

Presentation

CRISIS AND ADJUSTMENT. GOVERNMENT, SOCIETY AND POLITICS AT THREE KEY MOMENTS

When Octavio Paz received the Alexis de Tocqueville Award from the hands of French President François Mitterrand in June 1989, he announced the death of Revolution or, better, of what he and other thinkers have called the revolutionary myth that formed the backbone of the project of modernity after the triumph of the French Revolution. That myth was dying a natural death due to the steady advance of what various intellectuals and politicians of the time denominated democratic liberalism, not stabbed by some saintly counterrevolutionary Alliance intent on restoring the *ancien régime*.¹ But beyond bringing the ideas of Paz and 1980s' neoliberalism into discussion, we propose this datum as the guiding thread of reflections on the spirit of the epoch (*zeitgeist*) in which those words were penned, for they symbolize the transcendental change that transpired in many aspects of Western life, changes from which academia was not immune.

By 1985 in the USSR, Gorbachov was implementing reforms in an attempt to free up the ossified regime that had emerged from the 1917 Revolution. Then, November 1989 saw the beginnings of the demoli-

¹ Octavio Paz, "Poesía, mito, revolución", in *Vuelta*, 152 (July, 1989): 8-12.

tion of the Berlin Wall, and February 1990, the fall of Daniel Ortega and his *Sandinista* government Violeta Chamorro in elections in Nicaragua, followed, in December, by Lech Walesa's –the historic leader of *Solidarność*– ascension to the presidency of Poland that inaugurate the return to a free-market economy that mirrored concurrent developments in other countries of the Cold War communist bloc. Paz' words were, after all, a reflection on a world where radical change and revolutionary movements had ceased to be the means for resolving social, economic and political crises, having ceded their role to 'transitions' and reform-minded 'adjustments'; reforms, we now know, that almost always brought chaotic, unpredictable results.

History and the social sciences were also undergoing radical change at that time. The 1970s and 80s had witnessed the growing critique of explanations of historical reality based on the methods of a social-scientific history whose axis –according to its critics– “was faith in modernization as a positive force”² that would generate profound changes in the 1990s. In political science, this extreme criticism was represented by the famous ‘death certificate’ for history issued by Fukuyama;³ but in other domains the crisis gave rise to new research topics and re-oriented methodologies in such disciplines as anthropology and history. The macro-analyses framed in grand socioeconomic structures focused on the most important and visible political junctures –with revolutions as their paradigm, of course– faded away, their place taken by microanalyses that paid less attention to measuring the modernizing advance of grand transformations –in terms of progress, success or failure– than to understanding incremental, continuous mutations; that is, everyday adjustments of the system. Somehow, the focus shifted from revolutions to reforms.

Written from the perspectives of history and anthropology, the four texts in the Thematic Section of this issue of *Relaciones* share this

² Georg G. Iggers, *La historiografía del siglo xx. Desde la objetividad científica al desafío posmoderno* (Santiago de Chile: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012), 167.

³ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?”, *The National Interest*, 9 (summer, 1989): 3-18.

meticulous approach to analyzing aspects that might go unnoticed if not for a genuine interest in dissecting systemic complexes. Moreover, all four essays examine phenomena at a micro level that is, somehow, introduced into a dialogue with far-reaching conjunctural phenomena as a function of their importance as elements present in transitions. Francisco Eissa-Barroso examines changes in the profiles of the officials in charge of provincial governments, taking as his example the *corregimiento* of Veracruz in a period when the war of dynastic succession set off a crisis of governability that had to be resolved. In response, Felipe V opted to militarize government offices in what was one of the earliest, significant attempts to re-structure the apparatuses of government and the administration of justice in what would become a recurring concern for Hispanic kings throughout the 18th century, as evidenced by the grand shifts that occurred during the reign of Carlos III. The attention given to such an apparently simple phenomenon as the socio-professional origins of government functionaries acquires importance when related to other aspects of the process.

Alejandra M. Leal Martínez makes a pluri-secular leap that takes us to Mexico in the aftermath of the devastating 1985 earthquake, revealing a civil society that showed a great capacity for organization and response in the face of crisis. Her narrative is broadly structured around the emergence of a social solidarity that quickly morphed into a seizing of power by society from the ineffective, disorganized government of Mexico City. The idea of a citizenry that became democratized and a society that demonstrated its autonomy in response to that crisis by confronting the neoliberal State gains strength when, in addition to the processes that she discusses Leal Martínez situates this empowerment of civil society in 1985 between the political reform of 1977 and the recomposition of political and social forces during the electoral scenario of 1988, two key elements that help frame her narrative. Indeed, the author's analysis never ceases to surprise us and raise a challenge with the proposal that, instead of reading this phenomenon simply as a reaction to the imposition of neoliberal economic policies, we should comprehend it in another key: the creation of a neoliberal common sense within society.

The articles by Brian Connaughton and José Antonio Serrano Ortega examine a period of transition closely-related to the process of Mexico's independence. But their analyses of the issues involved adopt perspectives that set aside the grand revolutionary process to focus on elements of political culture. Connaughton explains in detail the emergence and continuity of a reformist constitutionalism that paid special attention to the relations between the civil and ecclesiastical powers after the experience of the battles with Bourbon royalism. Taking the Constitution of Cadiz as his focal point, he traces the continuity of political ideas from the late 18th century to 1821, defining them as political-religious constitutionalism, and exemplifying them with events in the region of El Bajío. But this text also offers a deep, critical review of recent historiography on this topic. Serrano Ortega, in turn, analyzes the performance of the *diputación provincial de Guanajuato* and its relations with local governments (*ayuntamientos*) in the two-year period, 1822-1824. He begins with a review of fiscal aspects and the control strategies implemented in an effort to constrain the administrative autonomy of local government, and how those measures set off more than a few conflicts. One important point of Serrano's analysis is that it propitiates discussion of some conclusions reached by earlier historiography regarding the importance of the *ayuntamientos* in political life in Mexico in the first half of the 19th century.

In the Documents Section of this issue, Julian A. Velasco presents a list of employments from around 1787 in the province of Tunja in the Nuevo Reino de Granada. The elaboration of such lists was not an uncommon practice under the Spanish Monarchy, as we find them continuously from the 17th century on.

The General Section opens with an article by Onésimo Chávez and Jacinta Palerm that discusses the processes of the establishment, mobilization and dissolution of an organization that for twenty-three years brought together diverse Zapotec communities located in the Sierra de Juárez. Called originally the *Alianza de Pueblos Unificados* (Alliance of Unified Towns), and later the *Organización Independiente de Pueblos Unidos del Rincón* (Independent Organization of the United Towns of Rincón), this collective chan-

neled the shared demands of several towns in the Sierra from 1978 to 2002.

In his article, Daniel Añorve proposes a particularly thought-provoking reflection on identity and volatility in the configuration of postmodern culture based on an analysis of the world of soccer and the changes it has undergone since 1981. Finally, Déborah Oropeza introduces us to a migratory phenomenon that, though little-studied, had far-reaching consequences, especially of a cultural nature; namely, migration from Asia to New Spain from 1565 to 1700. This was a complex movement involving diverse, heterogeneous groups that left an indelible mark on the society and culture of New Spain and, later, Mexico.

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