled dictatorship and economic exploitation. This version of the ideology would be adopted by history as the Díaz regime began to falter in its third decade. Antipositivism held together disparate elements of the opposition. The conservative opposition based primarily among the clergy and military also attributed all manner of evils to the materialism of positivism.[174] The opposition seized on the growing perception of the regime as decrepit and out of touch, a decaying relic that had been corrupted by power, and offered counterpoints in the symbolic dialogue.

The perception of positivism as a cover for greed enjoyed currency among critics; middle class resentment toward the regime bubbled beneath the surface for some time and working class anger grew as the burgeoning labor sector faced the repressive side of the Porfiriato. The workers' movement remained active, despite the repression of the regime. Strikes turned violent throughout the period, beginning immediately upon Díaz's assumption to power and continuing to the end of his rule. Worker anger boiled over into massive strikes in the Río Blanco mill in Orizaba, Veracruz in 1908, and in Cananea, a mining town in the state of Sonora in 1906. Protests and demands for changes were unheeded and ended in the massacre of dozens of workers. These events were seized upon by the opposition and the working class press to point up the depravity of the positivistic regime, and contributed to the discontent that fed the Revolution, while the Díaz regime made efforts to coopt workers and appear conciliatory.[175]

[174] Ibid.
[175] Lear, John. 2001. *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, p. 119.

The End of Porfirism and Beginning of Revolution

Signs of the end of the Díaz era were visible at beginning of the twentieth century. Organized opposition—primarily liberals of both moderate and radical stripes—began to clamor more than at any other time since the 1870s. The fallout from strikes turned violent shook the established order and alternative political programs—those that did not feature Porfirio Díaz at there head—were floated.

Some nominal challenges to Díaz's presidency came from associates who posed no plausible threat to the established order, such as General Bernardo Reyes, one of one of Díaz's insiders and an old liberal who did oppose some of Díaz's policies. Such challenges usually arose with the tacit approval of Díaz himself and certainly did not propose to fundamentally alter the political bases of the state.

There were, though, purist liberals who had refused to surrender their classical views of individual liberty and who attacked the regime using the same symbols as those appropriated by Díaz. To them the ideals of Díaz's own 1876 revolution had been betrayed, and the revered constitution was in practice ignored. Such radical liberals were prominently represented by the likes of Ricardo Flores Magón and his brothers Jesús and Enrique, founders of the Partido Liberal Mexicano. Magón, and his brothers attempted to reclaim the title of liberalism from the Díaz regime by appropriating the symbols of the 1857 Constitution and Benito Juárez. The brothers agitated against the regime for several years, and the apex of their revolutionary activities coming in the decade immediately preceding the revolution of 1910.[176]

The nail in the Porfirian coffin came from the ranks of the frustrated middle classes. Díaz himself opened the door to his own demise in a sensational interview given to an American

[176]The brand of liberalism championed by Magón and his brothers took a radical turn and finally embraced anarchism. Though their participation was limited and they were sidelined by their exile, Magón and his brothers are considered heroic precursors of the revolution.

journalist. The president-for-life declared that he would welcome an opposition party as “a positive good” for Mexico's development and looked forward to his retirement and Mexico's transition to democracy.[177] The interview was received with astonishment in Mexico and gave hope to reformers who saw the chance to complete the economic liberty of Mexico with political liberty.

Francisco Madero, the scion of a wealthy family in the state of Chihuahua, took up the banner of anti-reelection. The spiritualist Madero claimed to be urged on by the spirits of his dead brother and Benito Juárez, among others, and ran for president in 1910. Being defrauded of victory and thrown in prison by a Díaz apparently regretful of his earlier statements welcoming opposition, Madero called for armed revolution to begin on November twentieth in his call to action written from prison, the Plan of Potosí.

Madero revived the classical liberalism so well-known to Mexico, but never fully implemented. Madero hoped to reverse the tide of state building that had taken place for three decades under Díaz. In his book analyzing the current state of the country, *La Sucesión Presidencial de 1910*, Madero attacked the militarism and violence on which he claimed the regime rested and drew attention to Díaz's broken promises to step down from power. In his quest for the presidency he toured the nation speaking to receptive audiences, pledging to loosen the grip of the state and respect the freedom promised by the constitution. Such a stance assaults the statist assumptions of many interpretations of Mexican political culture, but was a refrain heard often from liberal orators and writers.

Madero's planned uprising only gained steam in early 1911, but the structure finally collapsed under its own weight as Díaz recognized the futility of further resistance and resigned and went into exile in May. The crumpling of the Díaz regime unleashed the furious energies of

[177]http://www.emersonkent.com/historic_documents/creelman_interview.pdf

dozens of factions and ideological tendencies. As the “apostle of democracy,” however, it was Madero who, while he lived, would assume the vanguard of the revolution.

Madero's plan was an extension of the nineteenth century liberals'. He proposed a hands-off state that guaranteed the rights of workers and capitalists alike. His attack on the power of the state would not go far; Madero lasted in office for only a little more than a year from 1911 to 1913. A conciliator, Madero chose to engage the Porfirian elites, leaving much of the system of Díaz in place. He allowed, for instance, the Porfirian General Victoriano Huerta to retain his position of leadership within the military. Had he removed the Porfirian supporters from power rather than attempt to appease them, a much different outcome might have been recorded. As it happened, the forces of reaction led by Huerta, whom Madero had continued to entrust with the command of the armed forces even after rumors of his disloyalty traveled widely, determined to return the state to its proper owners, overthrowing and murdering Madero in what came to be known as the “Ten Tragic Days.” The counterrevolution led to seven more years of civil war. The faction known as the Constitutionalists, a group of relative moderates led by another caudillo, Venustiano Carranza, gained control of the country only by the early 1920s, at which time a semblance of order began to return.

In those chaotic years the two greatest icons of the Revolution emerged. Emiliano Zapata and Francisco “Pancho” Villa, memorialized in song, text, film and mural, came to dominate the popular imagery of the Revolution and, though killed by the victorious factions, to symbolize for the regime that took root in the following years the ideals for which the Revolution had been fought.

Villa was panegyrized even as the hostilities continued. He was a former bandit in the northern state of Durango who adopted a pseudonym when he fled his home. He was well known

for his ferocity as a warrior and for inspiring deep loyalty among his men. As provisional governor of the state of Chihuaha during the Revolution Villa pursued fairly radical and progressive measures for the time. He became one of the most charismatic figures of the period, and after his retirement was rewarded by the revolutionary government for his services. He was, nevertheless, considered a threat to the newly established elite and was assassinated by the new political chieftain Álvaro Obregón in 1923.

Zapata was driven since before the outbreak of the Revolution to recover the lands of his village robbed by large landholders. Influenced by anarchist intellectuals, he proposed a return of collectively owned land to villagers and the appropriation of the property of those who did not submit. His army of peasants were regarded with intense fear in the cities and Madero came to consider his influence problematic for his own administration, a suspicion that turned to open hostility. Zapata issued his Plan de Ayala, an agrarian anarchist manifesto, in open defiance of the Madero government, which Zapata considered to have betrayed the ideals of the Revolution. After Madero's overthrow Zapata came into conflict with Carranza and was gunned down by the Constitutionalists in 1917.

A bandit and agrarian anarchist are an unlikely pair to be canonized as national heroes but Villa and Zapata became the most widely invoked symbols of what was to become a loosely defined revolutionary ideology. Though myriad factions vied for power from 1910 to 1920 and many of the revolutionary protagonists fought each other as fiercely as they did the counterrevolutionaries and a US intervention, in death they were joined together within one great Revolutionary Family, all of whom posthumously shared a commitment to the ideals and principles of an overarching social movement.

The Constitution

The whirlwind of ideologies and factions that fed the revolution were poured in the alembic of the Constitutional Convention of 1916, producing the most visible symbol of the Revolution, the Constitution of 1917, which remains in force. In places radical and stridently nationalistic, the Constitution grafted together the populist impulses of the revolutionaries and created the most enduring legacy of the Revolution.

Carranza called the convention to provide a legal basis for the Revolution. Carranza was a liberal in the mold of Juárez and did not intend for the Revolution to go far beyond the principles of the Reform. The delegates to the convention, however, pressed much harder on social questions than Carranza expected. The end product was a document calling for a social revolution, a constitution reflecting the new ideological winds of the twentieth century as much as the nineteenth. Given the variegated backgrounds of the members of the convention, the Constitution contained the birthmarks of various different ideological predispositions. The new charter incorporated much of the provisions of the liberal document of 1857, but included a heavy dose of socialistic thinking as well, giving the politicians of the next generations a great deal of flexibility in their commitments, and different principles from which to draw. In addition to free market principles the Constitution declares subsoil resources the patrimony of the nation (Article 27). While guaranteeing freedom of religion, it includes harsh punitive measures against the Catholic Church outlawing religious education and requiring governmental regulation of religious bodies (Articles 3 and 130). Beyond simply delimiting the powers of the state as Madero and moderate revolutionaries wished, the Constitution establishes the obligations of citizens (Article 31).

The document acted as a statement of principles for the demands of the radicals who were not content to simply return to the principles of the earlier laissez-faire liberalism. Undoing the damage done by the *científicos* would require another great effort by authorities. It would not be enough to only undo the power of colonial corporations, as nineteenth century reformists had aimed to do, and the Constitution included myriad provisions designed to promote the welfare of the masses, allowing the revolutionary regime to claim the mantle of populism. Article 123 enumerates a long list of rights guaranteed to workers, including an eight hour workday, prohibition of child labor, prohibition of sex discrimination, and the right to strike. There was no doubt from the beginning, though, that the state shall remain the final arbiter of the common good for its citizens.

Ejidos, for example, the land grants to agrarian communities demanded by the Zapatistas, were guaranteed by the Constitution but distributed by the state, contrary to Zapata's demand that original ownership be recognized. Nevertheless, the Revolutionary regime could claim its descent from Zapata and champion land reform.

The Constitution also granted wide latitude to the government and the presidents of the post-revolutionary period would take every advantage of their formal powers. Beyond the powers contained in the Constitution, which provides for separation of powers, the presidents of the Revolutionary regime enjoyed many “metaconstitutional” powers. Indeed the centrality of the presidency to the political system after the Revolution far exceeded what one would expect from a reading of the Constitution,[178] a situation paralleling that of the Porfiriato.

The political situation remained tenuous after the promulgation of the Constitution, with violence flaring for some years thereafter. Carranza himself was killed in a coup, as military

[178] Weldon, Jeffrey. 1997. "The Political Sources of *Presidencialismo* in Mexico." In *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*, ed. S. Mainwaring and M. S. Shugart. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

officers led by Carranza's follower Obregón rebelled against Carranza's insistence on maintaining a civilian regime. Obregón thus assumed leadership of the government, only to be himself assassinated in 1928 by a Catholic offended by the regime's official anti-clericalism. Despite the continued internecine bloodshed and factional infighting, during the 1920s and into the 1930s a revolutionary mythology began to take shape, elevating new heroes to the national pantheon and inscribing a new chapter in the history of the long task of the liberation of the Mexican nation.

Engineering the Revolutionary Symbolism

Much of the fighting of the Revolution was done in the name of individual caudillos, rather than abstractions. There were, though, many loosely defined programmatic elements for which revolutionaries fought and died. Knight finds embedded in the "genes" of the revolution causes as varied as nationalist anti-imperialism, agrarianism, liberalism, labor reform, "developmentalism" in the style of moral regeneration, indigenism, and anti-clericalism. None of these necessarily implies commitment to any other, and indeed some collided with each other.[179] Each of them, though, would be called upon throughout and following the Revolution. Many of these expressed frustration with perceived failures of Díaz, the surrender of economic sovereignty to foreign powers, the conciliatory tone taken with the church, and most of all the betrayal of political liberalism. Others, such as developmentalism and indigenism had found a home in the Porfirian regime.

Most of all, though, these genetic elements demanded a regenerative movement to restore or transform some part of society. As an integral revolution fought in the name of social justice

[179] Knight, Alan. 1997. "The Ideology of the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940." *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de America Latina y el Caribe* 8 (1).

was to become the officially sanctioned view of the many years of carnage, the state would once again be enlisted as the most appropriate and capable agent for transforming society, this time in the image of an imagined integral Mexican Revolution.

Perhaps a million people died from the violence, illness, or hunger. It was, nonetheless, the defining moment of the twentieth century, a time in which a new pantheon of heroes and villains reached their apotheosis. The complexities of the heroes' lives and the nuance of the villains would be smoothed over in the official narrative. The greatest heroes, the symbols of the Revolution and champions of the people, were often at each other's throats, hurling their armies at one another, assassinating each other., but after the dust settled and a consolidated regime had emerged with rules governing access to and exercise of power, the ambiguities and conflicts within the Revolution were put aside in favor of populist symbols used to justify an expansion of political power.

The consensus (of the winners) was that Díaz and his ilk had shamed the nation, robbed the people of their liberty, and ground the poor under their heavy boots. The arts, literature and film would be instrumental in weaving together a heroic story of an oppressed people overthrowing a tyranny and establishing a socially progressive revolutionary regime that served the interests of the workers and returned the land to its rightful owners.

Journalists and novelists would contribute to the construction of the new mythology surrounding the Porfiriato and the Revolution. On the eve of the Revolution the journalist John Kenneth Turner, an acquaintance of Magón, published an account of the Porfirian system entitled *México Barbaro*. In it he lets no opportunity pass to indict the corruption and cronyism of the regime, and documents the suffering of the abused poor and terror of the middle classes.[180] After the outbreak of Madero's revolution, John Reed published *México Insurgente*, a

[180] Turner, John K. 2002. *México Bárbaro*. Luis Gonzalez Obregón 5-B Col. Centro: Editores Mexicanos Unidos.

glorification of the people's recovery of their freedom.[181] The two volumes have become national lore, and detail the shame of a Díaz regime that condoned modern slavery and murdered its own citizens. The Mexican writer Mariano Azuela wrote the definitive fictionalized version of the Revolution, *Los de Abajo*, in which simple characters fight to recover their land and liberty, realizing that their struggle is joined to a cause greater than themselves, serving the revolution for the *patria*.[182]

In retrospect, the newer medium of film was put to good use in promoting the construction of the revolutionary mythology as well. As the Revolution faded from immediate memory in the 1930s, the solidified revolutionary regime overcame its initial wariness of a foreign technology and, recognizing its potential for mass communication, embraced cinema and used it to shape a memory of the events of the Revolution that conformed to official interpretations.[183] The budding film industry was heavily subsidized by the state and even supplied with equipment and troops to reenact battles.[184]

The famed Mexican mural movement reaching its apex in the 1930s also performed much of the heavy lifting in establishing the standardized imagery of the Revolution as a people's movement and glorifying its heroes. Murals took a narrative form, and their public nature made them a powerful tool for schooling the illiterate masses in nationalist mythology (pre-Hispanic roots, Spanish oppression, and the triumph of the Reform and Revolution) and for exhorting the people to political action in support of the revolutionary regime..[185] The trio of artists most closely associated with Mexican muralism—David Alfaro Siquieros, José Clemente Orozco, and

[181] Reed, John. 1969. *Insurgent Mexico*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
[182] Azuela, Mariano. 1941. *Los de abajo, novela de la revolución mexicana*. [México]: Ediciones Botas.
[183] Noble, Andrea. 2005. *Mexican National Cinema*. London ; New York: Routledge, p. 55.
[184] Mora, Carl J. 1983. *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896-1980*. Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 43.
[185] Goldman, Shifra. 1982. "Mexican Muralism: Its Social Educative Roles in Latin America and the United States." *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 13 (1-2):111-33.

Diego Rivera—saw themselves as integrally connected to social and political issues and used their murals to communicate a radical, communal vision of the nation.[186]

A Member of the Liberal Family?

As is again evident, the transformed liberal narrative gaining predominance in the Porfirian era fell outside the liberal family. As an elitist and hierarchical interpretation of politics, the Porfirian narrative bore no resemblance to the limited and limiting vision of a liberal narrative. The Revolution would also reserve a special place for a small coterie of state officials who would direct the nation toward a brighter future, again inconsistent with the family of liberal narratives that curb the power of the state in favor of individual autonomy.

The nineteenth century liberal mission to transform society lhad ooked primarily backward to the source of Mexico's predicament, presuming that attacking the bases of the colony would allow the rebuilding of an egalitarian society of small property holders, creating a liberal nation in the model of the United States. The Porfiriato extended that mission to establishing an orderly, capitalist haven of economic growth, stripped of partisan politics. As in the older liberal project, the Porfirian project was presumed to entail a reconfiguration of Mexican society, a great effort that would require, as did the Reform, the intervention and direction of a powerful state. The regime erected a new national narrative, appending the Porfirian interpretation of the national drama to the already dominant liberal mythology. The regime and its sympathizers filled the public space with representations of state power, elbowing the opposition to the margins in social discourse.

The symbols deployed by the regime laid claim to the national patrimony, connecting the Díaz regime to the Aztecs, and for the present the symbolic narrative organized itself around

[186] Rochfort, Desmond. 1993. *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros*. [London]: Laurence King, p. 7.

peace and order projected the image of material progress, cleanliness, and economic growth to legitimate its rule. Díaz was made the authority bearing scientific insight into the complexities of social life and with solutions to the ever present danger of dissolution and discord.

The narrative was not accepted without challenge, of course. The legitimacy of the Díaz regime could not simply be manufactured and submitted to an accepting public, particularly to a growing laboring population and a rising middle class. Liberals stitched together a counter-narrative in which Díaz had betrayed the liberal ideals of his own youth. The constitution and Juárez were raised as symbols of resistance and the discordance between these stories led, ultimately, to revolt. The moderate reformist impulses of the early stages of the revolution were, however, in the end swallowed by the storm of radicals and reactionaries.

Porfirism and Revolution: A Parade of Symbols

The Porfiriato and Revolution were dueling stories about the future of the Mexican nation. One preponderant narrative was answered by, and ultimately replaced with, another narrative, reworking the symbolic vocabulary, replacing a story about peace, order and progress with one about social inclusion and nationalism. The revolutionary elite that emerged to establish the longest lived authoritarian regime in Latin America appropriated the heroic symbolism of the nineteenth century liberals, integrating the same conceptualization of the Mexican nation imagined by the earlier reformers, but interpreted the Porfiriato not as the culmination of liberal history, but as traitorous parasite.

The end effect of the Revolution was the construction of a nationalist, anti-imperialist, populist revolution for the Mexican nation. Despite the fact that revolutionary leaders had warred with each other, pursuing conflicting aims, they were all enlisted into the service of an integral

Revolutionary Family with a purportedly cohesive ideology. The new regime, drawing on the populist and socialistic ideological currents gaining in popularity in the young twentieth century, would mark a profound shift in participatory rhetoric. The Revolution brought the question of the masses to the center stage and promised a regime for the entire nation. The Revolution, as the story went, had set the nation on the path toward the construction of a new, socially just Mexico that expiated the sins of Díaz. It was a radical rhetorical shift.

As Chapter Six will detail, however, rhetoric of radical change did not match reality in which continuity marked much of the political structure, the manner in which political elites exercised power. Indeed, the Revolutionary regime would pursue the state-building begun under Juárez and Díaz, taking it to heights undreamed of in the nineteenth century. This is not to claim that the Revolution was inconsequential; the Revolution did have the effect of shuffling power, elevating new classes of elites, giving the labor and agrarian sectors a seat at the table, while the middle class was the greatest benefactor of the change. But the grand national narrative, the symbolic structure that replaced the modernizing Porfiriato was another in which political competition and accountability were regarded as superfluous to the forward-looking mission of the regime. The winds of democracy and socialism, of mass society had arrived in Mexico. On top of the secularizing liberal mission of the nineteenth century was added the integration of the population in the national body. It would end, nonetheless, looking much like the modernizing despotism it had overturned.

CHAPTER 6

THE REVOLUTIONARY REGIME

The Revolution erected a new myth, a new parade of symbols, an anti-porfirism that in fact changed the underlying mechanisms of power only on the face. The nationalist and populist imagery of the Revolution established early on would commit the regime that grew from it to some postures such as nationalism and inclusiveness, and the regime did extend participation to a level unheard of in Mexican history. The national drama appeared to take an about-face, and the symbolic narrative did, but the conduct of politics continued in many ways unchanged, even resembling an extension of the Porfiriato.

Probably the most dramatic shift in the revolutionary age was the incorporation of the masses into the daily life of politics, if only as subordinate players. The party born of the Revolution appeared to fashion the perfect solution to the problem of the masses confronted by elites since independence, and for the first time in Mexican history participation of the majority (albeit controlled participation) became the operative principle of the regime.

The populist aspects of the Revolution were written into the constitution and continually extolled by the political leadership. Finally, more than a century after independence, Madero had "unleashed the tiger," as Díaz proclaimed at the outbreak of the Revolution,[187] and by participating in the Revolution the population of a now integrated Mexican nation, aware of itself as a people, tore down the barriers to participation in national life that had shut them out since

[187]Meyer, Michael C., and William H. Beezley. 2000. *The Oxford History of Mexico*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 403.

the colony. The social discourse could no longer exclude the majority of the nation, holding them as an unruly group of children to be tutored, but had to integrate them. The symbolic narrative of the Revolution would do precisely this, while in the end returning the leash to the tiger. The mythology of the Revolution—nationalism, agrarianism, and indigenism—celebrated the participation of the people, the people who made the revolution. The new mythology also informed the people that their demands had been heard, their suffering ameliorated, that the new regime was theirs, that a revolutionary family protected their interests, and further participation required their support of the the new party, as it was their party.

The revolutionary narrative was sustained by an authoritarian corporatism using state resources to craft a message and understanding of the national destiny, shifting over time from an agrarian indigenism to a statist industrialist model, while retaining the essential rhetoric of the revolution for the people. After decades, as inequality persisted, corruption flourished, and official impunity continued unabated, perceptions of the Revolution began to diverge from the symbolic rhetoric of the regime. Splits within the revolutionary family emerged as some saw the Revolution as betrayed, and these divisions within the ruling party were exacerbated as the party's leadership turned toward neoliberal economic policies in the 1980s in attempt to shore up the flagging economy. The division within the party's leadership and failures of the regime to deliver on its promises permitted the emergence of another symbolic narrative—under construction for several decades—that has captured the public space. The importance of the revolutionary regime lies in its legacy today. It is the the paradigm which is only in the last few years being shifted and to which a response, a law abiding and free market vision for Mexico, is still in the process of being crafted by the newly ascendant PAN.

The Party: Foundation of the Regime

The anarchy of the decade from 1910 to 1920 gave way to relative order punctuated by periodic upheaval in the form of rebellions and assassinations from 1920 to 1930. The political predominance of Álvaro Obregón gave way after his assassination in 1928 to the leadership of another caudillo, Plutarco Elías Calles. Calles, cognizant of the potential for continued warring among the many revolutionary aspirants to power, created a political party to manage political competition, incorporating the principal caudillos of the Revolution and providing a peaceful channel for rotation in power. His creation, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario would undergo various changes and reorganizations; President Lázaro Cárdenas (in office 1934-1940) renamed the party the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana in 1938, and President Miguel Alemán (in office 1946-1952) gave the party its final imprimatur as the Partido Revolucionario Institucional in 1946, its very name—the Institutional Revolutionary Party—reflecting the underlying tension in its methods and goals.

Calles served as president from 1924 to 1928 and Obregón, as the leader of the coup against Carranza and chief political boss, planned to have himself reelected at the end of Calles' term. When Obregón was assassinated in 1928, Calles inherited his position, becoming the *jefe máximo*, the maximum chief. He formed the party as a means of resolving the recurring crises of succession that plagued the revolutionary regime as they had plagued all others. The party would establish peaceful, negotiated transitions and finally end the jockeying for political power that had led to violence so often before. Now, under the auspices of the party, the president would serve the six year term prescribed in the Constitution without the possibility of reelection. This understanding, more than constitutional restraints, limited the ambitions of continuation in office.

This authoritarian party was able to negotiate power for seven decades. Throughout this time, the PRI established itself as the essential party, replacing Porfirio Díaz, who had been called the essential man, similarly constructing a political narrative that made political opposition quaint. In its official history the PRI made itself synonymous with the Revolution and the nation. For seventy years after the founding of the party organizational flowcharts changed and presidents' pet projects shifted national priorities, but the revolutionary leaders continually emphasized—to a greater or lesser extent—a common set of principles revolving around the nationalist and populist imagery established as the official goals of the Revolution.

Among the most important figures of the revolutionary regime was Lázaro Cárdenas. Cárdenas rewrote the terms of the social contract, creating a populist fusion of the party and state that directly incorporated the masses into the political machinery. Cárdenas gave to the revolutionary party its most salient feature, the corporatist organization that divided the party into various sectors based on function, creating a centralized and corporatist party to replace a confederation of dispersed power centers around the country.[188] The PNR was divided into four sectors, the workers' sector, a peasants' sector, the military, and a catchall “popular” sector consisting mainly of state employees. Cárdenas also cemented the overtly radical disposition of the party and insured the insertion of the state into the economy and society, a dispensation that would endure as the regime became far more conservative in subsequent decades.

Cárdenas recognized the immense power of the labor unions, peasants, and public employees—and their danger—and sought to bind them to the party and ensure their support of the state.[189] Private enterprise, on the other hand, had a stormy relationship with the new government. In the initial period following the revolution, a radical turn toward socialist and

[188]Grayson, 1998, op cit, p. 18.
[189] Grayson, 1998, op cit, p.13.

nationalist rhetoric alienated business interests, and the elites who had come together at that time to forge a new consensus excluded some of the principal actors in Latin American society: business elites, landlords, and the church.[190]

Its corporatist character is evident in the structure of the party that sprang from it. The PRI centralized power in the national government, making *caciques* (bosses) in the states dependent on access to the party for influence, and constructing a vertical, top-down flow of power with few, if any, horizontal bridges between institutions. Inherent in this arrangement is a patron-client relation that grants superiors great latitude over the fates of their supplicants. The state represented the ultimate power broker by reserving the privilege to grant legal recognition, and thereby life, to any organization. Societal function served as the basis for representation within the state, rather than individual status. Thus, industrial workers are grouped together separately from state bureaucrats, and indigenous peoples are collectively represented, distinct from agrarian workers.[191] Though a top-down structure, the party and its corporatist structure was flexible enough to incorporate a wide range of old and emerging interests.

Any opposition movement unaffiliated with the party—whether political party, labor union, or other interest group—faced considerable obstacles from the strong hand of the state. The distinctive symbiosis between the party and state made it a formidable enemy and an attractive ally. With exclusive control of the state, the party had enormous resources at its disposal and the government employed a substantial portion of the workforce.[192] Although the PRI was not able to incorporate every group seeking influence and some activity inevitably took

[190] Knight, Alan. "Mexico's Elite Settlement: Conjuncture and Consequences." *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* Higley, John; Gunther, Richard eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. pp. 113-145.
[191] Middlebrook, Kevin J. "State-Labor Relations: The Changing Economic and Political Context," in *Unions, Workers, and the State in Mexico*, Middlebrook, ed., University of California, San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 1991.
[192] Grayson, George. "Mexico's Semi-Corporatist Regime" in Wiarda, ed., *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America Revisited*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004, p.513.

place outside the official structure, the party-state was effectively hegemonic. Affiliation with the PRI offered access to state resources, the party's nearly exclusive domain, and tangible benefits in the form of monetary subsidies, housing, and health care.

Incorporating the Masses

As an ostensibly populist movement, the party was careful to forge ties with urban workers and peasant masses. The Revolution had been fought in part against the repressive labor policies of the Díaz regime and the pro-labor posture of the Revolution was evident in the many worker-friendly provisions of the 1917 Constitution. The institutionalized corporatism of the revolutionary regime, however, soon wrapped the labor movement in red tape, and showed itself capable of resorting to the same measures as its predecessor.

The workers' movement had entered the Revolution early, becoming one of the Constitutionalist faction's staunchest defenders, and a close ally—and useful populist symbol—for the revolutionary party. "Red Brigades," unionized workers organized for battle by the anarchist workers' organization the Casa Obrero Mundial (COM), took up arms for the assault against the counter-revolution of Huerta. Despite their relatively small numbers, unionized workers loomed large in the political arena due to their concentration and organization. The labor sector was thus integrally important to a party and regime claiming to embody the people's revolution, and it was essential to the regime to ensure a pliant workers' movement. Access to the state and influence over policy proved compelling to labor leaders as well, and they would enter a Faustian bargain that elevated the position of workers beyond anything known during the Porfiriato while shackling the workers' fortunes to the needs of the political leadership.

The labor sector would ultimately become a subsidiary of the party, and the major labor unions were, in fact, closely wedded to political power from the beginning. Upon the victory of the Constitutionalists over the Huerta regime and contending revolutionary factions Carranza disbanded the Red Brigades, shut down the COM and oversaw the formation of the Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos (CROM). This confederation fell fully under the control of Obregón and Calles in the 1920s. A dissident offshoot of the CROM became the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM), protesting the ineffectualness of the CROM.

Vicente Lombardo Toledano, a prominent communist intellectual, was instrumental in establishing the CTM as an independent workers' voice that would press for realization of the radical and populist goals of the Revolution. The pattern cut by the CROM became the norm, however. The CTM attached itself to the rising star of Cárdenas and in time became the most powerful workers' organization in the country, not as an independent and democratic movement, but by virtue of its inclusion within the PRI's political apparatus. The alliance of convenience between labor leaders and political leaders gave the regime effective control of the mainstream labor movement and effectively shut out the independent—often anarchist and socialist—unions.[193]

The labor movement that had been growing in power from the days of Díaz thus never enjoyed independent life. The CROM and CTM and their affiliates benefited from the close association with the regime, of course, enjoying representation in the president's cabinet and in the legislature. Moreover, as the favored confederation since the 1930s government policy consistently favored the CTM over rivals, extending to it state funds, requiring workers to join its unions and, by extension, the governing party. The institutionalization of labor boards with labor,

[193] Middlebrook, Kevin J. 1995. *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, The State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. ch. 2.

business, and state representatives endowed with arbitration power gave the labor sector greater equality in power relations.[194]

In the grand scheme, though, labor occupied the status of junior partner. In addition to offering access the PRI regime put heavy restrictions on labor's activities and brandished the threat of retaliation against the uncooperative. Unauthorized strikes were met with the same hostility and violence as those during the Porfiriato. Labor leaders accepted the power of political leaders to manipulate unions and interfere in elections, and unions were fully under the thumb of the state by the 1940s.

The peasant sector, on the other hand, was similarly integrated into the party by merging the Confederación Nacional de Campesinos (CNC). The peasant movement had a long history in Mexico, of course, and the potential for agrarian unrest well-known. Cárdenas himself created the CNC and forbade peasants from joining the CTM. Membership in the corporate party—as with the labor movement—ended some of the abuses of the past, but essentially ended with the replacement of traditional agricultural overlords with new political elites. The paternalism ingrained in the countryside did not disappear but was only transformed through a network of bureaucratic agencies and officials.[195]

As with the urban labor movement, the agrarian movement was tamed primarily through cooptation; the CNC came to work closely with the party. The ideals of Zapata were praised and claimed to be kept alive to peasants forcibly herded to official rallies and required to vote for the PRI under threat of losing their land. Strikes and demonstrations by independent peasant and indigenous organizations (often overlapping) were known, but given the dispersion and relative

[194] Ibid, 56.
[195]Krauze, 1997, p. 469.

poverty of the peasantry,[196] opposition agrarian movements largely low-profile until the explosion of civil activity in the 1980s that preceded the PRI's fall from power.

Cárdenas was, more than any other figure, the creator of the modern Mexican state, one that penetrated society and the economy further than ever before. There is every indication that Cárdenas had the best of intentions; he took care that his opponents were not harassed, and largely respected civil liberties.[197] Nonetheless, the faith of Cárdenas in the state's impartiality and commitment to revolutionary ideals were not enough to sustain the regime, and a conservative sclerosis, authoritarianism, and corruption flourished after his departure from office.

The New Order

Mexico in 1917 was, sixty years after the Reform, still a largely agrarian, poor, unequal society, a far cry from the modernized and individualistic society of property holders dreamed of by the liberals of the previous century. There was, in other words, a great deal of work for the Revolution to accomplish. As in previous symbolic narratives, this work could be accomplished largely through action taken by the state. The new grand program included a pastiche of ideological elements. The economic nationalism cultivated during the Porfiriato was expressed by the constitutional provision declaring all subsoil resources national patrimony. As the previous chapter discussed, the xenophilia of the Porfiriato fed a nationalistic backlash and stoked resentment toward foreign business owners. This was an extension of the anti-Spanish prejudice so current during the nineteenth century and encouraged by populist liberals. The twentieth century version would produce a state-led economic model reflecting the import

[196]Ibid, 614.
[197]Ibid, p. 476.

substitution popular throughout Latin America and the developing world. The Mexican model included state-owned industries controlling much of the heavy industry, communication, and transportation.

Economic nationalism, a central source of grievance with the Díaz regime, reached its zenith with the nationalization of the oil industry in 1938. Cárdenas moved to nationalize the industry when the U.S. and British owned companies refused to abide by new regulations delineated in the constitution. An oil workers' strike begun in 1937 received the blessing of Cárdenas in a dramatic turnaround from the policy of the Díaz regime to favor foreign investors. A protracted legal battle ended with the Mexican Supreme Court ruling that foreign owned companies must observe the findings of an arbitration procedure favoring the demands of the union. The balking of the foreign-owned companies provoked President Cárdenas to nationalize the oil industry in 1938. Cárdenas declared that in nationalizing the oil industry Mexico would "recover" its patrimony from foreigners and their "ridicule."[198] The nationalization was celebrated throughout the country and the day became a national holiday. The nationalization was supported by members of all classes, and made in donations to make payments to the foreign oil companies. A national oil company, Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex), was created to control oil production. Pemex is the largest source of export revenue, and is considered the key to modernization and national prestige. Despite relatively poor performance, oil remains the most powerful symbol of national economic sovereignty, provoking debates concerning the future of Pemex.

The Agrarianism derived from Zapatismo, and from Villismo to a lesser extent, lived on. The constitution obligated the state to redistribute land to communities and break up large haciendas that had proliferated in the previous century. The *ejido* system was created to grant

[198]Krauze, op cit, pg. 474.

land to agrarian communities in a manner tightly controlled by the state. Though promised in the 1917 Constitution, land redistribution did not begin in earnest until the presidency of Cárdenas. Cárdenas championed the *ejido* system even before his presidency as governor of the state of Michoacan, and defended them even as President Calles presumed they had failed. Cárdenas pledged vocally the state to the members of the *ejidos*, using his pulpit to proclaim the agrarian goals as the final component of the Revolution.

Ejidos were protected by law and the communities not allowed to divide or sell the land. Heavy restrictions were placed on use of the land and arbitrary enforcement of legal protections made the security of *ejidos* as precarious as that of private farms. The state's emphasis on agricultural production paid off, though, with rising output that outpaced population growth and allowing Mexico to be self-sufficient in agriculture by the 1950s.[199]

Official indigenism reached its zenith in art and literature. The revolutionary regime invested more in creating the cult of indigenism than either the liberals or Porfirians had done. The indigenism of previous eras was tinged with racism; even while the indigenous past was embraced as the foundations of the Mexican nation, the extant Indian communities were depreciated and devalued.

By contrast, under the PRI regime the indigenous populations were publicly embraced, as was the mixed race character of Mexican demographics. Whereas the mestizos and Indians had been disdained as a national problem by previous generations of liberals, the revolutionary regime made a virtue of the race mixing that lay at the base of the Mexican nation. José Vasconcelos, a prominent public intellectual and one-time presidential candidate, embraced the mestizaje, or race-mixing, like few before. He wrote of what he called the “cosmic race” which

[199] Heath, John Richard. 1992. "Evaluating the Impact of Mexico’s Land Reform on Agricultural Productivity." *World Development* 20 (5):695-711.

would emerge through the combination of the strengths of all races, making the mestizo races of Latin America, in fact, the superior race due to the mixing of blood from all continents. He dreamed of Mexico as the birthplace of a worldwide mestizo culture.[200]

The Indian past became a powerful symbol, a construction through which the PRI celebrated itself as the standard-bearer of the Mexican nation. Although the PRI regime celebrated not only the indigenous past but the present, little changed in practical treatment of these communities, of course. The government of Cárdenas created a Department of Indian Affairs in 1935 with the aim of pressing the revolutionary crusade in health, education with centralized planning. The government's policy, however, placed more emphasis on the mestizaje lauded by Vasconcelos than on the preservation of indigenous customs. In 1948, a National Indigenous Institute was created with the express purpose to "mexicanize the indigenous."[201]

Radical Anticlericalism

The burgeoning of the state's capacity would lead it inexorably into direct conflict with the church, and the early revolutionary leaders confronted the religious question with greater fervency than any previous liberals. The tensions between the church hierarchy and the revolutionary government would provoke a final battle between the "two sovereigns." Obregón, the undisputed chief of the Revolutionary government throughout most of the 1920s met his end at the hands of a devoted Catholic who assassinated him in protest of official anticlericalism. His successor, Plutarco Elías Calles brought an even more febrile anticatholocism than any of his predecessors.

[200] Vasconcelos, José, and Didier Tisdel Jaén. 1997. *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition*. Johns Hopkins paperbacks ed. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press.
[201] Beaucage, Pierre, and Rosa Cusminsky. 1988. "La condición indigena en Mexico." *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 50 (1):191-211.

Calles intended finally to make real the transformation of Mexico from the superstition of Old Mexico to the secularism dreamed of by the radical liberals for a century. As revolutionaries, though, this generation's attempts at undoing the harm of religion went far beyond the nineteenth century liberals' hopes to separate church and state.[202] Integral to their understanding of nation-building was a modernizing secularism derived from the Enlightenment, but it included a modern confidence in the capacity to re-engineer attitudes. In pursuit of this goal early revolutionary caudillos undertook a foredoomed anti-religious crusade to uproot the Catholicism ingrained in the Mexican spirit. “Anti-fanaticization” campaigns formed a central component of this effort to replace religious dogma with a civil religion of revolutionism, and closely paralleled other modern revolutionary movements' attempts to reeducate the uninformed masses and reform popular culture in the revolutionary image.[203]

The incidence of anticlericalism varied widely across the country and among the political leadership, of course, and some, such as Cárdenas, would prefer to focus their energies elsewhere while maintaining a tolerance for anticlerical fanaticism. Most infamously, the Tabascan governor of the 1920s and 1930s, Tomás Garrido Canabal, pressed a virulent anticatholicism that included the formation of a squad of “red shirts”, a paramilitary group that intimidated Catholics. In Tabasco religious iconography was outlawed, saints' images burned, and even the salutation “*adiós*” considered offensive given its theistic origin. Calles, too, held a deep antipathy toward the Church and during his term as president the conflict became unavoidable.

These most energetic efforts to recreate society met the counterforce of a traditionally conservative religious population. The radical anticlerlicalism of Calles and the likes of Garrido led inexorably to the armed conflict of the civil war known as the Cristiada. In response to the

[202] Butler, Matthew. 2007. *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico*. 1st ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pg. 25.
[203] Bantjes, Adrian A. 1997. "Idolatry and Iconoclasm in Revolutionary Mexico: The De-Christianization Campaigns, 1929-1940." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 13 (1):87-120.

modernizing, nationalist and radical revolutionary story, the so-called Cristeros took to arms to defend the Catholic faith as the centerpiece of Mexican identity, and invoked the conservative mantel of the previous century.

The Cristeros adopted as their banner the Virgin de Guadalupe. The Virgin is the symbol of the Mexican nation, but the Cristeros put it to alternative uses, inspiring collective action against what the faithful viewed as a monstrous, secular intrusion into the Catholic faith. The civil war broke out in 1926 when the government finally moved to implement the anticlerical provisions of the constitution and the Church responded by suspending religious services.[204] The Ley Calles was implemented when President Calles was dissatisfied with the desultory implementation of the constitutional provisions regulating worship and issued a national law to ensure their proper enforcement.

Calles considered the challenge from Catholics as the greatest test of the survivability of the Revolution, and believed the Cristeros and other Catholics were loyal to papacy and thus enemies of the revolutionary regime. The Cristeros claimed that, by defending the Catholic identity they were defending the essence of the Mexican nation, as conservatives had done for generations. Both sides were thus impelled toward a conflict that could only lead to war.

Discontent with the repression and continuing clashes with unions affiliated with the government quickly escalated to guerrilla warfare despite efforts by church leaders to avert armed conflict. The government's expectation that the rebellion would be easily repressed were dashed as the war stretched over three bloody years. The uprising was spontaneous and decentralized, and the battles raged across central Mexico, historically the conservative stronghold of the Church. The war dragged on and resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of

[204] Bailey, David C. 1974. *¡Viva Cristo Rey! The Cristero Rebellion and the Church-State Conflict in Mexico*. Austin,: University of Texas Press, p. 77.

lives and showed no signs of abatement until finally in 1929 Calles found no other alternative than a modus vivendi, by which the state could continue to claim superiority over the Church. In fact, the church continued unofficially to operate as it had in the past. The outwardly tense relationship with the church remained a hallmark of Mexican politics for decades, even as self-professed Catholics would occupy the presidency, among the several contradictory features of the Mexican political system. The revolutionary regime, therefore, came to mimic Díaz's relationship with the Church, and the plans to eradicate the baleful influence of the Church met no more success than had earlier generations of liberals.

The Institutionalization of the Revolution

The sum of these scattered programmatic pieces was another grand vision of a reconstructed society, a vision no less utopian than that of the *puro* liberals of the previous century. Whereas that utopia was constructed on the ruins of a Hispanic colony as a repudiation of the liberals' understanding of it, the revolutionary utopia was constructed as a rejection of one understanding of the porfirian regime. In rejecting it, however, the new regime took up its fallen baton in a modernization project reaching far beyond anything dreamed of by Juárez or Díaz. The state of the twentieth century had at its disposal communication, transportation, productive capacities greater than ever before, and revolutionary elites were disposed to use them for their proselytization.

The nationalized oil industry provided revenue the state the means to placate the various sectors of the party and to finance public works that served as testament to the accomplishments of the Revolution. Discovery of massive deposits of oil and natural gas in the late 1970s filled

the government's pockets with borrowed money from abroad, money that would be impossible to pay back when oil prices leveled off in subsequent years.

After the 1930s the Revolution's radical agenda was for the most part put aside while the revolutionary rhetoric was retained. The structural features of Mexican society and politics went to a significant degree unchanged; while land was redistributed primarily under Cárdenas, large landholders did not disappear, the church was not banished as a central feature of life, laborers did not enjoy democracy in the workplace, and indigenous groups were not integrated into national life. The democracy of an equal citizenry that inspired reformers from the Reform era was not to be real. Indeed, the Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa named the Mexican regime "the perfect dictatorship," one that outlived any other in a continent all-too familiar with authoritarian regimes. The creation of the party was part of the cementing of the national myth that bore only a tenuous relationship to reality.

As had been the case with liberal and Porfirian arrangements, the democratic and federalist features of the political system lost their substance. From 1946 to 1973, the PRI's record of electoral victory neared one hundred percent.[205] The legislature largely served cosmetic purposes. Seldom did the Congress fail to approve legislation submitted by the president. Similarly the judiciary remained a pliant instrument in the executive's sway. The presidential system combined with the guaranteed majority of the PRI at all levels of government, a highly disciplined party, and the president's role as head of the party endowed the president with authority far exceeding that found in the Constitution. Among the most significant of the president's metaconstitutional powers was that of naming his own successor, known as the

[205] Meyer, Michael C., and William H. Beezley. 2000. *The Oxford History of Mexico*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 580.

dedazo. This power to name officeholders extended to personally choosing legislators and governors, as well.

Officeholders had always blurred the lines between public and private funds; caudillos of the nineteenth century profited well from their time in office, and later revolutionary generals emerged from the war with vast haciendas. The later twentieth century was no different, and perhaps exacerbated an already widespread practice; the statist economy and centralized authority of a non-competitive corporatist PRI regime extended untold opportunities for corruption and they were exploited. Corruption was indeed legendary, and illicit enrichment of political and union leaders was widely known and emulated by the lowest level officials, as is the case in many Latin American countries. An especially rich environment for corruption was to be had in Mexico, especially when huge oil deposits were discovered in the 1970s, leading to a proliferation of bribes.[206] A word association study conducted in the 1990s found that the word most often paired with "government" was "corruption."[207]

Given the openness with which fortunes were made it appears ironic that anticorruption campaigns were a staple of practically all administrations. Presidents regularly took office piously promising to root out corruption and promote clean government but were known to be lining their own pockets by the end of the administration, a period in which corruption skyrocketed throughout the administration. The increased corruption at the end of an administration would then provide the foil for the incoming president's promised moral renovation.[208] The anticorruption rhetoric nonetheless contributed to the larger narrative of

[206] Weyland, Kurt G. 1998. "The Politics of Corruption in Latin America." *Journal of Democracy* 9 (2):108-21, p. 110.
[207] Morris, Stephen. 1997. "Corruption and Mexican Political Culture." *Third World Quarterly* 20 (3):623-43.
[208] Morris, Stephen D. 1991. *Corruption & Politics in Contemporary Mexico*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, ch. 5

advancement toward fulfillment of the future promise of the Revolution and promised moral renewal at the beginning of each new administration.

As in the past, print media were central in the project of perpetuating the revolutionary mythology. Following the familiar course of the Díaz regime, journalism was for the most part emasculated. Free speech was nominally respected and writers and journalists were in principle permitted to report and critique the political system as they saw fit, but economic realities contributed to serious self-censorship. The state's influence in the economy gave it wide latitude over the print media. Newspapers were largely dependent on the government for advertising revenue as well as for subsidized printing materials. Any publication that ran afoul of the administration risked shuttering its operation.[209]

Print media, however, never achieved wide circulation in Mexico. The twentieth century, of course, would largely belong to radio and later television. As media of communicating the new gospel to the illiterate population and the countryside where books and newspapers were hard to come by, these technologies were indispensable to political communication. Television experienced a stellar ascent after its introduction in 1950, and Mexico's television industry ranked among the most developed in the world. Televisa, the largest television company in the country, was an international media force by the 1970s, exporting its programing worldwide. Controlling more than ninety percent of the viewing audience in Mexico at its height, Televisa's power mirrored that of the PRI.[210]

Televisa, emerging in the earliest days of Mexican television, evolved along with the PRI and profited enormously through its close relationship with the government. Televisa enjoyed the

[209] Krauze relates an incident in which the apparently mistaken labeling of a picture of the president as a monkey led to the dissolution of the guilty newspaper. Krauze 1998, op cit, p. 686.

[210] Sinclair, John. 1996. "Mexico, Brazil, and the Latin World." In *New Patterns in Global Television: Peripheral Vision*, ed. J. Sinclair, E. Jacka and S. Cunningham. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, p. 35.

favor of the government in licensing and subsidies[211] and the kindness was often repaid in sympathetic portrayals of the government and its programs. Programing and news coverage reinforced the political messaging of the PRI. Televisa's reportage could always be counted on to transmit the benefits of stable leadership and the advances of the Revolutionary government. The economic and political outlook was routinely given a positive interpretation and political figures' statements seldom challenged. Opposition figures, on the other hand, were given little coverage at all, and when it was forthcoming it tended toward the unflattering.[212] Instances of political violence or protest were usually passed over in silence. The political competition that was covered centered on the economic divisions represented in the PRI's corporate organization and the government was portrayed as a moderator for conflicting social classes.[213]

When the official presidential candidate was challenged by the son of Lázaro Cárdenas—a popular reformer in his own right—in the 1988 election, and the PRD was formed to challenge the PRI's domination, the media passed over the newcomers without comment or attacked their candidates as violent malcontents.[214] The net effect of official control over the media's messaging has been called a “monologue” by the PRI.[215] The regime, then, resembled the Porfirian regime in more ways than one.

[211] Paxman, Andrew, and Alex Saragoza. 2001. "Globalization and Latin Media Powers: The Case of Mexico's Televisa." In *Continental order?: Integrating North America for Cybercapitalism*, ed. V. Mosco and D. Schiller. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, p. 70.
[212] Hallin, Daniel C. 2000. "Media, Political Power, and Democratization in Mexico." In *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, ed. M.-J. Park and J. Curran. London: Routledge, p. 100.
[213] Lawson, Chappell H. 2002. *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of a Free Press in Mexico*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 49-50.
[214] Bruhn, Kathleen. 1997. *Taking on Goliath: The Emergence of a New Left Party and the Struggle for Democracy in Mexico*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
[215] Hughes, Sallie. 2006. *Newsrooms in Conflict: Journalism and the Democratization of Mexico*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, ch. 4.

The Mexican Miracle

The corporate regime and the tamed society and media it entailed proved instrumental to the goals of growth-minded officials intent on achieving economic growth without unleashing the instability that seems to be a congenital feature of modernization. The preponderant role of the state and its preference for minimizing conflict among the sectors allowed it to control the potentially disruptive power of the societal sectors without the recourse to the violence endemic to many Latin American countries throughout the twentieth century. Even as wide gulfs in policy preferences began to separate the sectoral leadership from presidents and their cabinets, the facade of unity was maintained with every president paying lip service to revolutionary nationalism and the sectoral chiefs giving the expected support to official candidates. The alliance held strong enough to keep the PRI in control of state and national governments until the 1980s, appearing permanent. A political and economic maelstrom beginning in the 1970s and the 1980s brought dizzying changes to the Mexican state and society and would challenge the current configuration, but from the 1940s to the 1980s, the corporatist regime became fully entwined with society and the revolution was institutionalized by the party.

As with many revolutionary movements, the regime took a conservative direction as leadership was handed down. In the 1940s and 1950s, under the leadership of Presidents Miguel Alemán (in office 1946-1952) and Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (in office 1952-1958), the PRI adopted a business-friendly, industrial model for development, a departure from the agrarian vision of Cárdenas. The state continued, of course, to patronize peasants and workers, but poured the state's resources into building alliances with the business sector and into creating an urbanized and industrialized economy. Alemán worked hard to repair the damage done to relations with the U.S., and much of the capital for investment would come from the business interests to the north.

Alemán's renaming of the official party as the Institutional Revolutionary Party advertised as well as anything the new direction of the party and state. As president, Alemán oversaw the expansion of the auto industry, communication and transportation, large scale electrification, and the beginnings of the urbanization of the country.[216] In doing so, he established the party's character and goals for the next three decades. While Cárdenas created the party structure that would allow it to endure, Alemán set it on the course that would execute the economic model for success. The official antagonism between the state and business masked a tacit understanding that privileged cooperation behind the scenes. Beginning with the Alemán government the party recognized the need for a sound business community. By this means, as banners over construction sites across the country announced, "We are Constructing the Patria."[217]

Following the prevalent economic thinking at the time, the administration focused its energies on industrialization and inserted the state into an active role promoting development, a natural complement to the corporatist political model of the party. In the interest of developing capitalism, Alemán forged close ties with business leaders. The populism of Cárdenas alienated the business elites, but their pragmatic incorporation by Alemán allowed the party to remain rhetorically committed to revolution and populism while adopting pro-business industrial policies. The PRI found willing partners in the domestic industrial class. The party began in the 1940s to shift its favors from agriculture to business, extending state credit The PRI became a business-oriented developmentalist party, while still retaining the trappings of a nationalist, worker-based and agrarian revolutionary party.

[216] Krauze, Enrique. 1997. *La presidencia imperial: ascenso y caída del sistema político mexicano (1940-1996)*. 1a. ed. Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, p. 110.
[217]Krauze 1997, *Biography of Power*, p. 112.

President Alemán in essence undertook a replay of the Porfiriato, with new symbols and a new narrative surrounding the destiny of the Mexican nation, but still a modernizing thrust to place Mexico within the international market and attract foreign capital. Alemán steered the party from industrial workers and agrarian workers toward the middle classes and entrepreneurial interests.[218]

The immediate results were promising. The import substitution model of industrialization so popular in much of the developing world led to a booming economic expansion in the first, "easy" phase of growth. The economy grew at an average rate of 6.5 percent a year from the mid 1950s to the 1970s during this period of inward-looking development.[219] The economy was heavily shielded from international fluctuations by trade barriers affecting seventy percent of imports by 1970.[220]

Even as the easy phase of import substitution began to run dry in the 1970s, economic good news only appeared to continue arriving. Massive oil deposits were confirmed off the Caribbean coast in the late 1970s, leading the president at the time, José López Portillo (in office 1976-1982), to declare to the Congress that there are two kinds of country in the world, those with oil and those without, and that in Mexico "we have it." Further, he promised that "we will administer abundance."[221]

High oil prices kept expectations and government spending equally high. Oil prices would collapse in 1981 following a debt crisis in 1976, leading to an economic meltdown and a body blow to the regime, but the "Mexican Miracle" lasted long enough to imbue the PRI regime

[218] Sherman, John. 2000. "The Mexican "Miracle" and its Collapse." In *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. M. C. Meyer and W. H. Beezley. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 576.
[219] Williams, Mark Eric. 2001. *Market Reforms in Mexico: Coalitions, Institutions, and the Politics of Policy Change*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, p. 5.
[220] Lustig, Nora. 1998. *Mexico: The Remaking of an Economy*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, p. 14.
[221] Preston, Julia, and Sam Dillon. 2004. *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy*. 1st ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 95.

with the legitimacy of economic growth. Despite the continuation of great inequality, inefficiency and corruption, the PRI machine advertised the creation of great industries, oil production, and urbanization for the development of the Mexican nation. This told a compelling story about the advancement of the goals of Revolution.

Apologists for the PRI adopted much the same role as the científicos had for the Porfiriato. Jesús Reyes Heroles, the foremost ideologue of the PRI, linked the revolutionary regime to the development of Mexican liberalism since 1808. In his view, the Revolution resurrected the liberalism that had been smothered by the Porfirian government. Reyes Heroles considered the Porfiriato as a break with the liberalism of the Reform, and the Revolution as a vindication of the social goals of liberal heroes from the early years of independence.[222] In the end, of course, the regime erected by the revolutionary family constructed a symbolic narrative quite similar to that of the Porfirian regime, and its methods of political action bore a strong family resemblance as well.

Opposition to the PRI: Counternarratives

The reformulation of a presidentialist authoritarianism was recognized quickly enough. Cosío Villegas saw in the presidential succession of 1940 the cementation of a "neo-porfirism." His essay of 1946, "The Crisis of Mexico", declared the Revolution finished as a constructive project. He saw among its chief goals the abolition of centralized personal power. Secondary was the patchwork of reformist goals intended to lift the masses from their poverty. None of the goals survived two decades. Just as the Porfiriato rested on thin ideological pillars, the Revolution was by the 1940s emptied of content. The Revolution, he wrote, destroyed the previous regime, but

[222]See Reyes Heroles, Jesús. 1957. *El liberalismo mexicano.* México, D. F.: Universidad Nacional de México Facultad de Derecho.

the revolutionary leaders were not up to the task of creating a new, democratic political system.[223] The Revolution was not dead, however, as it lived on in slogans and holidays, speeches and murals throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

The unfulfilled revolutionary promise engendered opposition in various forms, opportunistic and genuine. Political parties abounded in the revolutionary regime, which was fully consistent with the allegedly democratic character of the regime. Parties of many different ideological persuasions peppered the political scene and fielded candidates for office throughout the entire PRI era. The Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana (PARM), established in the 1950s, provided a forum for prominent veterans of the Revolution who wished to remain independent of the PRI. The Partido Popular Socialista (PPS) was founded as a communist party by the labor leader Lombardo Toledano and for some years maintained a critical posture toward the official party. These parties did not, however, pose a genuine challenge to the control of the PRI, as had been the case of opposition candidates close to the Díaz regime. As a clientelistic corporatist outfit, the PRI excelled at co-opting and taming opposition, and most parties cooperated closely with the governing party. The formerly fiery PPS, for instance, evolved as a docile partner to the PRI, and eventually splintered into oblivion. The major exception for opposition parties was the PAN, examined more closely below.

As noted, for the most part unions were either extensions of the PRI or ground into submission. There were pockets of resistance, though. Independent trade unions had an exceedingly hard time of it, but some managed to survive at smaller levels, and reformers within the "official" unions continued to press their demands for greater union democracy. The

[223] Cosío Villegas, Daniel. 1997. *La crisis de México*. 1. ed. México: Clío.

movement gained steam in the early 1970s and—though having little in the way of material victories—went far in publicizing resistance to antidemocratic practices of the PRI.[224]

Grassroots popular movements challenged the continuing authoritarianism and clientelism that dissatisfied much of the middle classes in particular. Most dramatically, student protests ahead of the 1968 summer Olympics held in Mexico City led to a government crackdown and the killing of hundreds of demonstrators, an event quickly explained away and seldom mentioned by the government until the transition after 2000.[225] This egregious instance of repression was, in retrospect, a turning point, and for the next decades the PRI would have to work hard to maintain its claim to be the representative of the nation as skepticism grew and organized challenges became harder to contain.

The PAN

The most consistent and principled voice of opposition would be that of the PAN, founded in 1939 at the height of the Cárdenas drive to reorder society and incorporate the masses. The populist Cárdenas regime provoked a backlash from conservative Catholics, and the founding of the PAN may be viewed as a reactionary response to the radicalism of that administration. Nonetheless, the party's primary founder and chief ideologue Manuel Gómez Morín, a lawyer and politician who served the administrations of Calles and Obregón, was not himself committed to Catholic orthodoxy. Its program was to be pragmatic, responding to challenges as they arise, and was thus open to influence from a variety of ideologies.

The PAN appeared just as the state machinery extended its reach further into society than at any time before, and as independent social groups and political parties were being swallowed

[224] Pérez Arce, Francisco. 1990. "The Enduring Union Struggle for Legality and Democracy." In *Popular Movements and Political change in Mexico*, ed. J. Foweraker and A. L. Craig. Boulder: L. Rienner Publishers.
[225] Lawson, Chappell H. 2002. op cit., p. 50.

through cooptation and harassed out of existence. National Action would become the most successful and consistent of opposition parties, demonstrating the commitment of its adherents and attraction of its principled rejection of the bases of the PRI regime. The party became a refuge for many of those disaffected by the PRI's secular populism: Conservative Catholics, business people, middle classes, and the independent-minded of the frontier states. The PAN consistently polled well in northern states and traditionally religious areas. The party was thus born to be the polar opposite of the party of power.

There has always been anti-statist streak in the PAN's ideology directly descended from the liberalism of Madero. As a law student Gómez Morín had been an early supporter of Revolution and became an influential figure in the revolutionary regime, contributing to the creation of the Bank of Mexico and the Agricultural Bank of Mexico, and is counted among the "Seven Sages" of Mexico, a key group of intellectuals. Founders of the PAN thus considered themselves the true heirs of the Revolutionary movement

The PAN did not hope simply to resurrect the liberalism of the nineteenth century, however. The party's formulation took place at the height of the division between individualistic liberalism and the socialism exemplified by the Russian Revolution. Reacting to perceived insufficiencies of both, Gómez Morín and others hoped to construct a third way, balancing the rights of the individual and the social needs of the community. Thus, the name "National Action" was to focus attention on its flexible and pragmatic character.[226]

The PAN was also born infused with a heavy streak of Catholic thinking, as well. The wounds of the Cristiada were still fresh when the PAN was assembled in 1939 and fragments of the clerical opposition to the revolution played a large role in brining it into being. The Catholic

[226] Loaeza, Soledad. 1999. *El Partido Acción Nacional, la larga marcha, 1939-1994: oposición leal y partido de protesta*. 1. ed. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

social thought influential in the party stemmed in part from the papal encyclicals Rerum Novarum of 1891 and Quadragesimo Anno of 1931 which established Church doctrine concerning relations in a modernizing society. These documents were the primary influences on Catholic corporatism in Latin America and influential when the PAN was established and as other corporatist regimes were being installed around the continent.[227] Prominent among the elements of the party´s philosophy was "complementarity," the notion that societal functions ought not to be duplicated. The peculiar functions of the family belong to the family, enterprise to businesses, and so forth. This translated into an opposition to the economic statism of the PRI regime but is still consistent with a corporatist approach that divides society based on function.

This combination of ideological elements resulted in a tension between the Catholic ideologues and the more liberal, business-oriented factions. This led to sometimes bitter disputes, such as the failure to nominate a presidential candidate in 1976, obliging López Portillo to run without a major opponent. The internal tension only grew more acute as the PAN began to win offices. From its inception during the heyday of *cardenismo* until the unwinding of the PRI regime, the PAN patiently endured the fraud and abuse of the regime, confident that "one day the Party would convince the people."[228] Ideological purity and pragmatism collided with each other as the party did begin to convince the people and it was required to govern, rather than act primarily as the nation's conscious. This dilemma has played out on a grand scale since the PAN won the presidency.

The party wove a narrative that was in ways similar to the anti-governmental programs of opposition movements past in offering a simple and attractive program of transparent and limited government, while also demanding a recognition of the centrality of the Catholic faith to

[227] Wiarda, Howard J. 1997. *Corporatism and Comparative Politics: The Other Great "ism"*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, p. 78.
[228] Gomez Morín, quoted in Shirk, David A. 2005. *Mexico's New Politics: the PAN and Democratic Change*. Boulder, Colo.: L. Rienner, p. 49.

Mexican identity that would not have been alien to moderate liberals of the nineteenth century. Central to the PAN, then, was a rejection of the radicalism and statism of the official party, and a plea for moderation and respect for the process of democracy. Nonetheless, the heavy influence of Catholic social thought also provides the germs of a corporatism that may yet flower. This question will be From its founding, however, the party was not expected to win in the short term, and was considered by its supporters to be engaged in an "eternal struggle."[229]

The Crisis & Reform

The Mexican Miracle had been held as an example for other developing countries, but its fragility was on dramatic display as early as the 1970s. Challenges originating from the oil shock of 1973 and political upheaval from the student protests of 1968 and guerilla activity in the early 1970s led President Luís Echeverría (in office 1970-1976) to increase government spending and intervention, only exacerbating the problems associated with slowing growth usually associated with later stages of state-led development.[230] When oil prices plummeted, the Mexican government found itself with massive debts taken on when banks were all too willing to extend cheap credit to a major oil country, but now without the means to repay the ballooning debts.

The general economic crisis made the 1980s the "lost decade of development" throughout Latin America, and Mexico's over-reliance on oil revenue made it particularly vulnerable. The end of the economic good times was dramatic and catastrophic. The economic crisis had greater negative repercussions for average Mexicans than the turbulence experienced in the first decades of the revolutionary period, though it did not evoke the same kind of widespread social unrest.[231]

[229] Mizrahi, Yemile. 2003. *From Martyrdom to Power: The Partido Accíon Nacional in Mexico*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, p. 18.
[230] Lustig, Nora. 1998. *Mexico: The Remaking of an Economy*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. pp. 17-18.
[231] Knight, Alan. "State Power and Political Stability in Mexico" in Neil Harvey, ed., *Mexico: Dilemmas of Transition*. London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1993.

Vocal protestations from unions, but little more, attended the lowering of living standards that could have ended in chaos in less tightly controlled systems.

In the economic arena, the PRI leadership emerging in the 1980s took steps to dismantle the statist economic machine that had reigned since the 1930s and underpinned the entire national economy. Many of the new elites were educated in business in the United States and became known as *técnicos* because of their orientation toward policy solutions. Beginning particularly with the administration of Miguel de la Madrid (in office 1982-1988), political leaders moved away from the protectionist trade barriers that had insulated the economy for decades toward an opening to the international market. The leadership beginning in the 1980s was drawn more than before from those educated in business and economics in the United States. The about-face elicited a great deal of angst and controversy and provoked the same bitterness as had the economic welcoming policies of Díaz.

Carlos Salinas Gortari (in office 1988-1994) benefited handsomely from the PRI machine, likely owing his victory to the engineering of the 1988 presidential election in which the computerized tallying system suffered an unexplained breakdown while he trailed the populist candidacy of Cárdenas, and emerged the winner when the system was restored. He nonetheless forged ahead with the reforms of his predecessors that made possible the eventual surrender of power effected by his successor Ernesto Zedillo, moving beyond the steps of de la Madrid in an effort to transform even the ideological bases of the regime.

Salinas espoused what he called *liberalismo social*. Calling it a “new vision” for the Revolution, it looked backward toward the nineteenth century liberalism of the Reform and forward to the globalizing economy. Claiming to retain the populist goals of the Revolution and to reject neoliberalism, social liberalism nevertheless amounted to a privatization plan and

opening of the economy coupled with government assistance to the needy. Salinas announced a new stage in the development of the Revolution and retained its tropes and symbolic trappings, such as indigenism and agrarianism, nationalism and workers' rights, but simultaneously and consciously shifted the most basic policy positions of the state. The door to an open economy having been pushed ajar, the government of Salinas went farthest in swinging it wide. The economic integration with the United States in the form of the North American Free Trade Agreement, acceded to in 1992, went beyond even what Díaz could have dreamed. The Salinas administration undertook to privatize a large portion of the economy, deregulating the economy.

Moreover, the Constitution was reformed, ending the state's obligation to redistribute land to landless communities, and to allow the partition and sale of *ejido* lands, removing one of the pillars of the revolutionary symbolic structure. The Salinas administration continued to claim the heritage of Zapata even as it dismantled the constitutional reforms that had been claimed as the culmination of his movement. Declaring “Liberty and justice to the Mexican countryside,” the administration linked its privatization plans to Zapata, marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of his assassination by holding a ceremony transferring land ownership to farmers and Salinas declaring “Zapata's struggle continues.”[232]

In addition to bending toward the neoliberal economic nostrums gaining recognition in the 1970s and 1980s, the pragmatism of the PRI allowed it to fluidly integrate opposition voices as the need arose. In the wake of violence of 1968, political reforms in 1977 began a slow-moving democratization that culminated in the surrender of the presidency in 2000. The reforms of the 1970s and thereafter introduced greater access to representation through proportional election schemes and created an electoral authority that gained independence and impartiality.

[232] Stephen, Lynn. 1997. "Pro-Zapatista and Pro-Pri: Resolving the Contradictions of Zapatismo in Rural Oaxaca." *Latin American Research Review* 32 (2):41-70, pg.

Thus, the Congress has been increasingly populated with opposition parties, and the PRI finally lost the supermajority in the Congress that allowed it to alter the political system at whim in 1997. The PRI gave up the first governorship in Baja California in 1989. The economic and democratic reforms continued under President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (in office 1994-2000), the first president who refused to exercise the *dedazo*, and the president who would concede defeat to the PAN's Vicente Fox.

The Anti-Neoliberal Reaction

The adoption of neoliberal policies and embrace of economic union with the United States that followed the economic crisis produced deep strain in the PRI. Welcomed by pro-business and democratic activists outside the PRI machine, various sectors within the PRI reacted with hostility to the reforms. A split opened between traditional revolutionary nationalists, the so-called "dinosaurs," and the reform-minded technocrats particularly in the administrations of Salinas and Zedillo.[233] The neoliberal economic reforms viewed by the new generation of leadership as essential to progress provoked a backlash from the populist and leftist wing of the PRI, led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the son of the greatest embodiment of nationalist populism, Lázaro Cárdenas.

The younger Cárdenas swept to prominence at an opportune time: economic crisis gripped the country and the PRI leadership appeared to be turning its back on the foundational goals of the party and the Revolution itself. The movement putting Cárdenas forward as a presidential candidate in the 1988 election was re-appropriating the symbolism of the

[233] Some authors consider this analysis overly simple. See e.g. Hernández Rodríguez, Rogelio. "The Partido Revolucionario Institucional" in *Governing Mexico: Political Parties and Elections*, Mónica Serrano, ed., London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1998.

Revolution.[234] A patchwork of civil and political organizations banded together to support Cárdenas. The Frente Democratico Nacional that formed the basis of his support claimed to be rescuing the core of the PRI from usurpers and to represent the real national interest. Campesinos and urban laborers along with leftist intellectuals vaulted Cárdenas into the public imagination, while the PRI did all it could to ignore or discredit him. The movement created by the FRD would leave the PRD as its more lasting legacy.

At the same time, the world-famed Zapatistas, more formerly known as the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, also made their appearance during the abandonment of economic nationalism. Their media-driven rebellion erupted in 1994 in the southern state of Chiapas on the day that NAFTA went into effect. Claiming continuity with the ancient Mayan struggle against colonization and with the Zapatista struggle for land, the Zapatistas echoed mainstream critics who accused the government of having abandoned the Revolution and returned the country to the authoritarianism of the previous century. The Zapatistas attempted to wrest control of the Revolutionary symbols from the PRI and to reclaim Zapata, linking his image to an international anti-neoliberal movement that continues to exercise a pull on Mexicans disaffected with the current economic and political trajectory.

The PRI's Symbolic Narrative

The PRI regime created a narrative of the Revolution as the culmination of Mexican political development, appending the overthrow of Díaz and creation of the party to a long epic of liberal history. Cosío Villegas wrote "large numbers everywhere felt that exalted sensation of man turned into a god, of man with creative genius and will, with the faith that from his hands may

[234]McDonald, James H. 1993. "Whose History? Whose Voice? Myth and Resistance in the Rise of the New Left in Mexico." *Cultural Anthropology* 8 (1):96-116.

come a new, great, brilliant, harmonious and kind world; faith, also, that nothing is impossible and that anything may be achieved by simply willing it."[235]

The symbolic discourse of the regime looked backward and forward, creating a bridge between the nineteenth century imagery of liberal Mexico, the agrarian nation, and the industrial and urbanized twentieth century. These elements of its symbolism were not entirely consistent, and at times at odds. Its ideology was vague and unsystematic, but visceral and especially tuned to the Mexican situation.[236] Leaping far beyond the limited liberalism of Madero, the regime committed itself to a symbolic radicalism emerging from the chaos of the decade of the Revolution. By the 1940s the party had woven a narrative in which it was itself the agent of the willing and purposive transformation of society described by Cosío Villegas. Aguilar Camín writes that by the 1940s the Revolution became a promise. The achievements of the past were no longer the focus of the regime's rhetoric, but of what was to come, the Revolution became with Cárdenas and his successors an "eternal future."[237]

The greatest innovation of the PRI, and what appears to distinguish it from previous regimes in independent Mexico's history, is the extent to which it explicitly and actively involved the majority of the population primarily through incorporation into the party; among the regime's most resonant claims to legitimacy, of course, was the status as the party of the Revolution and as the representative of all Mexicans. The PRI, after all, adopted the colors of the Mexican flag for its own logo. And the party was flexible enough to incorporate a wide cross-section of society, of course. Among its ranks were leftist labor leaders and pro-business economists. The

[235]Quoted in Brushwood, John S. 1989. "Innovation in Mexican Fiction and Politics (1910-1934)." *Mexican Studies/ Estudios Mexicanos* 5 (1):69-88, p. 70.
[236] Knight, Alan. 1997. "The Ideology of the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940." *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de America Latina y el Caribe* 8 (1).
[237] Aguilar Camín, Héctor, and Lorenzo Meyer. 1993. *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910-1989*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pgs. 159-161.

regime did, as well, depend on participation of large numbers of the populace through the corporatist mechanisms of the party.

A Member of the Liberal Family?

As the exponents of previous symbolic narratives had done, the apologists of the PRI regime claimed that theirs was a democratic government and heir to the liberalism of the nineteenth century. Clearly, though, the revolutionary narrative that praised the communalist and agrarian foundations of the nation and sought the modernization of the country through the leadership of a political party representing the entirety of the population could not be counted among the members of the liberal family.

As the party of the Revolution and embodiment of the nation's will, opposition movements fell outside the revolutionary project and thus unnecessary or inimical to progress. Harking back to the positivist triumphalism of the Díaz era, a PRI politician stated, "bi-partyism in Mexico is not possible because there is a basic lack of consensus for it."[238] There is, of course, little reason to have any confidence in the functionary's analysis as a reflection of the public's actual sentiment. It does, however, reveal the operative assumptions of the political class that political pluralism is inconsistent with revolutionary goals and represents its attempts to construct a narrative and broadcast the message that opposition outside the party is both undesired and unworkable.

The revolutionary regime constructed by the party largely followed the playbook written in previous centuries. As was the case with predecessor regimes that came to power with

[238] Gil, Carlos B. 1992. *Hope and Frustration: Interviews With Leaders of Mexico's Political Opposition*. Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, pp. 122-123.

intentions of remaking society, grand symbolic narratives were used to justify broad state power while only partially fulfilling or simply failing in their loftiest goals.

The reality-defying invocation by the PRI of the Revolution, federalism, and democracy functioned as what Krauze calls a "lie converted to institutional truth."[239] The lie permitted institutional and political rearrangement at the whim of the president while retaining the symbolic undergirding of the regime. The Revolution went through a period of cooling off. The anticlerical fervor was cooled after the Cristiada; the socialist labor rhetoric was dimmed by political leaders taking the harnesses of unions; land reform took a back seat to industrialization. But the rhetorical radicalism remained ensconced in the Constitution, the name of the party, and in official narrative. Even as the revolution for the people lived on in speech, the regime grew conservative, as conservative as Díaz and the *científicos*.

When consolidated, the Revolution created a scaffolding within which to construct another great narrative concerning the destiny of the nation. Cárdenas and Alemán, the two architects of the PRI's power and purposes designed a regime consistent with the aims of the past: the redesign the social and political institutions. Cárdenas and Alemán had divergent aims but both viewed the fusion of state and party as indispensable to the revolutionary project, a conception of the political system that reduced democratic institutions to subordinate status.

By the 1980s, however, the symbolic discourse of the revolutionary regime was exhausted. The institutionalization of the Revolution in the 1940s and 1950s sealed the revolutionary symbolic narrative while abandoning its more radical goals. By abandoning economic nationalism and communal landownership in the later years of the PRI period, the party surrendered its hold on what was left of the revolutionary nationalism that had survived, a development that coincided with the rise of the powerful opposition parties, the PAN and PRD.

[239]Krauze, 1997, p. 486.

The eternal future of the PRI having crumbled, the national political discourse has split between two competing grand projects: Left wing nationalists, many of whom defected the PRI to the PRD and other parties, continue to champion the populist nationalism of the old PRI, while the PAN undertakes to disassemble the state built by the PRI.

CHAPTER 7

FROM PERFECT DICTATORSHIP TO IMPERFECT DEMOCRACY

The twenty-first century is the most democratic period in Mexican history, and the democratic transition of 2000 raised the possibility of the consolidation of liberal democracy. Chapter One demonstrated that this consolidation has not yet occurred. Chapters Two and Three discussed the theoretical foundations of the study, and Chapters Four through Six reviewed the political history of Mexico since independence, focusing on the dominant narratives constructed that defined the conduct of symbolic political interaction. The independence period was marked by trenchant competition between the conservative and liberal factions, a contest that gave way to liberal predominance that extended into the Díaz era, wherein a transformed liberalism turned into an ideology of dictatorial power. The Revolution and regime that was consolidated in its wake constructed an answer to the positivistic porfirian modernizing regime by drawing on the earlier liberal narrative and appending a radical, inclusionary populist element.

That institutionalized revolution has now been concluded. What, then, has the democratic opening in Mexico produced as symbolic narrative? Given the long history of belligerent political rivalry and clientelistic hierarchicalism we would not expect liberal democracy to spring fully formed from the wreckage of the PRI. Indeed, we find instead that symbolic battle and institutional weakness continue as in the post-independence and revolutionary eras.

Chapter Seven describes events since the transfer of power from the PRI to the PAN, discussing the emerging contest of symbolic narratives arising to fill the void left by the

crumbling of the PRI system. The two dominant narratives are the offspring of earlier symbolic arrangements, one an attempt to resuscitate the aging populist nationalism of the Revolution, and the other of the PAN and other reformers a return to the democracy building, free market individualism of earlier liberals. The possibility of further political cultural change and democratic consolidation will be considered, and the chapter concludes by discussing the potential for further study and application to other cases.

The Transformation

The democratic transformation of Mexico took place along with others throughout Latin America in the "third wave" of democratization and has resulted in changes that on the surface appear to signal the demise of the clientelistic machine politics that was the lifeblood of the PRI for seven decades. The abandonment of the state-driven industrial model and adoption of liberal economic policies has led to economic changes inimical to the PRI's—or likely any party's—monopolization of the political sphere. Unionization rates, for example, have plummeted in Mexico, robbing the PRI machine of an organized army of party faithful. The CTM has been slow to devote energy to recruiting workers in the burgeoning services sector and in the maquila industry because the dispersed and temporary nature of many of the jobs makes gains in membership unlikely.[240] The political reforms beginning in the 1970s have allowed an uncontrolled party competition to creep in, and the PRI's surrender of the political and economic resources of the country has resulted in a plurality of more or less independent voices arising in the media. The legislature has come into its own, no longer a rubber stamp for an imperial

[240] Grayson, 1998, op cit., p. 86. Grayson also points out that service workers may reject the authoritarian administration of the unions, and *maquiladora* workers tend to be young women uninterested in workplace organization.

president. Mexican civil society has burgeoned with new groups operating outside the state's fixed rules.[241]

In the more democratically open atmosphere of the 1980s and 1990s the PAN grew spectacularly. In 1985 the PAN counted twenty-six mayors, fifty-one state legislators, and no governors, numbers that increased to 329 mayors, 299 state legislators, and nine governors by 2000.[242] Given its history and stellar achievements of the previous fifteen years, in retrospect the party appeared to be well on the way to replacing the PRI as the governing party. When the party did indeed win the presidency in 2000, the transition from PRI to PAN rule was considered a turning point in the democratization process and the Fox term was met with high expectations. When Zedillo passed the presidential sash to Fox, it was the first time since the early days of the republic that power alternated peacefully, and Fox had promised to take great strides in reforming the country's institutions, continuing the economic reordering and democratizing the political institutions. By the time Fox had stepped down, however, his presidency was widely viewed as a failure in its ambitious goals to turn politics around. The consensus was that Fox was unable to effectively negotiate the competing parties in a divided government.[243]

The Fox Phenomenon

Fox had not been a dyed-in-the wool *panista* and was thus a better candidate for displacing the PRI. As a rancher and former head of Coca Cola in Mexico, Fox joined the party only in 1987, whereas many members of the party were second-generation, following their parents into membership. As a relative newcomer, Fox advocated electoral pragmatism, pushing to open the

[241] Grayson, George. "Mexico's Semi-Corporatist Regime" in Wiarda, ed., *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America Revisited*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004, pp. 253-254.
[242] Edmonds-Poli, Emily, and David A. Shirk. 2009. *Contemporary Mexican Politics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, p. 159.
[243] Pastor, Manuel, Jr., and Carol Wise. 2005. "The Lost Sexenio: Vicente Fox and the New Politics of Economic Reform in Mexico." *Latin American Politics and Society* 47 (4):135-60.

doors of the party to more members and to cooperate with other parties, tactics viewed with skepticism by the party leadership.[244] Fox thus had to overcome opposition from the party core to secure the candidacy.

However, his independence and flexibility, in addition to his flair and charisma, were his principal strengths in attracting support in the general election. In contrast to the dour Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, running again in 2000 under the PRD banner, Fox appeared a winner, and was thus the greatest hope to deal a historic and symbolic defeat to the PRI. His campaign organization, “Friends of Fox,” circumvented the PAN and attracted support from independent voters and intellectuals in the center and on the left. Much of his campaign centered on his potential to propel democratization forward and leave the stale authoritarianism of the PRI in the past, riding a wave of PRI fatigue among voters. Among his campaign slogans was “Enough!” Even the relatively colorless PRI candidate, Francisco Labastida, was attuned to the pro-democracy demand of the public and distanced himself from the old party by announcing during his campaign “a new PRI, closer to you.” As a maverick iconoclast with a magnetic personality, Fox was able to cement his status as the “change” and “democracy” candidate considered the most likely to have a chance at dethroning the PRI, and thus able to assemble a broad base of support.

All parties recognized that the PRI's claim to represent the Mexican majority could no longer sustain the party and that a repudiation of the past was necessary. The PRD attempted to link the PAN to the neoliberal policies of the PRI, arguing that the election of Fox would change the party in power, but the substance of the PRI would remain. The PRI machine, for its part, took tried and true measures to maintain the presidential prize. The party hoped that by mobilizing the base through its clientelistic network of workers and peasants it could survive in

[244]Shirk, David A. 2000. "Vicente Fox and the Rise of PAN." *Journal of Democracy* 11 (4):25-32.

the fairest election it had allowed.[245] In the end, the election proved to be a referendum on the continuation of PRI in power and neither the PRI nor PRD could stop the momentum of Fox. The election of Fox in July of 2000 ended one era and was the beginning of another with ambiguous contours.

The PAN in Power

As an opposition party the philosophy of the PAN evolved marginally over the decades, but remained remarkably steadfast in its principled objection to the PRI´s abuse of power and its willingness to continue participating in fixed elections. Its calls for transparency and good government were a constant in Mexican politics and, as a legitimate opposition party, its presence of course gave the PRI regime democratic cover. The PAN could, from the outside, criticize the government for its irresponsibility and corruption, and the PRI could continue engaging in its usual practices, at times making cosmetic concessions to public opinion and opposition representation.

As long as this arrangement prevailed, the PAN had the luxury of maintaining its critical stance. As the PRI was obliged to open the doors to the halls of power ever wider, and the PAN happily stepped in to occupy positions in municipal government, then state governorships, and finally the presidency, it was faced with the unseemly reality of governing in the house that the PRI had built. As the victorious liberals in the age of Juárez confronted a hierarchically arranged society of privileged corporations, the PAN inherited a modernized corporatist patronage network. Again, as in the past, a liberal reformist party would attempt to uproot the previous authoritarian regime and cultivate a free market economy and society of individuals. It is worth

[245] Bruhn, Kathleen. 2004. "The Making of the Mexican President, 2000: Parties, Candidates, and Campaign Strategy." In *Mexico's Pivotal Democratic Election: Candidates, Voters, and the Presidential Campaign of 2000,* ed. J. I. Domínguez and C. H. Lawson. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

recalling here the outcome of the earlier liberal faction´s efforts. As argued in previous chapters, the exigencies of governing a country by no means united the liberals and their forward looking project ended in an ad hoc dictatorship intended to defend constitutionalism and individualism. Political officials today face an entrenched clientelism and crime-ridden country that will be unlikely to respond to a soft touch. Furthermore, some of the actions of PAN officials themselves have revealed a willingness to adapt to the exigencies of power politics that resemble the other parties' tactics.

Despite being a phenomenal candidate and perfectly suited to capture the anti-PRI sentiment of the electorate, Fox turned out to be a mediocre president unable to turn the historic election into a corresponding ability to shepherd a fractious Congress and neutralize opposition from within his own party. He did, however, attempt to make good on his promise to reorient the country and disassemble what remained of the PRI's towering and inward-looking institutionalized revolution. His initiatives on tax reform, indigenous rights, and an immigration deal with the United States could not overcome the hostile political environment, and the midterm of elections of 2003 in which the opposition parties gained in the Congress cost Fox further political capital.[246] Though viewed as personally honest his tenure produced disappointment in a wide range of sectors.[247]

Fox's successor, Felipe Calderón (entering office in 2006), enjoyed much greater support from the PAN's internal leadership. As the son of a founding member, Calderón was the definitive insider. Although a dull presence and by no means a natural campaigner, his nomination represented a return to the party's core values. Despite differences with Fox, the incumbent entered the fray of the general campaign for the PAN candidate (some believe

[246] Edmonds-Poli, Emily, and David A. Shirk. 2009. *Contemporary Mexican Politics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, pgs. 113-114.
[247] Lawson, Chappell H. 2004. "Fox's Mexico at Midterm." *Journal of Democracy* 15 (1):139-53.

illegally), promoting his administration's achievements and urging voters to “keep the horse” even as they change riders. As a candidate in 2006, Calderón offered himself as the continuation of democratic reform and of honest government.

Consistent with the anti-statist element stretching to the beginnings of the party, the PAN presidents have tended to welcome the increasingly globalized economy as an opportunity for Mexico, rather than a threat. Fox worked actively to raise the international profile of Mexico and integrate the country into the world market and international bodies. Calderón vowed to continue the economic restructuring of the last years that would attract the investment to make Mexico self-sufficient and end the need of so many Mexicans to travel abroad in search of income.

The PAN has consistently painted its project as progressive and forward-looking, while characterizing its opposition as retrograde and atavistic. Fox established the theme in his campaign for president in 2000 by advertising himself as the candidate of democratic transformation, the best hope for overcoming the PRI machine stuck in decades past. Calderón continued to sound the same note during his campaign and presidency.

Discussing the economy as president he eschewed the plan among some to “move toward the past,” and lamented that “their most harmful decisions are seeking nationalizations, expropriations, state control of the economy and authoritarianism," adding that “Mexicans have decided to look to the future and to strengthen democracy, markets and investment.”[248]

Privatization of the economy has always been a pillar of PAN's ideology, and the PAN presidents have made it a priority of their administrations. This is a delicate issue, however, and the move to privatize national companies has been countered with fierce resistance, as it was when initiated by the PRI. Among the most controversial proposals made by Fox and Calderón

[248]Spinetto, Juan Pablo, Patrick Harrington. January 28, 2007. “Mexico's Calderón Urges Region to Reject Turn to Failed Past.” Bloomberg.com. http://quote.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601170&sid=asSWAccIrVJo.

have been opening the oil sector to private investment. The company, though one of the largest oil companies in the world, suffers from declining revenues and has amassed massive debt.[249] Fox put forward a plan to sell shares in Pemex, and Calderón has suggested structural changes to the company to respond to declining output and efficiency.[250] Though neither has attempted to privatize the oil industry outright, their willingness to tinker with Pemex has made created a large target for economic nationalists who see a more sinister plan to sell off the national patrimony.[251]

Fox promised an end to the PRI's corporatist relations and to uproot the clientelistic treatment of labor. After the PAN came into office it became clear that ridding the political system of the old corporatist tactics of cooptation would be more difficult than expected, and that Fox and his successor had an ambiguous commitment to uprooting the sectoral organization of society present for so long. Despite its reformist credentials, the PAN has been unable to fully disrupt the clientelistic practices of old and has even engaged in them itself. Consequentially, in the judgment of some, corporatism has not only survived but thrived under the PAN.[252] The party has indeed found it necessary to make alliances of convenience in support of its agenda. The PAN has, therefore, cooperated with enormously powerful unions, such as the social security workers' union (SNTSS) and the educators' union (SNTE), mainstays of the PRI's old machine.[253] It has also prised political leaders from the PRI with offers of greater potential for

[249]Smith, Geri. December 13, 2004. "Pemex May Be Turning From Gusher to Black Hole." *Business Week*. http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/04_50/b3912084_mz058.htm.
[250]Martinez, Andres R., Carlos Manuel Rodriguez. September 4, 2009. "Mexico May Emulate Petrobras as It Plans New Oil Laws." Bloomberg.com. http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601207&sid=aJ1Vw5HsdTLI.
[251]Reform proposals have led to the creation of an organization known as the National Movement for the Defense of the Oil. Protests and direct action, even by legislators, have been common. See Jorge Octavio Ochoa. February 24, 2008. "Anuncia movimiento por defensa del petróleo radicalización de acciones." *El Universal*. http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/484769.html
[252]Martínez, Nurit. January 4, 2010. "Perdura el corpoativismo." *El Universal*. http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/174446.html
[253]Editorial. April 16, 2010. "Sindicatos y corporativismo." *El Universal*. http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/editoriales/48000.html

advancement.[254] Outside the public sector, charges arise that the PAN's electoral strategies include cooptation of agricultural workers.[255] The PAN's current leaders, then, may be attempting to restructure the economic model of the old PRI while maintaining some of its political tools. It remains to be seen whether this tendency is simply a matter of practical, short-term pactmaking, or perhaps reveals a willingness to use state resources to remain in office over the longer term.

Nor has the current administration shied from using the hard power of the state when deemed necessary, particularly in the case of crime. Most visibly the Calderón government has relied on the military to effect its goal of regaining control of territory lost to the criminal cartels. Calderón has argued that his war against narcotrafficking was unavoidable, and the only means to regain control of the country, even while acknowledging that violence stands to increase as a result of the state's assault.[256] Drug trafficking outfits, present for decades in Mexico but operating under the radar screen with cooperation or willful blindness of political and police officials, have accumulated enough power to openly defy the state and reciprocate the declaration of war. Until 2006, violence associated with the drug trade was contained, but has since exploded and caused a crisis atmosphere in public safety. Calderón made the deterioration of safety one of his campaign issues, and has responded to the burgeoning lawlessness by giving the military a wide berth in its campaign to uproot the cartels. As forty thousand troops were deployed to territories controlled by cartels, the result has been a mounting chorus of accusations of human rights abuses. Civilians have claimed that the military has launched a campaign of kidnapping and torture in an effort to uncover members of criminal gangs, operating beyond the

[254]Álvarez, Ignacio Alvarado. May 18, 2009. "El nuevo corporativismo sindical." *El Universal*. http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/168183.html
[255]Bartra, Armando. September 12, 2008. "Aprendiz de Brujo." *La Jornada de Campo*. http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/09/12/brujo.html
[256]Malkin, Elizabeth. December 17, 2009. "Mexico Deals a Blow to a Cartel but Warns of Continued Drug-Related Violence." *The New York Times.* http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/18/world/americas/18mexico.html?_r=1

law and with little oversight.[257] The Calderón administration's response has been to deny the charges and insist on the "scrupulous effort to try to protect human rights in all cases" and to and heap praise upon the military. He further challenged critics to name "any case, just one case, where the proper authority has not acted in a correct way, that the competent authorities have not punished anyone who has abused their authority."[258] Human rights groups respond with numerous instances of what they claim to be abuse and impunity.[259]

Consistent with the long tradition of corruption, military and police officials are found with depressing regularity to have ties to drug cartels as well. The amounts of money at the disposal of the cartels and the continual threat of violence has made corruption appear to be impossible to root out.[260] Local police have long been at the mercy, and service, of criminal gangs, but now the infection has spread to the top levels of government. As generals and top bureaucrats are sent to jail for spying for the drug cartels, even the administration of Calderón has been accused of protecting the Sinaloa drug trafficking cartel.[261]

The violence has reached epic proportions. The Mexican government reported that in three years of the Calderón presidency deaths in the drug war surpassed ten thousand.[262] Border towns have become virtual ghost towns as those with the means have fled and others avoid venturing outside. Making matters worse, the cartels can count on a stream of new entrants into their business as legitimate employment prospects remain weak. Calderón has argued that the

[257]Fainaru, Steve. July 9, 2009. "Mexico Accused of Torture in Drug War; Army Using Brutality to Fight Trafficking, Rights Groups Say." *Washington Post*. [Online] Lexis Nexis Academic.
[258]"PRESS CONFERENCE BY PRESIDENT OBAMA, PRESIDENT CALDERÓN OF MEXICO, AND PRIME MINISTER HARPER OF CANADA" August 10, 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Press-Conference-by-President-Obama-President-Calderon-of-Mexico-and-Prime-Minister-Harper-of-Canada/.
[259]See e.g. "Mexico: Calderon Denies Military Impunity." August 10, 2009. Human Rights Watch. http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/08/10/mexico-calderon-denies-military-impunity.
[260]Lacey, Marc. November 1, 2008. "In Mexico Drug War, Sorting Good Guys From Bad." *The New York Times.* http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/02/world/americas/02mexico.html?_r=1&ref=americas
[261]Burnett, John; Marisa Peñalosa; Robert Bennicasa. May 19, 2010. "Mexico Seems to Favor Sinaloa Cartel in Drug War."National Public Radio. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126906809&ps=cprs.
[262]De la Luz González, María. March 25, 2009. "Suman 10 mil 475 ejecuciones en esta administración: PGR." *El Universal*. http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/166613.html

mounting death tolls demonstrate that his approach is showing results as the drug traffickers eliminate themselves as their territory shrinks.

As the cartels have dug their heels into their territory, the incidence of drug use and addiction within Mexico has skyrocketed. Enormous swathes of territory are effectively in the control of criminal cartels, with municipal governments and police forces entirely unable to dislodge them, leaving them at the mercy of drug lords. This has led to a drumbeat of fears concerning the "Colombianization" of Mexico as governments are flooded with drug money. The fears of destabilization even led to discussion of Mexico as a failed state as the U.S. State Department warned of the dangers of the drug war to its south.[263]

Many view the war against the drug trade as unwinnable and argue that the only hope to attenuate the violence and maintain some semblance of normality would be to broker a deal through which the cartels continue to operate as they did before Calderón's mobilization of the military. A former foreign minister for Fox, Jorge Castañeda, has argued that the militarization of the drug conflict was unnecessary and a political choice, and advocates a return to the status quo ante as the best means of reducing the violence.[264] The morass appears to have no viable solution or end in sight, and it is likely that future governments will be forced to contend with the same struggle.

The Challenge from the Old Order

As much as some of the PRI's old-guard "dinosaurs" might wish, the PRI party-state machine is unlikely to make a return, at least at the national level. The visceral power of the revolutionary nationalist symbolism in which the party traded is not fully in abeyance, however. A coalition of

[263]Luhnow, David and José de Cordoba. February 21, 2009. "The Perilous State of Mexico." *The Wall Street Journal*. http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123518102536038463.html
[264]Castañeda, Jorge. May 6, 2010. "Mexico's Failed Drug War." *Cato Institute Economic Development Bulletin.* The Cato Institute. http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=11746

conservatives, liberals, and leftists voted Fox into office in 2000, but the election of 2006 brought to the fore a widening chasm between two large camps, both of them promoting change.

The broad tendency of nationalists and leftists of various stripes was to advocate a reviving of the abandoned revolutionary ideals of the previous century. In its earlier incarnation, the PRI could comfortably house radical populists, but by the 1980s leftists viewed the big tent of the party as shrinking. Left-leaning members dissatisfied with the direction of the party and demanding democratic reforms left the party to support the presidential candidacy of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and later formed the PRD, along with a handful of smaller leftist parties such as the Mexican Communist Party and the Mexican Workers' Party. Adopting an Aztec sun as its logo, the party claims to be the true democratic alternative and portrays both the PRI and the PAN as parties of the powerful that continue to do the bidding of business and the United States.

The party gained recognition in 1989 and grew precipitously. Immediately after its founding, the party was the fastest growing opposition party as it won many municipal and statewide elections, particularly in the state of Michoacán, the home state of Cárdenas.[265] The party also captured and held the municipal government of Mexico City since it was elected in 1997. The party quickly established itself as the foremost opposition party of the left.

As a scion of the PRI, its politicking resembles its parent party's practices. In spite of its reformist cachet and public rejection of the PRI's political manipulation, clientelism is among the party's chief resources in securing support, as it will likely remain given the long history of patron-client relations and the poverty of much of the country's population.[266]

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[265] Bruhn, Kathleen. 1995. "Governing Under the Enemy: The PRD in Michoacán." In *Opposition Government in Mexico*, ed. V. E. Rodríguez and P. M. Ward. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. p. 113.

[266] Hilgers, Tina. 2008. "Causes and Consequences of Political Clientelism: Mexico's PRD in Comparative Perspective." *Latin American Politics and Society* 50 (4):123-53.

For the presidential election of 2006, the PRD put forward the populist Andrés Manuel López Obrador as candidate. The mayor of Mexico City from the state of Tabasco, home to some of the most ardent revolutionaries, López Obrador ran a campaign with the slogan "for the good of all, first the poor," and declaimed against the ravages of neoliberalism. He enjoyed the status of leading candidate but ended losing the race to the PAN's Calderón by the slimmest of margins. López Obrador savaged the government of the PAN, the PRI, and the entire Mexican political system as corrupt and rigged in favor of the well-connected. He promised that as president he would transform the political system from top to bottom and re-engineer the economy to benefit the poorest Mexicans. As a genuine populist, he attempted to establish direct links to the masses through the media. Rallies in favor of his candidacy attracted hundreds of thousands of supporters drawn to this message of social justice and return to the principles embodied in the Constitution.[267] As governor of Tabasco and mayor of Mexico City, López Obrador patronized farmers and the urban poor, and peeled away some of the PRI's corporatist machine by attracting labor unions to the PRD fold, placing that party in competition with the PAN for those voting blocs.[268] López Obrador established a more tangible connection with the old PRI by bringing into his circle advisors close to the former President Luís Echeverría, the last of the PRI's big-spending populist presidents.

In his campaign proposals, López Obrador covered familiar territory. His book, "An Alternative Project for the Nation," elaborated twenty proposals covering all areas of policy. He appealed to liberal and revolutionary heroes past such as Morelos, Juárez, Madero, Villa, Zapata, and Lázaro Cárdenas.[269] He resurrected the earlier indigenism of the Revolution, calling on the

[267] Grayson, George W. 2007. *Mexican Messiah: Andrés Manuel López Obrador*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 4.
[268] Grayson, George. 2007. "Mexico, the PRI, and López Obrador: The Legacy of Corporatism." *Orbis* 51 (2):279-97.
[269] López Obrador, Andrés Manuel. 2004. *Un proyecto alternativo de nación: hacia un cambio verdadero*. 1. ed. México, D.F.: Grijalbo. ch.1.

nation to “pay its debt” to the indigenous and recognize their independence.[270] His populist priorities are revealed in his appeal to “fraternity” and insistence that “the country is not viable if enormous inequalities exist,” and his plan to offer special economic assistance to the poor and free medical care.[271] In the foreign policy arena López Obrador appealed to the nationalist sentiment jealous of its sovereignty and skeptical of overactive involvement in world affairs. He vowed to renegotiate NAFTA and to put “Mexico first, later the world.”[272] In an apparent repudiation of Fox's attempts to raise the international profile of Mexico, he wrote “The dreams of seeing Mexico as a grand protagonist in the concert of nations are just that: . . . mirages to feed personal ambitions.”[273]

López Obrador held a wide lead for much of the campaign, but Calderón turned the race around with his campaign's decision to attack López Obrador as a demagogue threatening the democratic advances of the previous years.[274] The Calderón campaign and its allies strove to paint López Obrador as an extremist and radical with intimate ties to President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela. The PRD candidate was further damaged by the open support of Chávez, Fidel Castro, and President Evo Morales of Bolivia, bolstering Calderón's portrayal of López Obrador as part of a Latin American trend toward authoritarian leftism. Coupled with López Obrador's refusal to participate in the first of a series of televised debates, López Obrador gave up a ten point lead within a month, and on election day the uninspiring Calderón was ahead in many polls.

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[270]Ibid, ch. 6.
[271]Ibid, ch. 7.
[272]Associated Press, June 26, 2006. “Mexican Rivals Have Different World Views.” http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,201026,00.html Retrieved 5/11/10.
[273] López Obrador, Andrés Manuel. 2004, ch. 14.
[274]Harman, Dana. May 2, 2006. “A Conservative Takes the Lead in Mexico Race.” *The Christian Science Monitor*. World, p. 1. Lexis Nexis Academic. 5/13/10.

When the official election returns showed a near-statistical tie and only months later found Calderón the winner, López Obrador rejected the outcome as fraudulent and the work of an electoral institute in the thrall of a conservative conspiracy. He demanded that every vote cast across the country be recounted, and when denied denounced not only his opponents but the Federal Election Institute as "a pawn of the party of the right."[275] Declaring himself the "legitimate president" he established a parallel government and issued plans for a reform of the nation's political institutions and the Constitution. Above all, López Obrador viewed himself as the defender of democracy. Gathering tens of thousands of supporters in the central square of Mexico City, López Obrador shut down the heart of the city while vowing to remain until his presidency was recognized. In the following weeks López Obrador refused to back down or negotiate a compromise. "If we negotiate, if we allow ourselves to be coopted, if we sell ourselves out, we would be dealing a huge blow to the national democratic movement and therefore the minority, and a neofascist oligarchy would always decide Mexico's destiny."[276]

The traditionally staid inauguration of the president before a deferent Congress became a sideshow. When finally given the opportunity to take the oath of office after physical altercations and opposition legislators blocked the halls of Congress, Calderón was obliged to stand before a hostile crowd filled with supporters of López Obrador jeering both Fox and Calderón in a ceremony that lasted all of four minutes before the new president ducked out amid a circle of supporters.[277]

López Obrador's stridency caused a rift within the PRD itself. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas lent only tepid support to López Obrador during the campaign, and pointedly refused to back the

[275]Grayson, 2007, op cit, p. 257.
[276] Quoted in Edmonds-Poli, Emily, and David A. Shirk. 2009. *Contemporary Mexican Politics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, p. 115.
[277] McKinley, James. December 6, 2006. "Calderón takes oath as Mexico's president." *The New York Times*.http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/01/news/01iht-mexico.html?_r=1.

losing candidate's perpetual sit-in. In a letter to the noted author and advisor to López Obrador, Elena Poniatowski, Cárdenas deplored what he referred to as the "intolerance and demonization, the dogmatic attitude . . . toward those who do not accept unconditionally his propositions . . ." and lamented that these characteristics appeared to be an ever more ingrained feature within the PRD itself.[278]

The party's fortunes have waned since the 2006 election, its representation dropping in the Congress in the midterm election of 2009 and suffering bruising internecine conflicts over leadership and internal governance. Indeed, the party has experienced cycles as its star rose with Cárdenas in 1988 and López Obrador, but leveled off or decreased after these popular candidates failed to win the presidency. The party has also failed to attract a wide base of support among civil society and non-governmental organizations, perhaps due to an organizational failure in securing ties to a wider social movement.[279] López Obrador's recalcitrance did not sit well with the general public either. After the election controversy began to fade, López Obrador's popularity flagged and his once monumental rallies began to dwindle away.[280]

Despite the factional troubles within the PRD and discontent with López Obrador's posturing, his candidacy struck a well-spring of discontent within the Mexican population. His populist message struck a chord particularly among the poor—still a large percentage of the population—and frustrated middle classes. Though the Mexican economy has performed well, it did not grow at the pace promised by Fox and the expansion in employment promised by Calderón, who promised to be the "jobs president," has not materialized at a rate sufficient to

[278] Cárdenas, Cuauhtémoc. September 14, 2006. "Carta enviada por Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas a Elena Poniatowska." *El Universal*. http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/375156.html.
[279] Bruhn, Kathleen. 1997. "6. The Seven-Month Itch? Neoliberal Politics, Popular Movements, and the Left in Mexico." *The New Politics of Inequality in Latin America.* Oxford Scholarship Online Monographs. 1:144-70.
[280] McKinley, James. July 2, 2007. "A Year Later, A Mexican Leftist's Tone is Subdued." *The New York Times.* http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/02/world/americas/02mexico.html?_r=1

ease the serious pain felt by much of the nation's working class and only exacerbated by the economic crisis beginning in 2008.

The election telescopes the political history of Mexico since the 1980s. The election congealed two competing narratives, one centering on the continuation of the political and economic liberalization as embodied by Calderón, the other a defense of the old order spearheaded by López Obrador.

Ambivalence of The New Democracy

Polls conducted after the election found that thirty nine percent believed that the election had been tainted by fraud of some kind and twenty eight percent believed that López Obrador had been legitimately elected. Though fifty one percent believed the election to have been clean, that more than a quarter of the population believed the president to have been fraudulently elected in what was one of the most freely contested and transparent elections in Mexican history speaks volumes about the willingness of a large proportion of the population to attribute dishonesty to public officials of any party.[281]

Though the worst excesses of the corrupt PRI system are in the past there are signs that the antique style of previous generations has not been extinguished, and newer participants are springing up to take advantage of the more open atmosphere, without obviously contributing to substantive political debate.

In addition to the three major parties, a host of smaller parties compete for votes. Nueva Alianza acts primarily as a personalist vehicle for Elba Esther Gordillo, the leader of the SNTE and former top-ranking member of the PRI now allied with the PAN. The Partido Verde

[281] Harrington, Patrick. September 5, 2006. "Calderon May be Named Mexico's Next President by Court." Bloomberg. Com. http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=aMUqsi8X8yOY&refer=news.

Ecologista de Méxic (PVEM), ostensibly a green party, has been accused of similarly of being a nepotistic network of corruption. The Partido de los Trabajadores (PT), another leftist party of relatively recent vintage, also operates sometimes seemingly without scruple. Convergencia, a center left party was created when the founder's ambitions were frustrated within the PRI. Added to the sometimes personalist practices of parties, politicians regularly change parties in order to seek greater opportunities for advancement, making the choice among parties less meaningful.[282]

The presidential election of 2006 was not anomalous. The rancor that spilled over in the election survives. State and local elections are regularly bitter affairs that lead to conflicting claims of victory, charges of abuse of power, and violent confrontations.[283]

López Obrador calls those who would consider a reform of the oil sector "traitors to the *patria*" and promises a national civil resistance movement in resistance of any movement toward privatization.[284] López Obrador has himself been called a "psychopath of great danger" by a prominent senator of the PAN and former presidential candidate.[285]

Many other members of the legislature have joined in the act, condemning Calderón as a fraudulent imposition of a corrupt clique. López Obrador and other left-wing critics point to ties between the PAN and a shadowy ultra-right group known as *El Yunque*, or the Anvil, that is supposedly bent on infiltrating the government and creating a Catholic theocracy.[286]

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[282] Barrow, Lynda K. 2007. "Party On? Politicians and Party Switching in Mexico." *Politics* 27 (3):165-73.
[283]See e.g. Horacio Jiménez. April 27, 2010. "PAN acusa a Herrera de manipular la justicia." *El Universal*. http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/75669.html; Luis A. Boffil Gómez Monday, May 17, 2010. "Proclaman PRI y AN triunfo en la presidencia municipal de Mérida." *La Jornada*. http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2010/05/17/index.php?section=estados&article=032n1est.; Mauricio Ferrer. June 23, 2009. "Denuncia AN amenazas a 20 candidatos en Jalisco." *La Jornada*. http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/06/23/index.php?section=estados&article=030n2est.
[284]Gobierno Legítimo de México. February 17, 2008. "Para defender el petróleo habrá resistencia civil pacífica mayor a la que originó el fraude de Calderón: AMLO." http://www.amlo.org.mx/noticias/comunicados.html?id=62301
[285]*El Economista.* June 24, 2009. "AMLO 'psicópata de alta peligrosidad." http://eleconomista.com.mx/notas-online/politica/2009/06/24/amlo-sicopata-alta-peligrosidad-cevallos.
[286]See e.g. Ortega, Miguel Ángel. "Cara, la extrema derecha de El Yunque." *Revista Contralínea*. http://www.contralinea.com.mx/c16/html/politica/cara.html

The PAN in power has left an ambivalent record. The party of democratic transformation has been a disappointment to those who hoped for the party to transform the clientelistic and top-heavy style of governance of the PRI regime. This is due partly, of course, to the entrenched power centers at state and local levels, and resistance from opposition parties at the national level.

It is also apparent, though, that the PAN's leaders have found that enthusiasm that accompanied the transition difficult to maintain once in power. Many Mexicans believe that little has changed, and perceptions of corruption have increased. In attitudes toward democracy and government performance, Mexico consistently ranks among the most skeptical countries in Latin America. While a clear majority, 56%, say they would not support a military government under any circumstances, this leaves a troublesomely large minority that would.[287] Fifty-eight percent believe the military should remove the president from office if he should violate the Constitution.[288] Furthermore, twenty-seven percent believe that a military coup is possible, leaving only three other countries in Latin America with higher scores. Such a number is remarkable given that the military's as an institution has played no role in politics for nearly nine decades. When given a choice among regime types, Mexicans choose democracy as the best form of government at a rate of forty two percent, the lowest in Latin America. Eleven percent of the population considers the country “totally democratic,” a percentage higher only than Peru and Bolivia.[289]

After ten years of new leadership the public remains ambivalent toward democracy, institutions are weak and elites divided, and old corporatist clientelistic practices remain intact.

[287]Corporación Latinobarómetro. 2009. Informe 2009, p. 13.
[288]Ibid, p. 14.
[289]Ibid.

This situation raises the question of how far the democracy has come and how far it may go, a question discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 8

TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF SYMBOLIC ENGINEERING

To recall from Chapter One, Fukuyama wrote that democratic consolidation takes place at the deepest level of political culture, the foundation of other institutional and behavioral requirements. The primary motivation of this study has been to provide an interpretive account of political culture to ground institutional and behavioral theories of political outcomes, and its underlying theoretical approach has been to analyze overarching symbolic narratives as shapers of political discourse. The intention here has not been to tell a direct causal story of a political cultural variable producing authoritarianism, but to make a contribution to the understanding of the complex whole of political interaction produced by the interplay of ideas and institutions.

The symbolic narratives described here achieved dominant status, but are themselves also the consequence of structural conditions. Beginning with independence, political elites operated within a context of the authoritarian and hierarchical colonial regime. The Mexican elites participated in and contributed to their development and dissemination as part of a discourse taking as its point of departure the bequest from Spanish monarchism. Liberals saw themselves as obliged to direct state power to uproot that heritage, and the results were the authoritarianisms of Juárez and Díaz. Succeeding regimes similarly felt the weight of the past in their need to rewrite the terms of social interaction.

Such symbolic narratives thus dominate the public discourse and are the beginning point for participation in political communication, though they are themselves the product of the

attempts to understand and change the current dispensation. These symbolic narratives are part of a tapestry of individuals, institutions, and ideas in which causes and outcomes are inseparable. Part of the value in this approach lies in preserving an important place for culture while overcoming the timelessness of earlier cultural theories which exclude space for significant political changes. By recognizing the contextual shaping of political narratives—the evolutionary branching of symbolic narratives from earlier conflicts and consensuses—it makes a space for continuity within change. The result in Mexico was nearly two hundred years of overbearing state power.

To again invoke Elkins and Simeon, political culture is the "the nature of the political game." The nature of Mexico's political game has concerned, at its core, the remaking of a backward society through enlightened state leadership. The foregoing chapters have detailed the evolution of symbolic narratives beginning with the contest of liberals and conservative narratives, one with the purpose to uproot and destroy the old regime, another to defend its bases. Both factions pursued their ends in much the same way, attacking the other as illegitimate and enlisting the masses as clients, acting in their name, the name of the nation that they each hoped to create. Each successive regime supplied an interpretation of the past and present, and was in turn challenged by a reconfiguration of important symbols. The Reform, the Porfiriato, the Revolution and the PRI served as symbols contested by their protagonists and antagonists alike. These symbols have been the battlegrounds of Mexican politics.

For two hundred years confrontational utopias have been constructed and the ends of the state contested. When a consensus is constructed and successfully implemented, it has been around an all-encompassing narrative that extends the scope of the state widely. Narratives respond to social conditions—such as the facts of the colony, decades of war, centralized rule—

and political elites have historically responded with despotism, which itself became fact with which politics has to deal as new counter-narratives are constructed.

The centralized, hierarchical control of previous regimes handed the preponderance of control to individuals and small groups since independence. These institutional arrangements were constructed as necessities for the greater good, bestowing the pretense of legitimacy to the victors of the reform war, to Díaz, and to the winners of the Revolution. Symbolic narratives both make possible the structures of power and are reproduced by them. They are, in a some sense, impossible to escape.

The effects of these battles linger, the country still lives in the house built by Juárez, Díaz and the PRI. Parties are used as vehicles for personalist advancement, demonstrations and strikes provoke violence in the streets, and armed rebels continue to advocate total rejection of the political system, though with little support. Amid it all, reformers have carved out a space in which respect for democracy and institutions is central. This is the historical legacy of the past grand, transformational narratives, and continuity thus derives from the confrontation with centuries of authoritarian rule. Liberals, *científicos*, and revolutionaries all strove for transformation and in doing so laid the foundations for abusive regimes.

The New Conflict

It is possible that as the democratic reformist narrative gains ground and establishes terms of political communication that repudiate the authoritarian past, the groundwork for democratic consolidation is being laid. Now any political actor who wishes to be taken seriously must partake of the discourse on reform and democratization of the state with the purported aim of limiting its reach. Has, then, this liberalization of political culture that will herald the

consolidation of liberal democracy perhaps already occurred? Is it the end of the grand transformational aspirations that have historically placed political elites at odds with each other and beyond accountability?

There is, as yet, no grand national narrative that has replaced the PRI's revolutionary story. There are competing stories, as is always the case; there is always a pool of narratives that, under the proper circumstances, may gain currency, and dominant narratives have always been challenged by counter-narratives. The conservative ideology of the PAN would appear on the surface to have replaced the corporatist controlling narrative of the Revolution. The PAN cannot escape history, however, and the interplay of symbolic narratives continues.

The PAN presidents were propelled into office based on the consensus around the plan to restructure the political process and reduce the reach of the state. The plan of AMLO and the tattered remains of the doctrinaire elements of the PRD, on the other hand, is largely a return to the revolutionary dogma of the Cárdenas years. To the extent that this poses a threat to the consolidation of democracy, the concern is not his policy proposals for international trade or for uplifting the poor, but his attempts to revivify the grand transformational symbolic narrative that imbued the revolutionary regime with a symbolic cover in its exclusionary and undemocratic practices. In his fervor to declare himself winner of the 2006 election, he perhaps opened a window into what a López Obrador government would have looked like, and it bore a strong resemblance to some of the uglier aspects of the PRI regime.

The reformers' plan has provoked the ire of those segments committed to the revolutionary nationalist symbolic narrative. Control over oil, protection of the national patrimony, the indigenous poor, are seen as under assault by traitors. There has emerged a new liberal-conservative divide, this time the left-leaning nationalists playing the part of the

conservatives and the reformers the part of the liberals. There is again a permutation of the conflict over transformative narratives, a conflict over the ends of politics. As liberals, porfirians, and revolutionaries saw their opposition as inconsistent with the aims of the Mexican nation, as on the wrong side of history, so to do these interlocutors. The politicians of the PAN are themselves drawn into the fray, denigrating their opposition—sometimes the PRI and sometimes the PRD—as backward looking, allies of the authoritarian left; supporters of López Obrador tar the government as the stooges of fascists, or of domestic and international capital.

The situation of uncertainty of direction has, of course, occurred before. Mexican political culture wavers as it did before the consolidation of the Juárez Liberal regime and the Revolution. The first decade of the twentieth century is comparable to the pre-Reform era, in which conservatives and liberals battled to define the symbolic vocabulary of Mexican politics, and to the revolutionary years before the founding of the PNR, before its radical populist nationalism was encoded in the Constitution and given voice by the *cardenistas*; Krauze compared the situation in 2006 to that in 1911, wherein Madero faced an array of institutional and social problems that ultimately gave way to further violence and finally the PRI regime. Now the country confronts similarly monumental challenges that can only be met by essential agreement of major political actors concerning "the major objectives of the state."[290] This is precisely, though, what is lacking and what drives the current conflict.

In the past, dominant symbolic narratives have changed only after an agonizing civil conflict stretching over decades in the case of the liberal-conservative divide, and more rapidly, as the doctrinaire liberalism of the restored republic morphed into the positivistic, conservative-liberalism of the Porfiriato, and through the construction of the revolutionary nationalist narrative in the wake of revolutionary violence of 1910 to 1920. And in these cases, there was a

[290]Krauze, Enrique. 2006. "Furthering Democracy in Mexico." *Foreign Affairs* 85 (1):54-65.

good measure of continuity from one period to the next. Further, there was nothing necessary in the successful employment of any of these particular narratives. Relying on the past to predict either the pace or direction of change in the future would, therefore, be a hazardous venture. It has been noted above that efforts to predict cultural change based have been largely unsuccessful and there is no sure method to identify a democratic consolidation in the offing. We may, however, identify some of the most likely possibilities based on the current configuration of political forces, though they are unlikely to be exhaustive of the potential outcomes over the long term.

One possibility is the construction of a renewed, modernized revolutionary nationalist narrative. Though the PRD is in disarray and López Obrador has lost popularity, the conditions that propelled his ascent remain: corruption, inequality and widespread poverty. Another charismatic figure with a similarly populist message of social justice and national renewal might effectively fashion a coalition cultivating the still fertile revolutionary nationalist symbolic narrative and pose a credible challenge for the presidency. Though unlikely to resemble the belligerent authoritarianism of Hugo Chávez, such a movement could attempt to counter the efforts of the PAN governments and lead to further confrontation with these reformers and perhaps patch together a renewed vision of national transformation similar to that of the PRI regime and similarly harmful to transparency and the rule of law. Such an event would likely depend on the cooptation of a large sector of civil society and, given the reforms of the previous decades, this appears a less likely outcome. It bears remembering, however, that Venezuela was long hailed as a model for democratic consolidation in South America before mutating into its current, ambiguous state.

A second possibility is that social corrosion, economic misfortune, and criminality give rise to a narrative emphasizing a strong hand in the taming of an unruly society, a replay of the porfirist ideology of "peace, order, and progress." Pacifying the country was among the chief goals Díaz and his iron-fisted control and taming of a wild countryside among his most compelling claims to success. The Porfiriato rested on the premise that the disorder inherent in the Mexican nation made self-government impossible. Now the country faces the worst spate of violence since the Revolution, and the Calderón administration's attempts to impose order through military means raises concerns of militarization of the country. Though seemingly far-fetched given that civilians have overseen the political system since the 1930s and the Mexican military has not shown enthusiasm to take a direct part in politics, more than a quarter of the population believes a military coup is probable.[291] The drug-fueled violence that has erupted in the past four years shows few signs of abatement, and poses a danger to democratic consolidation if public officials and the public demand peace even at the cost of rolling back the forward strides of democratization.

The third possibility is stasis. For four decades after independence the country teetered between two factions pressing inconsistent programs. It is conceivable that none of the major factions in competition today are successful in capturing the public imagination fully, and the public discourse wavers between the populist brand of conservatism and democratic-reformist liberalism. The result would likely be a perpetual state of near-crisis, with occasional lurches toward one faction or the other and a divided public, which would bring the possibility of continued mistrust among parties, and of the public's mistrust for parties and state institutions. Indeed, the longterm outcome of the democratic transition in Mexico might be a consolidated illiberal democracy. The corporatist inclinations of the PAN in power and its willingness to

[291]Corporación Latinobarómetro. 2009. "Informe 2009," p. 9. available at http://www.latinobarometro.org/

adopt some of the PRI's tactics may also signal that whichever party that finds itself in power could be willing to abandon reform and revert to older forms of the twentieth century politicking, muting the possibility of democratic consolidation. In view of recent events, this currently appears the most likely outcome.

A fourth possibility, and the happiest prospect for liberals, is that the democratic impulses of the reformers within the PAN—but also the PRI and PRD—takes root among political actors and a consensus emerges around limiting the scope of the state, of respecting opposition and limiting the power of public officials. The PAN's narrative is essentially that of moderate liberals of the nineteenth century, who sought democratization and limitation of state power, and respect for the rule of law. If the PAN's original vision of a decentralized, democratic and individualistic society prevails, the country may be set on a path toward democratic consolidation in the long term. There is no requirement, further, that the reformist narrative be championed by the PAN. The social democratic goals of the nationalist left-wing are not in themselves inimical to democratic consolidation, and the amelioration of extreme poverty and inequality may be essential to the stabilization of the regime. Rather, the historical context in which grand transformative narratives have contested makes a democratic social democracy difficult to distinguish from the revolutionary nationalism of the old PRI. A liberal and democratic left, however, may as easily play the role of reforming force as the PAN, and may indeed be essential in establishing a pluralistic party system that offers genuine policy choices to voters. There is, at the moment, however, no well-organized and competitive left-wing movement that counts the rule of law and the limitation of power among its chief goals.

A Member of the Liberal Family?

This study has emphasized the continual evolution of symbolic narratives beginning in the independence period. As has been argued, new narratives have arisen as responses to the foregoing dominant narratives. As a result, the predominant Mexican narratives have continued to display illiberal features that emphasize the role of the state and its representatives in remaking society. Is there now a liberal symbolic narrative gaining predominance that will contribute to democratic consolidation?

The democratic impulses of earlier liberals were subordinated to their grand plans. Now twenty-first century liberals find the most auspicious opportunity for long-term democratic consolidation, given the slow-moving institutional evolution of the past several decades and the multivocal nature of the public space. Though not the individualistic and egalitarian utopia dreamed of by early liberals, conditions approximate those necessary for a liberal democratic political system through the presence of institutional guarantees. The rights to political participation and opposition are for the most part respected. No one party or elite group is able to dominate political communication as in the past and there is as yet no consensus. At no other time in history has the regnant symbolic narrative, still only emerging, bore so close a resemblance to the liberal family tree. These conditions are permissive only, and the political cultural requirement is not yet met, leading to both possibility and to conflict.

The reformist camp is advantaged by the emphasis on participation indelibly integrated into the national consciousness by the Revolution and the current international nostrum hailing democracy. Mexico is furthermore a largely, but imperfectly, pluralist country, with a free media and active civil society. Institutional arrangements alone cannot complete consolidation, but require the additional respect for a democratic process founded on rule of law and the rights of

political adversaries, as noted by the scholars of consolidation reviewed in Chapter One. The conclusion of this study is that consolidation will hinge on consensus around a new national narrative that recognizes this respect as a primary goal for politics, and on the end of grand narratives promising the renovation of the nation and elimination of political enemies. Change, even fundamental change, is not necessarily removed from political goals, but these must be accompanied by the normative acceptance of pluralism, of political equality, and the rule of law as intrinsically valuable.

As symbolic narratives always arise out of a national discourse rather than springing into being without antecedents, this narrative would be the product of a reengineering of native symbolic material. And the symbolic material is undoubtedly present in the independence movement and liberal pantheon of the nineteenth century; the Revolution's inclusive vision of a Mexico comprised of all races and social classes; the forbearance and peaceful struggle of the PAN and the reform movement headed by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. These constitutive elements are essentially liberal in their character and, importantly, are not an imposition from above.

Whether such a narrative might become the predominant mode of communication depends on how well it addresses the subjective needs of the nation. Wedeen compares symbolic communication to advertising that combines consumers' desires with claims about products, shaping people's identities.[292] Similarly, successful narratives, those that achieved dominant status, fulfilled certain needs, answering pressing questions about the way forward for a nation at a crossroads. Mexican narratives responded to the crises at independence and the war of Reform, lawlessness, of despotism and inequality of the Porfiratio. Mexico is again at such a crossroads, and will again decide what sort of nation it is to be and what sort of story to tell about itself.

[292] Wedeen, Lisa. 1999. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 19.

Implications and Further Research

This study has focused on the grand sweep of history since independence and on the national-level narratives that have gained the widest currency. There are, of course, local variations in the employment and acceptance of the national narratives. Further studies might take a lower-range focus on how political narratives operate on regional and sectoral levels. How, for instance, did regimes such as the PRI's employ revolutionary imagery in the construction of patron-client relationships with the labor movement and peasants? How did the PAN establish its narrative in the states where it was most successful, for example in Baja California? What local contextual conditions allowed its success?

This study has also dealt primarily with the most powerful explicitly political power-brokers because the authoritarian nature of the political process has for most of its independence centralized decision-making, and the clientelistic nature of politics has historically made independent civil society activity difficult. In the latter twentieth century, though, civil society has expanded in scope and activity, and has sometimes been attributed with defeating authoritarian governments in itself. Research into the role of civil society in democratization could benefit from a sustained examination of Mexican civil society's participation in the consumption and reproduction of the symbolic counter-narratives that focus discontent and organize action.

Also of import to the agenda of comparative politics is the expansion of the theoretical application to the illumination of the politics of different countries. The study conceives of symbolic narratives as the major component of political culture and national politics as revolving around a “plot” composed of symbolic elements peculiar to each national context. A comparative study of Latin American symbolic narratives and the functioning of political institutions would

extend this project and provide further insights into symbolic politics. All countries are unique, of course, but various Latin American countries display “anomalous” political outcomes in democratic performance, for example. Are there identifiable differences in the national narratives of democratic Costa Rica and the rest of Central America, or similarities between those of Costa Rica and similarly democratic Uruguay?

Such a research project would contribute not only to the deeper understanding of the politics of particular countries, but has the capacity to contribute to a truly comparative enterprise. Furthermore, the usage of a interpretive account holds great promise for the objective understanding of political outcomes given its sustained attention to historical particularities. It bears remembering, of course, that while objectivity in explaining the evolution of political systems and potential for democratic consolidation is the chief goal, we need not pretend to abandon our preference for liberal democracy.

The type of investigation undertaken here is not limited, of course, to democratization and democratic consolidation and may be fruitfully employed in studies concerning a variety of political phenomena. At the heart of much political activity is persuasion, and political narratives do much of the work in persuading people of their interests. Human rights groups, business associations, labor movements, feminist groups, all strive to change groups' political thinking, but without necessarily challenging the foundations of the regime. These movements employ the same type of political narratives that revolutionary movements and governments use in securing their ends for the entire society. Geertz, for instance, analyzed the symbolic rhetoric of union activists in attempts to influence legislation.[293] Attention to these kinds of symbolic communication could illuminate all manner of political activity in any nearly all contexts. Human rights groups attempt to ingrain the notion of the inviolability of individual rights in the

[293] Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures; Selected Essays*. New York,: Basic Books, pp. 209-211.

public imagination, for example, while business groups attempt to equate looser regulation with greater prosperity and freedom.

More broadly my hope is to contribute to avenues of research that place greater attention on the role of ideas in the political world. Politics is driven to a large extent by competing conceptions of the best organization of society, and these conceptions motivate people to all manner of actions. There is an important role for the social scientist to play in the interpretation of these conceptions that can add an important dimension to our institutional and behavioral understandings of politics.

In conclusion, it should be stressed again that political outcome is contingent. The political situation in Mexico at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century is on balance positive, and the possibility of a consolidated democracy is better than ever before. Complimenting institutional change, the public discourse has turned toward democracy and accountability more than in any prior period. Nonetheless, as has been stated, public discourse is mutable and unpredictable, and it the achievement of a consolidated democracy in Mexico will depend on the full transformation of the social matrix comprised of people, their intentions for politics and the institutional setting in which they operate.

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