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# Politicians, Narcos, Missing Students, and Mexico's Crisis

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Alexander Dawson



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## Politicians, Narcos, Missing Students, and Mexico's Crisis

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### Abstract:

Taking the September 2014 disappearance of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Normal School in rural Guerrero State as its point of departure, this paper explores the interlinking experiences of government corruption, narco-trafficking, and elite privilege as they have played out through the larger social crisis that followed the disappearances. I argue that the fissures within Mexican responses to Ayotzinapa reveal a great deal about the ways that racial and class privilege continue to characterize civil-society movements in Mexico. Broad, civil-society coalitions to combat political corruption, impunity and violence have been difficult to sustain here, a problem that has been particularly striking given the spectacular nature of the recent waves of violence in Mexico. This paper argues that it is the entrenched nature of middle-class and elite dependence on class and racial privilege that ultimately makes those alliances unthinkable.

### About the author:

Alexander Dawson is a historian of Modern Mexico with a PhD from SUNY-Stony Brook (1997). He is the author of *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Arizona, 2004), *First World Dreams: Mexico Since 1989* (Zed, 2006), and *Latin America since Independence* (Routledge, 2010, 2014). He has published articles in the *Journal of Latin American Studies*, *The Americas*, *Latin American Perspectives*, and the *Hispanic American Historical Review*. He is currently working on a book titled *Peyote Wars* (under contract with the University of California Press) which examines the ways peyote, whiteness, and indigeneity have been linked over time in Mexico and the United States by indigenous peoples, ecclesiastical authorities, government officials, and others. It also explores the ways in which the boundaries created around peyote and policed by various authorities have been blurred or crossed by a variety of actors since the colonial period.

### About the publisher:

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## Politicians, Narcos, Missing Students, and Mexico's Crisis

*The state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is.*

Philip Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State"<sup>1</sup>

On April 4, 2011, while grieving the death of his 24-year old son Juan Francisco, Javier Sicilia Ortega penned the following letter to Mexico's politicians and narcos:

The brutal assassination of my son, Juan Francisco, of Julio César Romero Jaime, of Luis Antonio Romero Jaime, and of Gabriel Anejo Escalera, is added to so many other boys and girls who have been assassinated just the same throughout the country, not only because of the war unleashed by the government of Calderón against organized crime, but also the rotting of the heart that has been wrought by the poorly labeled political class and the criminal class, which has broken its own codes of honor.

I do not wish, in this letter, to speak with you about the virtues of my son, which were immense, nor of those of the other boys that I saw flourish at his side, studying, playing, loving, growing, to serve, like so many other boys, this country that you all have shamed. Speaking of that doesn't serve for anything more than to move what already moves the heart of the citizenry to indignation. Neither do I wish to talk about the pain of my family and the families of each one of the boys who were destroyed. There are not words for this pain. Only poetry can come close to it, and you do not know about poetry. What I do wish to say to you today from these mutilated lives, from the pain that has no name because it is fruit of something that does not belong in nature – the death of a child is always unnatural and that's why it has no name: I don't know if it is orphan or widow, but it is simply and painfully nothing – from these, I repeat, mutilated lives, from this suffering, from the indignation that these deaths have provoked, it is simply that we have had it up to here.

We have had it up to here with you, politicians – and when I say politicians I do not refer to any in particular, but, rather, a good part of you, including those who make up the political parties – because in your fight for power you have shamed the fabric of the nation. Because in middle of this badly proposed, badly made, badly led war, this war that has put the country in a state of emergency, you have been incapable – due to your cruelties, your fights, your miserable screaming, your struggle for power – of creating the consensus that the nation needs to find the unity without which this country will not be able to escape. We have had it up to here because the corruption of the judicial institutions generates the complicity with crime and the impunity to commit it, because in the middle of that corruption that demonstrates the failure of the state, each citizen of this

country has been reduced to what the philosopher Giorgio Agamben called, using a Greek word, “zoe”: an unprotected life, the life of an animal, of a being that can be violated, kidnapped, molested and assassinated with impunity. We have had it up to here because you only have imagination for violence, for weapons, for insults and, with that, a profound scorn for education, culture, and opportunities for honorable work, which is what good nations do. We have had it up to here because your short imagination is permitting that our kids, our children, are not only assassinated but, later, criminalized, made falsely guilty to satisfy that imagination. We have had it up to here because others of our children, due to the absence of a good government plan, do not have opportunities to educate themselves, to find dignified work, and spit out onto the sidelines become possible recruits for organized crime and violence. We have had it up to here because the citizenry has lost confidence in its governors, its police, its army, and is afraid and in pain. We have had it up to here because the only thing that matters to you, beyond an impotent power that only serves to administrate disgrace, is money, the fomentation of rivalry, of your damn “competition,” and of unmeasured consumption which are other names of the violence.

As for you, the criminals, we have had it up to here with your violence, with your loss of honor, your cruelty and senselessness.

In days of old you had codes of honor. You were not so cruel in your paybacks and you did not touch the citizens nor their families. Now you do not distinguish. Your violence already can't be named because, like the pain and suffering that you provoke, it has no name nor sense. You have lost even the dignity to kill. You have become cowards like the miserable Nazi *sonderkommandos* who kill children, boys, girls, women, men and elders without any human sense. We have had it up to here because your violence has become *infrahuman* – not animal, as animals do not do what you do – but *subhuman*, demonic, imbecilic. We have had it up to here because in your taste for power and enrichment you humiliate our children and destroy them, producing fear and fright.

It is you, “señores” politicians, and you, “señores” criminals – in quotes because this epithet is given only to honorable people – are with your omissions, your fights and your actions, making the nation vile. The death of my son Juan Francisco has lifted up solidarity and a cry of indignation – that my family and I appreciate from the depth of our hearts – from the citizenry, and from the media. That indignation comes back anew to put in our ears the phrase that Martí directed at those who govern: “If you can't, then resign.” Putting this back in our ears – after the thousands of anonymous and not anonymous cadavers that we have at our backs, which is to say, of so many innocents assassinated and debased – this phrase must be accompanied by large citizen mobilizations that obligate you, at these moments of national emergency, to unite to create an agenda that unites the nation and believes in a state of real governability. The citizen networks of the state of Morelos are calling for a national march on Wednesday, April 6, that will leave at 5 pm from the monument of the Dove of Peace to the Government Palace, demanding justice and peace. If the citizenry does not unite in this and constantly reproduce it in all cities, in all towns and regions of the country, if we are not capable of obligating you, “señores” politicians, to govern with justice and dignity, and you, “señores” criminals, to retake your codes of honor and limit your savagery, the spiral this violence has generated will bring us on a path of horror without return. If you, “señores” politicians do not govern well and do not take seriously that we live in a state of national emergency that requires your unity, and you, “señores” criminals, do not limit your actions, you will end

up winning and having power but you will govern and reign over a mountain of ossuaries and of beings that are beaten and destroyed in their souls, a dream that none of us envy.

There is no life, Albert Camus wrote, without persuasion and without peace, and the history of Mexico today only knows intimidation, suffering, distrust and the fear that one day another son or daughter of another family will be debased and massacred. If you only knew what you are asking of us to accept - that death, as is already happening today, becomes an affair of statistics and administration and which we should all get used to.

Because we do not want this, next Wednesday we will go out into the street: because we do not want one more child, one more son, assassinated, the citizen networks of Morelos are calling for national citizen unity that we must keep alive to break the fear and isolation that the incapacity of you, "señores" politicians, and the cruelty of you, "señores" criminals, want us to put in our bodies and souls.

I remember, in this sense, some verses by Bertolt Brecht, when the horror of Nazism, which is to say the horror of the installation of crime in the daily life of a nation, appeared: "One day they came for the blacks, and I said nothing. Another day they came for the Jews, and I said nothing. One day they came for me (or for a son of mine) and I had nothing to say." Today, after so many crimes supported, when the destroyed body of my son and his friends has brought the citizenry to mobilize anew, and in the media we must speak with our bodies, with our walk, with our cry of indignation, so that those verses of Brecht are not made a reality in our country.

We must restore dignity to this nation.<sup>2</sup>

Written in the midst of acute grief, the desire to restore is first and foremost a desire to restore his son to life. Understood in that light, one can easily see Sicilia's choice of words. Something existed, was taken away, and must be restored. Given that his son cannot be returned, the nation stands in.

A little more than three years later, hundreds of relatives of the 43 disappeared students from Normal School in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, also demanded a restoration, but theirs was more concrete. They wanted the return of their children (their signs read "Los Queremos Vivos"), and insisted that they were still alive. Theirs too was a futile demand, and might be read as expression of their grief, their inability to accept that what we all knew was true. Most likely however, they do know the truth about their children. Their words instead express the impossibility of the only thing that will make it right. These words also express something much deeper; the fact that there is nothing that this state can do in order to fix what it has broken; that the only thing it can do is disappear itself. Far from being a naïve or grief-stricken denial of facts, Los Queremos Vivos can in fact be read as a refusal to acknowledge the existence of the very thing that killed their children. If there was a state, this never would have happened.

We can see similarities between their and Sicilia's grief, but something does not quite align. In his evocation of Agamben, Sicilia insists that Mexicans have been reduced to "bare life". He insists that their rights of citizenship have effectively been revoked, that they have been expelled from society and become "homo sacer" (sacred man), subject to be killed by anyone because the law no longer applied to them.<sup>3</sup> They have suffered the loss of personhood. And yet for the family members of the missing 43, it is not at all clear that they have lost personhood, so much as they never had it.

The subtle dissonances between Sicilia's words and the claims of the victims' families lie at the very heart of our challenge to understand Mexico's contemporary crisis. Liberals, intellectuals, middle-class Mexicans – those who more or less wound up on the winning side of globalization – shout "it was the state" as a means of pointing to a systematic failure, a state that has lost a legitimate claim on a monopoly of violence, that has failed to protect human rights, oddly echoing the now discredited paradigm of "state failure"<sup>4</sup> in part because they want to will a certain kind of state (a state that would protect their rights) into existence. Sometimes they even insist that Mexico is on its way to becoming a nation of laws, institutions and transparent governance,<sup>5</sup> and that this particular state, that of the well-coifed and undeniably criminal Enrique Peña Nieto, is simply an obstacle on that path. They likewise tend to bristle at those who extend the claim, who point out that something much larger than citizen safety and good government might be at stake; those who claim that the state that has provided them with comfortable lives did so through a system that relies on the super-exploitation of their poor, dark-skinned compatriots. And they have no real answer to the claims made by the families of the missing 43.

## **The Story of a Massacre**

First the unbelievable. On September 26, 2014, 43 students from the Escuela Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa, José Luis Hernández Rivera, said to be on their way to the annual commemoration of the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico City (to be held October 2) disappeared shortly after commandeering a group of buses in the nearby town of Iguala (six other students were killed in the confrontation that led to the kidnapping). The fact that they commandeered



the buses (some would say hijacked) was not unusual. They did this every year, and then every year returned the buses after their trip. That students from two of the commandeered buses disappeared without a trace was not normal. This region has a long history of violent politics, including several recent massacres, and only months earlier 31 people had gone missing in the nearby town of Cocula, but these disappearances were often attributed to some sort of guilt on the part of the disappeared. They were narcos, or working with the narcos. This did not seem to be the case for these students, who were poor, largely indigenous, and were attending one of the most radical teacher colleges in the country. They were likely revolutionaries, to be sure, but not narcos.

Mexico was already in a heightened state of tension when the story broke. The country's baby-faced president, Enrique Peña Nieto, had managed to sell a changed narrative of the country to the world (our drug war is receding, look at how we grow!), but young, urban Mexicans had been organizing around a variety of issues since before the election. He seemed like a fraud. There was a great deal of evidence that he had been the beneficiary of soft coverage from the country's television networks and all sorts of illegal campaign spending. Just three months before Ayotzinapa, Mexican army soldiers killed 22 in the town of Tlatlaya, Mexico, covering up the incident by planting evidence that suggested a prolonged firefight. According to the popular website *Animal Politico*, at least two senior generals knew about the incident and participated in the cover-up.<sup>6</sup>

There was a farcical quality to the news from Iguala following the September 26. Rumors circulating in town blamed María de los Ángeles Pineda, the wife of Jose Luis Abarca, the PRD (Mexico's erstwhile left-wing party) mayor of Iguala, for the kidnappings. It was said that de los Ángeles, who had political aspirations of her own and had close ties to a local drug gang known as the Guerreros Unidos, had ordered the students eliminated because they had threatened to disrupt a speech she was scheduled to deliver. The mayor and his wife went missing on September 30 (they were ultimately arrested in Mexico City on November 4). Local informants then led investigators to a mass grave with 28 bodies on October 5, though it turned out that it did not contain the remains of the students. On October 14, four more mass graves discovered,

again with remains that did not match the students. In all, local informants led government investigators to nine mass graves, none of which contained the remains of the students.

Given de los Ángeles' close ties to the PRD governor of the state, Ángel Aguirre (she was rumored to be his lover, and at the very least was reported regularly to send him suitcases full of cash from the local traffickers), it was easy to imagine that this was not simply a local affair. Protestors in Chilpancingo, the state capital, set fire to government buildings on October 13. On October 20 protestors set fire to a Government Social Assistance office, and on October 21 teachers from the state set fire to PRD headquarters in Chilpancingo. By October 22 protests were taking place across the country, including one in Mexico City that drew upwards of 50,000 demonstrators. Governor Aguirre resigned on October 23. Four days later police arrested four members of Guerreros Unidos, who in turn led them to a new mass grave in the town of Cocula.

Early on the protests in Guerrero had a violent cast. It is possible that the crowds were infiltrated by agitators, but the video footage suggests that here and in some other parts of the country (Oaxaca in particular) the crowds that assembled in these early days had blood on their minds. Making matters worse, in these regions police and soldiers responded to demonstrations with brute force, repeatedly attacking demonstrators and stoking their rage. The fires and destruction seemed to speak to long-standing and deep hostilities between the rural, mostly poor (and admittedly radical) campesinos and teachers who gathered in the demonstrations, and state agencies with a long history of using violence and terror to maintain order.

By contrast, the demonstrations that took place in Mexico City during these weeks were remarkable for their lack of violence. At first most of the demonstrators were university students, but as the weeks went by a loose arrangement of dissidents of all kinds – intellectuals, union leaders, parents with young children, school and university students – constituted a growing movement that seemed to threaten governability in the capital. Most seemed to be residents of Mexico City (the caravans of campesinos did not really start making their way to demonstrations in Mexico City until later in November), and echoed the language of Mexico's Movement against Delinquency, which had been organizing on the margins of civil society for nearly 20 years (a decade earlier they had organized one of the largest demonstrations in the history of the capital). Marchers spoke about their fatigue with violent crime, with the politicians who

themselves were often the authors of crime, with impunity and corruption. They spoke of creating a Mexico of laws, of rights, where citizens felt safe.

Their numbers swelled dramatically on November 8, 2014, the day after a press conference in which Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam announced that the students had been cremated at the Cocula garbage dump and thrown in a river. An Argentine forensics team with special skills at identifying these types of remains was on their way to investigate the site. He announced 80 arrests, including 44 police. Ending the press conference without taking questions from the victims' families in the audience, he announced "ya me canse" (I am tired/I have had enough).

The November 7 press conference was made for social media. Rallying under the hashtag #yamecanse, somewhere between 60,000 and 120,000 students marched, performed street theatre, and loudly announced their fatigue with crime, lawlessness, bad government. They did so with remarkable civility, a self-conscious statement about government violence. Indeed, it would seem that in order to justify a certain amount of brutality, police sent agitators into the crowd, who in turn tried to set fire to the doors of the National Palace.<sup>7</sup> The infiltrators were quickly exposed, and the police response only further fueled the rage – which at least in Mexico City still remained largely peaceful. Across various social media platforms a variety of participants not only claimed that they had acted peacefully, but posted images, videos, and testimonies that proved their claims.

On November 12 protestors took over government tollbooths and set fire to the legislature buildings in Chilpancingo. Eight days later, on the anniversary of the beginning of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, there were protests in 26 Mexican states, and student walkouts in 122 secondary schools and universities across the country. In the Federal District, three groups of students set off at 5 pm from three points in the city (the Monument of the Revolution, the Angel, and Tlatelolco), with a plan to converge of the Zócalo. A crowd that organizers claimed was 500,000 strong (the police claimed 30,000) included students, families, friends and families of the missing, activists from human rights organizations (including Amnesty International [AI]), and members from a variety of Catholic organizations (*Misioneras de Nuestra Señora del Perpetuo Socorro* and the *Franciscanas de María Inmaculada*). Though once again largely

peaceful, some protestors clashed with police after the end of the march, throwing Molotov cocktails and rocks. Two people were wounded, and 11 were arrested, charged with attempted murder, tortured, and sent to a variety of prisons. A judge threw out the charges several days later.

Over the next few weeks the Peña Nieto administration made a number of efforts to contain the damage. On November 27 he introduced a series of security reforms, proposing that local police be replaced by state police in several regions. These proposals were roundly criticized for ignoring the allegations that state and federal police had been involved in the Iguala kidnappings. On December 6 Murillo Karam announced that the remains of one of the students (Alexander Mora Venancio) had been identified by a lab in Innsbruck, lending credibility to his earlier declaration that the students had been cremated in Cocula.

Murillo Karam's account, which was now backed up by forensic science and confessions by several Guerreros Unidos members, focused on local corruption, a rogue mayor and his wife, rogue local police, and their ties to a cartel. The students had angered the mayor's wife, been taken into custody by the local police, turned over to the Guerreros Unidos, and taken to the nearby garbage dump in Cocula. Those who did not die on the trip were executed, their bodies cremated and put into bags, and the remains dumped in a local river. The fact that the students had been detained just yards away from the army barracks of Battalion 27, notorious for its dirty campaigns in Guerrero, was said to be mere coincidence. In spite of witness testimony that they were at the scene, the federal police were absolved of any knowledge of the crime.

Murillo Karam backed up this story by releasing elements of the testimony (obtained under torture) of Felipe Rodríguez Salgado, known as El Cepillo, who was one of the members of the Guerreros Unidos to have confessed to the crime at Ayotzinapa. He indicated that José Luis Hernández Rivera, the director of the school, had been paid by a rival criminal group called los Rojos to send the students into Iguala on September 26 in order to stir up trouble.<sup>8</sup>

Few were convinced by this account. It was dismissed by AI, the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH), and 70 Mexican civil-society groups. Families of the students disputed the Rojos connection, saying the students in the school were too politically radical to get involved with narcos. *El Universal*,

which is normally fairly conservative, published an editorial lamenting the shocking frequency with which official versions of these stories turn out to be a tissue of lies.<sup>9</sup> Around the same time expert testimony reported in *La Jornada* and elsewhere raised significant questions as to whether the cremation story was even possible. Jorge Antonio Montemayor Aldrete, a professor at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) who led a team investigating this theory, concluded that it would have taken 33 tons of wood or 995 tires to incinerate the bodies, and that the space of the dump, which was about 540 square meters, was simply insufficient for such an undertaking. He also concluded that it would have taken two tractor-trailer trucks to move the wood to the dump, which was extremely unlikely given the narrow and muddy path. If tires were used, the remaining steel belts would have been found in the dump. The fire would have had to reach 1,600 degrees Celsius, but there was no evidence of a fire of that intensity in the area. These theories were also brought into question by the fact that it had rained in Cocula on September 26 and 27.

Only one bone fragment had been identified as belonging to one of the students, and it was much less charred than the rest of the remains sent to Innsbruck, which were too degraded to test for DNA. This raised the likelihood that the remains were produced in an army crematorium or incinerator in Iguala and then transported to the dump. On January 12, 2015 several family members, who claimed that the last GPS signals from their children's cellphones came from inside the army base, tried to gain entry to the base. They were violently rebuffed.

On January 24 the Guerrero newspaper *El Sur* reported that the Argentine forensic team had relayed their doubts about the Cocula dump theory to the families of the students. The team also indicated that the remains of Alexander Mora did not correspond with the rest of the remains, that they seemed to have been in a different physical state than the other remains from the dump, suggesting evidence tampering. Two days later there were 40 marches across the country demanding the return of the students.

Murillo Karam responded by attacking the Argentine forensic scientists for making their doubts about Cocula public, claiming that they were sowing doubt without having all the evidence, and on January 27 he declared the case closed. A month later he resigned as attorney general.

## Absurd

Amidst his ham-fisted efforts to contain one scandal, Peña Nieto fell into another in November 2014. On November 9 the journalist Carmen Aristegui released a story indicating that the newly renovated house in which the president and his family lived (now known as the *casa blanca*) had been bought for them by a construction company with long-standing ties to the president.<sup>10</sup> The company, the Grupo Higa, had earned hundreds of millions from contracts with Peña Nieto while he was governor of Mexico State, and had only recently won a \$3.7 billion contract to build a light rail link between Mexico City and León, Guanajuato (the contract was cancelled in November 2014 when the scandal broke). It also turned out that in 2005 Peña Nieto had bought another house from the Grupo Higa while they were winning lucrative contracts from his state government. His finance minister at the time (and later finance minister in the federal government), Luis Videgaray, bought a house on a golf course for \$500,000 with a mortgage from the Grupo Higa. First Lady Angélica Rivera only made matters worse when she improbably claimed that the \$7-million house actually belonged to her (she claimed it was purchased with her earnings from her roles on telenovelas), releasing a dreadful YouTube video in which she insisted that the people of Mexico get out of her private business.<sup>11</sup>

There is no credible evidence that she could have purchased this and other properties she owns (some in the US) out of her TV earnings. Nor is there any explanation how the president, who has lived his entire life as a public servant, amassed declared assets of over \$3.3 million (US) during his career. Peña Nieto of course attacked Aristegui for reporting the story, claiming she was trying to capitalize on social unrest to make her name. He seems to have managed to have the two principle investigators working on the story fired by Aristegui's employer (MVS Comunicaciones) in March 2015.

Peña Nieto was not alone in facing unwanted scrutiny for his ill-gotten gains during the crisis. In the midst of this scandal, the PRD mayor of Mexico City and his council quietly declined to release information about their real estate holdings, for "security reasons". Then Carlos Mateo Aguirre Rivero, the brother of the ousted governor of Guerrero, was arrested on charges that he had skimmed 20% from all state contracts (he was known as Mr. 20%) while his brother was governor. In February 2015, José Murat Casab, the former governor of Oaxaca and

father of the current head of the agency in charge of housing for workers, INFONAVIT, was profiled in the *New York Times*, accused of being connected to at least six properties in the US without having ever earned the kind of money that could account for how they were purchased.

Other stories flooded the media during the fall of 2014 and winter of 2015. Mexicans learned that, as governor of Guerrero, Ángel Aquirre diverted at least 287 million pesos into contracts and accounts of his friends and family members, and that Carlos Hank Rhon, a key member of the Grupo Atlacomulco (the long-standing clique of Priistas which was instrumental in bringing Peña Nieto to power), is in first place among Mexico's HSBC's clients with Swiss accounts, his holdings amounting to \$ 157 million (US). They learned that Roberto San Román Dunne, godfather to one of Peña Nieto's children, has won contracts from the Federal government worth more than \$40 million (US) since Peña Nieto became president.

The fall also brought news that an old blast from the past, Raúl Salinas, was finally going to be able to keep his unexplained wealth. On December 12, 2014, a federal judge in Mexico cleared Raúl, the brother of former President Carlos Salinas, of all charges stemming from a series of spectacular crimes dating to the 1990s (among the charges were allegations of over \$100 million in illicit enrichment). Salinas' managed to get the ruling in spite of the 48 Swiss accounts that could be traced to him, phony companies in the Cayman Islands, millions in transfers between Mexico and the US that could be traced directly to Raul (at least \$130 million), and incriminating conversations in jail in which it seemed that Carlos was the architect of the entire scheme. The judge in the case also released funds, bank accounts, and properties bought by Salinas using aliases and false passports.

Mexico's opposition parties remained silent in the face of these scandals, in part because their leaders are implicated in a great deal of wrongdoing. The mayor of Iguala and governor of Guerrero, after all, were both from the opposition PRD (though both used to be Priistas, and the governor in particular was close to the president). Mexico's right-wing party, the PAN, is reputed to have been involved in epic levels of corruption under former president Felipe Calderón,<sup>12</sup> and PAN governors in various parts of the country have been implicated in a string of recent human rights abuses. In other settings, PRD and PAN politicians have passed laws

intended to discourage public protests that arguably violate the human rights of Mexicans, and have repeatedly imprisoned their critics.<sup>13</sup>

Records obtained by Reuters through Mexico's transparency laws suggest that in recent years members of all parties have been looting the national oil company, PEMEX, at an alarming rate. The news agency's 2014 investigation found a recent report by Mexico's Federal Audit Office that flagged over 100 questionable PEMEX contracts, amounting to \$11.7 billion (US).<sup>14</sup> They also found that in the 160 internal investigations concerning wrongdoing conducted within PEMEX in recent years, contractors were never penalized, and that in only three cases were employees punished, with suspensions ranging from five days to six months. The same investigation found that from 2007 to 2013, 40 companies won \$88.1 million in contracts in spite of being banned by the company from receiving contracts. Among the beneficiaries was an alleged associate of Mexico's most notorious drug gang, the Zetas. The Ministry of Public Administration (SFP), which was charged with examining the improper use of government resources, and was in charge of investigating PEMEX, missed the fact that a contractor associated with the Zetas (Francisco "Pancho" Colorado) received \$35 million in contracts from the company even though he was banned from working with the company. Other contracts included \$9 million to tow a rig halfway around the world when the rig was already in the Gulf of Mexico.

Between 2008 and 2012 PEMEX was issued 274 recommendations to fix irregularities, but took no action in all but three cases, where it suspended a handful of employees. Moreover, The SFP almost never pursued cases against company and government officials. Their salaries are paid by PEMEX and they work in PEMEX offices.

How ironic then, that one of Peña Nieto's election promises was to tackle corruption. Actually, not ironic, cynical. When in office he immediately took to dismantling the institutions that might undermine his efforts to control the good-news narrative of a Mexico that was prosperous, stable, and past the drug wars. One of his first targets in this regard was the SFP, founded by President Fox in 2003 to foment the development of a professional and honest public administration. Neither Fox nor Calderón ever did much to actualize or support SFP, and Calderón first proposed eliminating the SFP in 2009. It was significantly weakened in 2012



when the Pact for Mexico between the leading political parties undermined the power of congress to actually investigate the executive branch.

Peña Nieto proposed eliminating the SFP in 2013 – moving most of its functions into the finance ministry, run by his friend Luis Videgaray (who was also instrumental in funneling questionable money into his election campaign). It was to be replaced by a Comisión Nacional Anticorrupción (CNA), run by a committee of the same notables it might be expected to investigate. The PAN and PRD both agreed to the proposal, merely insisting that the SFP not be fully disbanded until the CNA was set up. However, stripped of most of its power, the zombie SFP could do little to investigate public corruption. Meanwhile, no one took any action to create the CNA.

At this writing the SFP is in legal limbo, and incapable of investigating the allegations surrounding Peña Nieto and his clique. This is one reason why he named Virgilio Andrade, a PRI hack, to investigate allegations of corruption in early 2015. Naturally, the casa blanca case was excluded from his mandate. According to John Ackerman, he is “la persona perfecta para encabezar este Frankenstein en fase terminal. Su única función será tapar, cubrir y limpiar los evidentes conflictos de interés y corruptelas de su jefe y sus amigos en el gabinete presidencial.”<sup>15</sup>

## **In which We Scratch Our Heads**

The scale of depravity that seems to characterize Mexico's political classes at the moment puts us at risk of sweeping generalities. Mexico is corrupt, impossibly so. Mexico has always been this way. Mexico is a backwards place, having never found a way to embrace the principles that govern liberal democracies. And yet these types of sweeping statements, made by both Mexicans and foreigners, place us at risk of both orientalizing Mexico and failing to understand both change and the resilience of old practices over time.

Claudio Lomnitz warns us against seeing these phenomena as permanent or static, and looks instead for a specific moment when the kind of state Mexico has today was created. He roots it in the nineteenth-century civil strife that gripped the country after independence, which

in turn resulted in decades of economic stagnation that in turn produced a state that was particularly vulnerable to corruption.<sup>16</sup> The results of these phenomena, he argues, are a historically vast informal economy, vast amounts of petty corruption, and a tax base that is extremely small (the Mexican state relies very heavily on revenues from Pemex to fund itself – this accounts to up to 30% of the federal budget). Lomnitz also holds US drug and gun control policies accountable for much of the current chaos, which preys on Mexico's weak and corrupt system of law enforcement.

Parsed a certain way, Lomnitz' critique suggests a desire to create a stronger state, one that is not only better able to tax its citizens fairly and effectively, but also better able to guarantee human rights, the rule of law, and clean government. His project, like that of most human rights organizations and many of the journalists and intellectuals quoted above, is to create a country of laws and strong institutions where none historically existed. Many of these intellectuals believe that Mexico might have been on a halting path towards this goal – the country elected an opposition party in 2000 and enacted laws to ensure fair elections and improve public administration, it had been growing economically for some time, and had seen the emergence of a robust civil society and press – only to have this journey derailed due to a spike in the illegal drug trade and a ham-fisted response by President Calderón that allowed a certain kind of devil to be resurrected in the form of Peña Nieto.

The measures these critics typically use to judge the state rely on concepts like corruption, transparency, rule of law, and respect for human rights. These in turn are firmly rooted in a series of universalizing concepts – the most critical being the assumption that the sovereignty enjoyed by the state is the product of its legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. This is the state that the liberal (forgive me, I use “liberal” liberally in this paper) modernizers aspire to create. It is a sovereignty that the state enjoys because it maintains the illusion that it enjoys a monopoly on the legitimate use of force because it represents the people, was produced through the democratic process, and for the most part all citizens are equal before the law. Generation upon generation of Mexicans - from Hidalgo, Mora, and Juárez in the nineteenth century to Madero and Carranza in the twentieth century, to a host of current liberals like Sergio Aguayo, Denise Dresser, Irma Eréndira and John Ackerman, have aspired to that kind of state. And yet

generation after generation other logics have persisted. Mostly liberals describe these problems as the residue of a past not yet dispatched, or of people trapped in medieval mindsets, yet it is possible that something else needs to be explained.

To be clear, most human rights advocates in Mexico insist that the implementation of a human rights regime is impossible without active steps also to address the social rights of the poor, and inequality in particular. They call for autonomous institutions, governed by national and international norms, committed to defending the rights of all Mexican citizens. The question is then, why has it been so hard, for so long, to implement such a regime? Mexicans have for the better part of two centuries been in a recurrent struggle to implement practices and institutions that would guarantee the rights of citizens, and yet these efforts have time and again failed to produce a state that resembles a liberal democracy. This is not a story of stasis, of a country that does not change and is therefore locked in some pre-modern fog. Mexico has gone through profound changes over the centuries, becoming an urban, cosmopolitan, industrialized society, with some of the most robust cultural, civic, and educational institutions in the Americas. The country has also seen repeated renovations of its social and political system, reforms that have improved the living conditions (as measured through the Human Development Index) of millions of people, the development of upwardly mobile working and middle classes, and seen democratic openings in a political system long characterized by authoritarian rule. The Mexico of the early twenty-first century is in many ways unrecognizable when compared to the Mexico of the early twentieth century, except inasmuch as the routine violation of human rights, political corruption, and high levels of everyday political violence seem to point back to a past that continues to impact on the present. That, and the fact that today, like in the early twentieth century, Mexico is one of the most unequal societies in the world.

Mexico's middle sectors have been particular beneficiaries of many of the changes the country experienced during the twentieth century. Beginning the century as relatively small and politically marginal, the middle class grew in size and stature congruent with the growth of the Mexican state, especially after the 1910 Revolution. To be middle class in much of twentieth-century Mexico was to enjoy a certain set of expectations for life. One could expect a comfortable living, often connected to some form of public employment (or employment in a

firm that was protected by the state). It meant the capacity to hire household servants, nannies, cooks, cleaners, who made life relatively comfortable. It meant living in a relatively safe urban enclave where one could expect that certain publicly controlled utilities (water, gas, electricity, perhaps the telephone) were delivered with regularity. And it meant the capacity to feel relatively secure, not because one trusted the state or saw its institutions as legitimate, but because of the connections that a middle-class life guaranteed. Connections got you into the right schools. Connections helped you get out of trouble with the police if there was trouble. Connections got your child a job. In the latter part of the century connections helped you buy a condo in Houston or a house on South Padre Island, the sorts of hedges you might need should the peso collapse or the economy go south. These connections operated through a complex set of arrangements with the state. At moments (say, when there was trouble with the police) they protected you from the state. At others (when you needed a favor from a bureaucrat) they came in the form of the state. One's personal sense of security was rooted in the network, the neighborhood, the sense that if the police did anything, they targeted dangerous elements for violence. Personal security on the other hand, came in the form of high walls topped with broken glass, loud dogs, and the relative safety of crowded public spaces.

During most of the twentieth century, middle-class Mexicans (even most working-class Mexicans) did not equate security with the abstraction we know as human rights. These were not universal rights, but privileges secured through a series of distinctions – through income, connection, skin color, the capacity to live in a better neighborhood, and membership in a union or other professional organization, all of which became ways that individuals connected themselves to power. The state in that sense was a series of personal connections that protected those who could envelop themselves in those ties, and not a series of abstract values that applied to all Mexicans. Indeed, the very notion of a state that treated everyone equally was anathema to those who could work these connections. Remarkably, the architecture of the state was sufficiently vast that a large percentage of those who lived in the cities – even those who worked in mines, in the oil industry, and occupied strategic positions across the country – felt the power of that connection through their formal and informal ties to power. When, in the early 1980s Sergio Aguayo travelled among workers in northern Mexico trying to spread the gospel of human rights, the obstacles he confronted did not just come from bosses and politicians, but from

those who found such an abstraction a futile gesture in a society where power and security rested in one's capacity to work within the system, and where standing outside the system in the manner that human rights discourses advertised seemed like a foolhardy exercise.

And yet it was not just this – the strategic calculation that one makes in order to find security in clientelism. The further one moves up the ladder of privilege, the more that distinction itself confers deeply appealing forms of power based on inequality. Even working-class Mexicans enjoyed privileges under the system, whether it was better housing, jobs and access to medical care than their poorer counterparts, or the ubiquitous and generally low-paid servants who grace even lower-middle class homes. They could count on these forms of labor in part because government policies kept food prices low enough that Mexican peasants found it extremely difficult to make ends meet – resulting in a steady migration of hungry, rural folk into an urban labor market that never had enough jobs to go around.

## **Do You Know Who I Am?**

Middle-class and wealthy Mexicans do feel a strong sense of obligation towards their servants – to take their children to the doctor, bail them out of jail when they are in trouble, lend them money in family emergencies – but in return they expect forms of deference that naturalize the hierarchy between the employer and employee. They expect a performance that privileges the patronage and benevolence of the social better and that elides the transactional nature of this relationship.

In generations past one could catch the assumptions that undergirded this dynamic in occasional utterances in public – the young privileged male who was offended when a stranger used the informal *tu*, or the sense of awe that indigenous peasants expressed when President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940) treated them as equals. Lately however, social media offers us a never-ending flood of instances in which the rich and the political classes reveal the contours of their expectations of privilege. There are the incidents that seem obviously egregious, as when in April 2013 Andrea Benítez, the daughter of a the federal Attorney General for Consumer Protection, Humberto Benítez Treviño, had health inspectors close one of the most popular restaurants in Mexico City, the Maximo Bistro on Roma Norte, because she could not get a table.

Of course, the closure caused a public outrage, and the restaurant was quickly re-opened. Diners in the restaurant actually took photos of the inspectors closing the restaurant and posted them on social media.

Elected officials have also repeatedly been embarrassed by the tweets of family members (Peña Nieto's daughter famously called his critics "proles" on twitter), Facebook photos of their children vacationing in Europe and showing fancy wares (this includes the children of the mayor of Ecatepec, a poor community in the misery belt around Mexico City, the children of the mayor of Acapulco, and the daughter of the head of the PEMEX workers union<sup>17</sup>), and their generally tone-deaf utterances.<sup>18</sup> But there are also the more quotidian moments suddenly caught on tape. Well known are the "Ladies of Polanco," who in 2011 were pulled over for swerving in and out of their lane. The two drunken women refused to take blood alcohol tests, slapped the officers, shouted profanities, and called them "wage earners". In 2012 a wealthy business owner in Lomas assaulted a doorman who refused to leave his post to help him change a tire. Only recently the governor of Chiapas (and future presidential hopeful) Manuel Velasco was filmed slapping an aid at a public event. Velasco's face is plastered on billboards throughout the state, showing him hugging poor indigenous people.

"Indio" is a common slur in Mexico, aimed at poor people by wealthy, light-skinned Mexicans. Though newly caught on tape, there is nothing new to these acts, which in turn speak to a society in which poor, dark skinned Mexicans are expected to serve middle-class and elite Mexicans with deference, and do so for very little money. And to be sure, the expected deference of the poor extends to the homes of the liberal and left-wing activists, politicians, and academics, whose lives also depend on the labor and deference of their servants. Not to put too fine a point on it, but middle-class Mexico is unimaginable without these distinctions.

This is where the current wave of exposures that badly behaving elites have suffered in some ways masks the more insidious practices that they in fact reflect. Each exposure on social media is a moment in which privileged Mexicans abused those privileges, revealing their assumptions and perhaps naiveté about the need for new forms of discretion in the age of social media. They whet our appetite for scandal, for a privileged person to hate. And they suggest that the abuse that they have committed lies in a failure of comportment, discretion, politeness, a

desire to abuse their privilege. At the same time, they direct our attention away from the structural inequalities that this system produces, again focusing our attention on bad actors, abusers who need to be exposed, instead of a system for which they are only the singing canary. They are only the most spectacular examples of a system of structural inequality upon which not just Mexico's elites, but the entire political and middle classes depend.

Inasmuch as one of the defining characteristics of twentieth-century politics in the industrial West was a period in which middle-class households shed their servants (labor had become too costly, and the mechanization of certain forms of labor changed the nature of work in the household), the political parties that flourished during that era drew upon a middle class that was wage-dependent and not conscious of the ways in which its well-being depended on the super-exploitation of others. Middle-class Americans, Brits, Germans, and Frenchmen could imagine that they shared critical interests with the unionists who worked in their factories, and the miners, truckers and other workers who, like them, were wage earners. In Mexico however, that middle class, even when devastated by economic calamities, invariably depended on a system that regularized and enforced the dependence and deference of their servants. The very notion of accepting those servants as social equals was anathema, not only because it would mean raising their wages, but because it would mean altering the core forms of privilege that characterized their homes. And while it was true that industrial growth in urban centers, especially between the 1940s and 1980s, did produce a significant working class and reductions in inequality overall in Mexico, the growing urban working class did not represent a strain on the capacity of middle-class Mexicans to maintain armies of servants. Industrial growth was accompanied by considerable immiseration in the countryside (declining food prices, shifts in land from small-holders to large ones), and urban Mexicans never felt a want for a steady supply of brown-skinned uneducated servants. Industrial and other unionized jobs generally went to people who were either urban in origin or who had acquired the cultural capital associated with urban sensibilities, meaning that the most impoverished rural migrants to the cities generally had few options beyond low-paid work in the service or informal economy.

Globalization promised to break these patterns, articulating local regions to national and international markets, and addressing persistent poverty through significant economic growth. In

some senses, it did deliver. World Bank figures indicate that Mexican GDP in 2014 was \$1.178 trillion, making Mexico the fourteenth-largest economy in the world. GDP per capita is at \$9,750, just below the world average. Globalization has brought a boom in manufacturing exports, even if in recent years the overall growth rate has been a disappointing 2.4%, and at least during the first decade of the twenty-first century inequality seemed to be narrowing in Mexico. The percentage of Mexicans living in poverty ticked down for much of the 2000s, falling to 43% by 2006, before rising again to 52.3% by 2012. Inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, fell from 0.58 in 1968 to 0.47 in 2010.<sup>19</sup>

That said, even as the Gini coefficient improved in the early years of the twenty-first century, the distribution was extraordinarily uneven, and mostly due to the effects of improved earnings among middle-class Mexicans and unionized workers (especially in the automobile sector), along with the measurable effects on health, education, and housing produced by social programs targeted to the very poor. The changes in inequality have also been highly localized during the past two decades, with some regions experiencing significantly greater decreases in inequality than the national average, while nearly 20% of Mexicans have seen inequality increase. Most of the violence of the drug war has been in the 10% of municipalities (representing nearly 20% of the population) where inequality has actually increased.<sup>20</sup>

Measures for economic growth in Mexico since the 1980s suggest that the overall performance of the economy since that time has been much less robust than it was in the post-war period, especially compared to the US. The gap in GDP per capita compared with the US is greater today than in 1980. The country has one of the lowest minimum salaries in Latin America, ranging from 66.45 to 70.1 pesos per day, and recent figures suggest that 4.4 million workers earn between 1 and 3 minimum wages, whereas another two million earn 3–5 minimum wages. The number of people earning 1–2 minimum wages grew 3% between 2007 and 2013, while those earning 3–5 shrank 23% during that time. Furthermore, with inflation the real value of these wages has been declining for some time. Even the Mexican government (which lowballs these figures) estimates that an average Mexican needs \$13 (i.e., two minimum wages) per day to cover a basic diet.



Mexico is one of the most unequal countries among the large economies, better only than South Africa and Brazil. According to a 2014 report by the Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (CONEVAL), 53.3 million Mexicans live in poverty and 20 million cannot meet their basic needs. This number represents more than 50% of Mexicans (across the region about 28% of people live in poverty<sup>21</sup>). Those in the top 10% earn 27 times as much as those in the bottom 10%. In OCED countries the difference tends to be 10 times as much. A 2013 study by the Hay Group found that the base salary of executives in Mexico City averaged \$10,000 a month, \$417 less than a comparable executive in New York City, whereas the minimum wage in New York was \$7.25 per hour, compared to \$5.05 per day in Mexico City. The typical Mexican CEO earns 121 times the minimum wage, which is the largest gap in Latin America. More troubling, these figures do not even capture the 29 million Mexicans (out of an economically active population of 52 million) who work in the informal sector.

Productivity in Mexico has soared since the 1980s, but wages overall have stagnated. Wages and salaries as a portion of GDP has fallen from 40% to 18.9% since the 1980s, and the value of the minimum wage has fallen by 80%.<sup>22</sup> Basically, mean income in Mexico in 2010 in constant dollars was lower than it was in 1990. Furthermore, a recent report by the *Centro de Estudios Espinosa Yglesias* in Mexico City found that while there was considerable social mobility within the middle class, the poorest Mexicans experience remarkably little social mobility. Another 2013 World Bank report found that Mexico had some of the worst rates of upward social mobility in Latin America.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike in the OCED countries, tax revenues do little to ameliorate the differences in income. In most OECD countries income redistribution using tax revenues halve the Gini coefficient, but in Mexico tax policy has little impact on income distribution. Most of the benefit the poor receive is through social spending and conditional cash transfers. Systems of taxation that narrowly serve the interests of elites are commonplace in Latin America, but even worse in Mexico than elsewhere. Mexico's tax burden constitutes just 12% of GDP, which again is among the lowest in Latin America.<sup>24</sup> Taxes represent 26% of GDP in the US, and 32% in Brazil.

## The Specter of Race

There is a profoundly racial cast to these phenomena. Mexico is stratified according to skin color in terms of income, education, and social standing, with domestic workers, manual laborers, drivers, security guards, and the vast army of underpaid workers who keep the middle and upper classes afloat being drawn from dark-skinned people.<sup>25</sup> Those residing in indigenous communities live in the most abject poverty, followed by rural migrants to the cities, especially the poorest among them, who betray their origins in indigenous communities through their poor Spanish and dress, and once in the cities rarely gain opportunities to rise above the lowest steps on the social ladder. Forced into marginal jobs in the service sector, as street performers, sellers of chiclets and cigarettes, or beggars, their persistent poverty serves as an explanation for their poverty. They are poor because they are Indian, their Spanish rudimentary because they are too simple. They deserve their lot in life.

These forms of discrimination have a long history in Mexico, dating to a colonial period in which the caste system (the precursor to nineteenth-century scientific racism) determined that indigenous peoples would be the laborers of the colony. Though posited as a system intended to protect a Republic of Indians from voracious Spaniards, the caste system effectively functioned as a guarantor of agricultural and public labor in the colonies, feeding urban populations and building their roads. Generations later, much has changed and stayed the same. Rural, dark skinned Mexicans now constitute a central part of both the Mexican and the US stoop-labor force in agriculture, and in urban settings provide almost all of the labor that maintains the houses of the middle class and the rich.

Over time some Mexicans have endeavored to change this. Educators, anthropologists, and other activists (the indigenistas) working for a series of government agencies spent decades attempting to improve the lot of indigenous Mexicans during the twentieth century, and even Carlos Salinas posited his neoliberal policies as something that would ultimately benefit indigenous peoples. They may have shared little ideologically, but what these actors on the left and right did share was a commitment to acting on an inert indigenous population, a general belief that without the interventions of the state indigenous Mexicans could not help themselves. Moreover, those on both the left and the right have long understood that as they were currently

constituted, indigenous politics mostly represented an unwelcome threat to the political order. Indigenous peoples might be educated to be proper citizens, or liberated to be small producers, but in their current state they were most likely to smash the state as either backward savages or primitive revolutionaries.

For all their romance with figures like Emiliano Zapata, urban Mexicans have historically favored policies that promised to limit and control the potential of indigenous politics instead of ones that might unleash the political will of millions of marginalized people. This then became one of the core assumptions that characterized official politics in post-revolutionary Mexico. Indian Mexico, identified as such by its poverty, rural roots, and skin color, had to be controlled and contained. The economic value of this assumption is obvious inasmuch as these assumptions undergirded practices that normalized the super-exploitation of indigenous laborers in both urban and rural settings, but the visceral quality of the assumption is probably more important. Indigeneity represents a threat to survival, to be eliminated (through extermination or assimilation) or controlled. To have a voice, to have rights, is to be, for all intents and purposes, non-indigenous, because the inclusion of indigenous peoples in those rights before they were properly elevated could cause the system to collapse under the weight of their backwardness.

Mexico's most recent wave of globalizing reformers followed the same script, understanding that the rural, dark-skinned poor were to be acted on and not with. Those who prospered as the country integrated into the global system told themselves that the benefits would eventually reach these people, but that in the meantime they mostly needed to be controlled, for the country's own good. If Mexico was to be a winner in the global game, these people were simply the cannon fodder, sacrificed for the good of the country.

In turn, this system of physical control and marginalization has long nurtured a series of internal logics within indigenous communities. First and foremost is the sense among poor, marginalized Mexicans that state power is not something internal to their communities (not, at least in the Foucauldian sense). They do not willingly reproduce power through the myriad practices that urban Mexicans embrace in order to get through their days. State power is instead something external, something imposed on them, often through force, and generally understood as acting as a proxy for a narrow set of external interests (sometimes agents of the state

themselves, but at others large landowners, mining companies, timber companies, and the like). Even those agents who represent the supposedly more benevolent and softer forms of state power – institutions like the ministries of health, education, and the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) often treat residents of indigenous communities with disdain, as if they were children, and their institutions wind up with reputations within indigenous communities for graft and abuse. These agents of the state are sometimes obeyed, sometimes negotiated with, and sometimes kicked out, but they invariably represent something that originates from the outside. And that state is often violent.<sup>26</sup> During Mexico's long period of PRI domination, the aura of peace was essential to self-fashioning, but rarely stood up to much scrutiny. Marginalized people did contest the authority of the state, and did sometimes manage to win concessions, but they also often found themselves imprisoned, tortured, or dead as a result of their efforts.<sup>27</sup>

The state sometimes offered a Faustian bargain to rural Mexicans, trading limited opportunities in return for political quiescence. Poor students like those at Ayotzinapa could hope to ascend in a federal bureaucracy in order to improve their individual lot, and federal programs did sometimes improve the health, standard of living, and education levels of poor people, but these programs had the quality of arbitrary impositions from above, and for the most part benefited their well-to-do employees and local power brokers far more than they did the poor. Those who did not take the deal found that all variety of threats followed them around, from local political bosses and their henchmen (both police and private), to state and federal police, and at worst, the Mexican army. Guerrero especially had a long history of significant use of political violence by local elites in order to maintain their hold on power.

Poor people have captured the state in carnivalesque moments, but these were fleeting experiences. Even the great transformations of the twentieth century were mostly planned from above, meant to impose transformations on the countryside, and locally contested inasmuch as the specific implementation of new property regimes was dependent on a variety of forms of local complaisance and varied over time and space. Moreover, the nature of the power that emerged out of the Revolution ensured that control over property would gradually return to the elites. Instead of creating a system that could represent the interests of poor people as a collectivity, the state created by the PRI sought popular participation in the service of certain

elite projects. The system often renovated itself, and did respond to popular unrest at various points, but those responses to popular unrest never construed popular demands to be for power, transparency, rights, governance – those issues traditionally defined as the liberal agenda. They instead focused on specific concessions on material issues, meant to construe popular demands as linked to subsistence and material well-being rather than around the sorts of universal values that inform a liberal idea of citizenship. Again, the fact that Mexican liberals repeatedly insisted on the need for universal citizenship masked the fact that the fundamental logics of governance were rooted in the assumption that the state should act on an “other” – variously defined as rural, campesino, illiterate, alcoholic, uneducated, and indigenous – sometimes helping that other, improving their lives, at other times controlling them through repression or concession. Never was the state and the other linked through the sorts of fraternal bonds that underlie liberal assumptions about the universality of law, the sovereignty of the people, or the concept of the state as an impartial arbiter. These ideas do have purchase in Mexico, just not very much. And liberal efforts to extend their reach have sometimes been undermined by the very assumptions that educated and urbane liberals make about their own distinctiveness from the multitudes. No right-thinking liberal would subject himself to the same law that governs the lives of their poor, rural, indigenous neighbors.

This sentiment provides a remarkably powerful cover for rent-seeking behavior. Poor Mexicans expect government officials in their midst to steal public funds, abuse their charges, and get away with it. They feel entirely powerless to do anything other than occasionally drive the most abusive officials out, and must invariably calculate as to whether the meager benefits gained by allowing a government official into their village are worth the accompanying headaches. And this pattern is repeated on a regional and federal level. Some people do go into government with a desire to make their country better, to serve an abstraction they call Mexico. Most, however, seem to enter government service as rent seekers, individuals looking for opportunities of personal enrichment that come from control over the distribution of government largesse through social programs, contracts, and slush funds.

## Corrupt

Sometimes this is called corruption, and while this term of art may make sense in countries where corruption is a deviant practice (the assumption that most officials act in accordance with the law, and those who do not can be ferreted out and punished), the term does not quite ring true when the use of public office for personal gain is normative. Probably not every Mexican politician does this, and the country has a long history of those outside of the system seeking to expose illicit or unexplained enrichment (there are laws forbidding this, after all), and yet the tradition of using one's office for personal gain and suffering no ill consequences for doing so is so powerful as to be a defining feature of Mexico's political landscape.

Since the 1970s Mexicans have been treated to story after story of government officials who enriched themselves inexplicably. Arturo Durazo was the Mexico City police chief who had a replica of Studio 54 in his house. President José López Portillo built himself a mansion in Acapulco. Miguel de la Madrid was said to have pocketed hundreds of millions of dollars, but perhaps even less than the monies appropriated by Carlos Salinas and his brother Raúl, who rode the twin waves of privatization and a surging illicit narcotics trade to vast wealth. Many of these stories were exposed in the magazine *Proceso* under the editorship of Julio Scherer García, and though *Proceso* was revolutionary for its time, revealing these excesses when no other magazines would, this did not mean that Mexicans were generally unaware of the malfeasance of their political elites. *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1967), Carlos Fuentes' epic novel of the Revolution, was mainly about the way that insiders enriched themselves after consolidating power. Octavio Paz and Samuel Ramos made the dishonesty of Mexicans in public life central to their narratives of Mexicanidad. Even José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, author of Mexico's first novel in the second decade of the nineteenth century, lamented the depth of public corruption in Mexico – corruption that extended to all of the institutions that governed Mexican society, including the church.<sup>28</sup> Peña Nieto himself comes from a political dynasty in Atlacomulco founded by Carlos Hank González, who was famous for the aphorism “a politician who is poor is a poor politician.”

Mexicans tolerated rent seeking on the part of their politicians as long as it did not disrupt middle-class privilege and did not cause immense disorder. Indeed, the types of order that characterized post-revolutionary society were in part produced through the very rent-seeking activities that politicians used to pad their wallets. It involved funding the patronage networks, allowing a variety of actors to secure special benefits through their membership in a union or a *camara*. It involved the perpetual negotiation of order through the maintenance of access to power for some, and through the willingness of some of the beneficiaries to enforce local order (especially in poor, restive, rural regions) in return for federal largesse. One could *traer gente* (literally, carry people) through patronage, or maintain peace by eliminating one's enemies. The federal state was largely indifferent to the methods employed by local *caciques*, and to be sure, local power brokers usually deployed both strategies, but the order this system guaranteed allowed urban Mexico and those parts of the country that were linked to economic growth to prosper, while those that did not remained, on some level, invisible. This was also the type of system in which small-scale drug trafficking could flourish.

Small-scale traffickers have been moving opium poppies and marijuana from farms in Mexico's north (mainly Sinaloa) since at least the 1920s, when they began to build cooperative relationships with local police and government officials that allowed them to undertake their work relatively unmolested. Even into the 1970s, when the US government would periodically put pressure on the Mexican government to stem the flow of drugs northward, the traffickers would work with those officials to serve up a few scapegoats who ensured that their businesses remained robust. Raul Salinas Lozano, father of the Carlos, was well known as a partner in the trade.

The bargain at the local level that characterized Mexico during much of the twentieth century is one in which local politicians participated with traffickers in what Gustavo Duncan calls "oligopolies of coercion". In regions where the drug trade was a part of the local economy, the resources provided by traffickers subsidized local bossism – the traffickers offered access to consumer goods that in turn helped keep the peace. Various state agencies, including the police and the army, enforced rights of specific traffickers to their corridors (*plazas*).<sup>29</sup> Drug trafficking was particularly attractive for its capacity to fund consumption in very poor areas, but also for its

ability to supplement the salaries of low-level state functionaries. In turn, these local oligopolies were loosely connected to shifting national oligopolies engaged in the same practices. A history replete with drug cars being implicated, army units participating, Mexican governors taking bribes, and of the notorious likes of Raul Salinas (jr. and sr.), reminds us that the multilayered nature of participation in these illicit activities make it almost impossible to go after the narcos without going after the entire state. These efforts are made even more difficult by the fact that even those who appear to have few ties to the traffickers are often implicated in influence peddling schemes. Thus the disincentives for strengthening the institutions that might combat a variety of forms of malfeasance are simply too strong.

Up through the 1980s, trafficking was a relatively small-scale operation, tightly controlled by Félix Gallardo through his Guadalajara cartel, and orchestrated around a stable partnership with PRI officials at various levels of government, but with the success of US efforts to interdict the flow of Colombian cocaine through the Caribbean during that decade, the logics of the drug trade began to change. Colombian traffickers turned to Mexico as a more reliable transshipment corridor, and the profitability of the trade skyrocketed. These new opportunities came during a generational shift in Mexico's trafficking community, one in which the old bosses endeavored to divide up the plazas through which drugs flowed. In a classic enactment of Mexican corporatism, after the murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena in 1987 brought more scrutiny of Gallardo, he offered Tijuana to the Arellano Félix brothers, Ciudad Juárez to the Carrillo Fuentes family, and Sonora to Miguel Caro Quintero. The Matamoros corridor was left to Juan García Abrego, who formed the Gulf cartel, and Joaquín Guzmán Loera and Ismael Zambada García were given control of the Pacific coast, eventually forming what became known as the Sinaloa Cartel.

During the 1990s and early 2000s drug trafficking was a particularly attractive means to improve consumption for poor people in peripheral regions, strengthening economies often left behind by globalization. El Chapo Guzmán famously donated thousands of dollars and gifts to his opium growers after heavy rains devastated their crops, followed by a Christmas gift of 100 all-terrain vehicles. Legend abounds of discipline he laid down against local thieves in regions he controlled. In Michoacán, the Familia Michoacana, which appeared brutal to outsiders, was



revered in parts of the state as a source of paternalism, clientelism, and support in times of need, and for its “fair” mediation of local conflicts. They demanded a heavy price for their willingness to act as a local form of order, but for at least some of the people in the territories they ruled, it seemed a better deal than the one offered by the federal state.

Democratization in Mexico threatened these local arrangements, making the old alliances that secured the interests of the traffickers less reliable because of the threat that new political elites would displace the old ones (making it increasingly attractive for the traffickers to begin actively to fund political campaigns<sup>30</sup>). Yet democratization, even when pressed by the supposed left party (the PRD), never promised to up-end the logics of class and race in Mexico. Mexico's three principle parties endeavored to manage the democratization process during the 1990s in ways that would do little to disrupt traditional power arrangements. Unlike elsewhere in the region, Mexico's transition to democracy did not lead to significant shift in the composition of the political class or the functionings of power, at the local, state, and national level. When some within the new system and representatives of victims' groups undertook to produce new institutions, to combat rent-seeking or to account for past injustices, the influence of old actors from the authoritarian regime basically derailed these efforts.<sup>31</sup> And even while they engaged in vicious campaign smears, at heart each party remained committed to roughly similar agendas.

Indeed, the drug business seems to have undergone more changes than the political system during these years. Since the 1980s weapons had been flowing into Mexico from the US at an unprecedented rate, increasing the capacity of the newly forming cartels to exact violence on one another in their efforts to defend and expand their plazas. These conflicts worsened after the death of Amado Carillo Fuentes (head of the Juárez cartel) in 1997 destabilized the division of plazas among the traffickers, leading to increased violence among the cartels and the emergence of a series of new actors, most notably the Zetas, an exceptionally violent offshoot of the Gulf cartel.<sup>32</sup> The violence was stoked by the fact that 2,000 weapons were entering illegally Mexico per day by the 2000s.<sup>33</sup>

By the early 2000s Mexico was already experiencing a series of spillover effects from trafficking. Various forms of violence, some of it spectacular like the assassination of the Bishop of Guadalajara, some of it quotidian, like taxi-kidnappings, gave middle-class Mexicans

increasing reason to feel that something was spinning out of control in the country. Even as national statistics suggested that the murder rate was going down, by the late 1990s middle-class Mexicans increasingly spoke of a state that had lost all control of the country, and everyone either knew someone or had themselves been a victim of crime. Fear of insecurity was everywhere. Kidnappings were epidemic. In half of Mexico's states, the chance of a murder leading to a conviction was less than 1%.

Vicente Fox, who took office in a historic transition in 2000, responded to this crisis by militarizing policing, but it was his successor Felipe Calderón who opted for a full-scale military interdiction, beginning in Chihuahua in 2007. His soldiers stepped into a full-scale war between factions from Mexico's two dominant cartels (the Sinaloa and Gulf) for control of the Juárez plaza, and immediately found themselves completely out-matched. They could not count on local police for support, and even elements in the army were taking payments from one side or the other. The nadir came in October 2010, when 16 teenagers attending a birthday party were murdered by gangsters in what appeared to be a case of mistaken identity. Calderón, who was out of the country at the time of the massacre, initially dismissed the victims as gangsters, only to eat his words as the details emerged. This massacre became the indelible moment of Calderón's drug war.

Mexico has been engulfed in violent drug war since 2007. Some 120,000 people have lost their lives, and wide swaths of the country have gained a reputation for spectacular forms of violence (the North, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, Michoacán and Guerrero in particular). The murder rate has more than doubled. More than 25,000 people have disappeared,<sup>34</sup> thousands of them victims of state agencies. Twice high government officials in charge of the drug war have died in suspicious aviation accidents. Entire police forces have been dismissed for their links to organized crime. Dozens of journalists have been targeted for assassination. Today nearly 75% of Mexicans believe they live in a region that is unsafe.<sup>35</sup> And more chillingly, all of the efforts by the state to fight the narcos seem to have had little impact on the illicit drug trade in Mexico, which may in fact be more robust today than it was when Calderon went to war in 2007.

Mexicans do not simply fear the narcos. In spite of repeated efforts to create new police forces and remove officers tainted with corruption, Mexico's security agencies remain one of the

most significant threats to citizen security. According to a 2014 report, 18,000 police vetted for ties to crime in the previous year (out of 135,511 in all) failed to meet acceptable standards. In Veracruz and Baja California Sur, 60% of officers did not meet the basic standard.<sup>36</sup> In Veracruz 77% of the police who were tested failed. In all, at the municipal, state, and federal level, 42,214 police failed to pass their vetting tests. As of November 2014, 17 states had still not dismissed the officers who failed. Three of the worst states in terms of failure rates in vetting (Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Jalisco) are also among the states with the lowest pay for police.<sup>37</sup>

## The Two Solitudes

In the context of a largely failed effort both to reform the state and to fight the drug war, Mexicans were confronted with a series of potential options in 2012. The 40% of voters who chose Peña Nieto tacitly made the assumption that a return to PRI rule would bring a de-escalation in the drug war, largely because they believed the PRI would quietly seek a return to the informal arrangements of the past. The PAN was so tainted by Calderón's failures in the drug war and the sense that his regime had done little to contain corruption that the party's candidate, Josefina Vázquez Mota, gained only 26% of the vote (Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the PRD candidate, won 32.5%).

Peña Nieto was particularly unpopular with students, human rights activists, and liberals. News about his secret deals with the nation's largest TV network (Televisa) circulated well in advance of the election,<sup>38</sup> and the student movement *Yo Soy 132* effectively consolidated around a general sense among young idealists that his candidacy represented a return to the *caciquismo* (boss politics) of an earlier generation. Their fears were not dispelled when immediately after his election he agreed with leaders of the PAN, PRD, and Green Party to the Pact for Mexico, which formally promised to end political gridlock in the congress by committing to the parties to work together on educational, energy, and other reforms. Many suspected it was simply a ploy to once again concentrate an enormous amount of power in the executive branch (as had been the case prior to the 1990s). Academics, human rights activists, and victims groups continued to press for an end to impunity, more transparency, efforts to combat corruption, and citizen security,<sup>39</sup> but

under the Pact they lost the leverage that they had been able to develop in the legislative branch over the previous two decades.

It is not hard to understand why urban, middle-class, educated Mexicans might support the creation of strong democratic and civil-society institutions. Not only does this seem like a sensible response to widespread institutional failure, it aligns them with a kind of first worldism that has been critical to Mexico's democratic transitions since the 1980s, and links them to increasingly globalized cultural and intellectual communities in the US and elsewhere. Many of the most prominent voices in these fields, including Denise Dresser, Sergio Aguayo, Claudio Lomnitz, Enrique Krause, John Ackerman, and Alejandro Hope, either live or were educated abroad. Furthermore, these desires do resonate beyond a small intellectual elite. The 2004 March against Delinquency, which brought around 700,000 protestors into the streets of Mexico City in the largest march ever in the city, was organized around a call to reform the judicial system, end corruption, and fight impunity.

Hecklers standing on the sidelines that day attacked the white-clad marchers as middle-class stooges, claiming that they were ignoring the real social crises unfolding in the country. The hecklers may have been leftist opportunists attempting to hijack a human security issue for a different ideological battle, but their attacks resonated for many Mexicans. Among those more likely to stand with the hecklers were the students at the Ayotzinapa Normal School, who had long immersed themselves in the rhetoric and images of the revolutionary left. And to be sure, this is where sites like Ayotzinapa offer a real source of anxiety for many Mexicans. Unlike urban leftists and members of the radical unions (particularly the teachers unions) who can be dismissed as anachronisms or cynics, the students from Ayotzinapa were desperately poor, indigenous, and clearly the losers of the global age. This made them dangerous.

In part this is why we need to consider the response by defenders of the regime to the approach of the caravans on November 20 as something more than a cynical effort to dismiss the protests. Conservative commentators, including Ricardo Alemán, repeatedly exhorted the government to crack down on the radicals they claimed were leading the demonstrations. Beatriz



**Image:** Mural on the side of one of the buildings at the Ayotzinapa Normal School.

Pagés Rebollar, the PRI's Secretary of Culture, complained on the PRI website that the protests were orchestrated acts of vandalism, and signs that the disappearance and presumed deaths of the students were simply "a strategic trap aimed at Mexico". She used the term "extermination" in her posting, evoking a series of disturbing images, but also complained that "all these activists and propagandists have the same modus operandi." Veteran Priista and ad executive Carlos Alazraki used similar language, dismissing the Ayotzinapa disappearances in *La Razón* as a conflict between guerrillas (the students) and narcos, each of whom wanted to rule the region. He called the entire lot unrepresentative of "normal Mexicans."

Others took to Facebook, twitter, and YouTube, calling the disappeared students a variety of names. "Pinches nacos, se lo merecen"; "Estuvo feo lo que les hicieron, pero los putos no dejaron pasar una ambulancia"; "Que putos, ya que estudien pinches huevones"; "Tanto pedo x unos pinches indios prietos mugrosos! Son 100% reemplazables con otros 30 millones de lacras iguales!!"; "Yo me alegro que los hayan desaparecido y ojala y ya estén muertos, me cagan las putas marchas de gente sin oficio ni beneficio ojala y maten a mas..."; "Ayotzinapa no somos todos, no generalicen. No podemos ser iguales a esos pinches indios".<sup>40</sup>

By no means do these expressions speak for all Mexicans, yet these are not merely isolated utterances. They speak to the layers of privilege that characterize middle-class and elite life in Mexico, the hierarchies that ensure both that rural dark-skinned Mexicans are the poorest in a deeply unequal society. And it is this arrangement that movements that focusing on citizen security, transparent government, and human rights are most challenged to address. It is not at all clear that their projects can coincide with either the traditional project of elite control or the types of popular politics that emerge out of places like Ayotzinapa. Most of those marching in Mexico City seem to want a better state, while Los Queremos Vivos brings the very desirability of that state into question.

I am reminded here of the reaction to the following photo, tweeted in late February, 2015:



The image captures a masked protestor standing next to the base of the Angel de la Independencia, an iconic Mexico City monument. The graffiti in the photo declares, “Justice will arrive when the blood of the bourgeoisie begins to flow.” Like earlier photos of banners depicting Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, unfurled by protestors in the Zócalo<sup>41</sup>, this photo raised some alarm even among tweeters who made a habit of lambasting the government. Alejandro Hope, a well-respected security expert with a degree from Princeton, tweeted “Si se busca construir una coalición amplia en favor de la justicia, tal vez este no sea el mensaje más

apropiado.” Hector de Mauleón, the editor of the high-culture magazine *Nexos*, tweeted:

“Prodigioso. Barbarie y bestialidad en la misma capucha!”

Poor, rural, dark-skinned Mexicans understand that this may not be the most “appropriate” way to construct a coalition for justice. And yet for them, it is not clear that any kind of coalition will address the bare life that they live. None ever has.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Abrams, P. 2006. *International Journal of Historical Sociology* 1(1), 58-98. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-6443.1988.tb00004.x.

<sup>2</sup> Most of the translation comes from narconews (<http://www.narconews.com>), and was by Al Giordano. I have edited for meaning.

<sup>3</sup> Agamben also defines the sovereign as the one who has the power to decide on the state of exception, when law ceases to cover all people. The sovereign decides who is included in the political body, and who is reduced to bare life, outside of the political body. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998). See also *State of Exception*, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Call, C.T. (2010) “Beyond the ‘failed state’: Toward conceptual alternatives.” *European Journal of International Relations* 17(2), 303-326. Call, C.T. (2008) “The Fallacy of the ‘Failed State’.” *Third World Quarterly* 29(8), 1491-1507. Top 5 reasons why “failed state” is a failed concept, by William Easterly and Laura Freschi, published January 13, 2010, [http://aidwatchers.com/author/easterly\\_and\\_freschi/](http://aidwatchers.com/author/easterly_and_freschi/).

<sup>5</sup> Enrique Krause, “The Mexican Evolution,” *New York Times*, March 24, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/24/opinion/24krauze.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2015/02/militares-involucrados-en-el-caso-tlatlaya-modifican-sus-declaraciones/>.

<sup>7</sup> This seems likely, as the masked agitators can be seen on video being protected by police after they tried to set fire to the doors of the National Palace.

<sup>8</sup> “‘El Cepillo’ culpa al director de la normal de Ayotzinapa de esta...” *Proceso*, January 28, 2015. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=394382>.

<sup>9</sup> Dennis A. García, “Versiones oficiales se derrumban.” *El Universal*, January 18, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> <http://aristeginoticias.com/0911/mexico/la-casa-blanca-de-enrique-pena-nieto/>.

<sup>11</sup> See Angelica Rivera’s response to the allegations on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdJ06CLjxE>

<sup>12</sup> In one instance, a company called Gutsa won a \$30 million contract to construct the Estela de Luz, to celebrate the Independence bicentennial. The costs escalated to over \$90 million and the project was still not completed in time for the celebration.

<sup>13</sup> *El Universal* - Opinion - Moreno Valle, ¿orgullo de la oposición? <http://www.eluniversalmas.com.mx/editoriales/2015/01/74399.php>.

<sup>14</sup> Elinor Comlay, Mica Rosenberg and M.B. Pell, “Mexico looks the other way as contractors fleece oil giant Pemex,” January 23, 2015, Reuters.

<sup>15</sup> John M. Ackerman, “Disfunción pública,” *Proceso*, 14 February 2015. See also John M. Ackerman, “Casos aislados,” *La Jornada*, February 17, 2015. See also Irma Eréndira Sandoval, “Elucubraciones tecnocráticas,” February 6, 2015, <http://www.sinembargo.mx/opinion/06-02-2015/31542>. On the 2014 Corruption Perceptions

Index (100 completely clean, 0, completely corrupt) Mexico scored a 35, putting it at number 103 on a 175-country list. The UK was by contrast 78, US was 74, and Canada 81. Mexico did fair particularly well for Latin America. Chile scored a 71, Cuba a 46, Brail a 43. Venezuela was the worst in the region, tied with Haiti at 19. Mexico is ranked 103 out of 174 nations by Transparency International.

<sup>16</sup> Claudio Lomnitz, “Three Causes behind Mexico’s Crisis of Corruption and Impunity,” Huffington Post, November 19, 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/claudiolomnitz/mexico-corruption-causes\\_b\\_6186682.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/claudiolomnitz/mexico-corruption-causes_b_6186682.html).

<sup>17</sup> This last set of postings included pictures of her on luxury jets and yachts, of her with three bulldogs in expensive hotel rooms, with designer handbags, and more.

<sup>18</sup> EPN’s step-daughter Sofia Castro hit a particularly sour note when in early November she responded to questions about Ayotzinapa at an awards gala with the phrase, “No es momento de hablar de Ayotzinapa, venimos a disfrutar.” <http://www.prinosaurios.com/hija-de-p...>

<sup>19</sup> Following trends across the region, it rose to 0.49 in 2012. *Social Panorama of Latin America 2014*.

<sup>20</sup> Enamorado, Ted, Luis-Felipe Lopez-Calva, Carlos Rodriguez-Castelan and Hernan Winkler (2014), “Income inequality and violent crime : evidence from Mexico’s drug war,” Policy Research working paper 6935, Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2014/06/19705699/income-inequality-violent-crime-evidence-mexicos-drug-war>.

<sup>21</sup> Report by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Santiago, Chile, January 2015. The number of billionaires grew from 22 in 2013 to 27 in 2014, and their combined income increased from 137 billion to 169 billion. “[Billionaire Census 2014](#)”, produced by the Swiss bank UBS and the Singapore Wealth-X consultancy.

<sup>22</sup> Palma, J. G. (2011), “Homogeneous middles vs. heterogeneous tails, and the end of the ‘Inverted-U’: the share of the rich is what it’s all about,” *Development and Change* 42(1). These figures come from several sources, including López-Calva, L.F. and N. Lustig (2011), “La disminución de la desigualdad en la América Latina. Un decenio de progreso?”, Fondo de Cultura Económica. Mexico; Montecino, J. A. (2011), “Decreasing Inequality under Latin America’s ‘Social Democratic’ and ‘Populist’ Governments: Is the Difference Real?” Center for Economic and Policy Research, October 2011. Washington DC; Sedlac (2014), <http://sedlac.econo.unlp.edu.ar/eng/statistics.php>; and World Bank (2014), World Development Indicators, <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>.

<sup>23</sup> <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/11858/9780821396346.pdf?sequence=5>

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Aaron Schneider’s 2012 Cambridge University Press volume, *State-Building and Tax Regimes in Central America*. See Tasha Fairfield’s 2015 book, *Private Wealth and Public Revenue in Latin America: Business Power and Tax Politics* (Cambridge University Press), which argues that social movements can influence tax policy. On the role of left-wing parties in improving the tax regime in a democratic fashion in LA, see Evelyne Huber and John Stephens their 2012 book *Democracy and the Left* (University of Chicago Press).

<sup>25</sup> Andrés Villarreal (2010), “Stratification by Skin Color in Contemporary Mexico.” *American Sociological Review* 75(5): 652-678. <http://asr.sagepub.com/content/75/5/652.abstract>.

<sup>26</sup> There is an excellent recent discussion of this in *Dictablanda*, edited by Paul Gillingham and Ben Smith (Duke, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Enrique Desmond Arias, Daniel M. Goldstein argue in *Violent Democracies in Latin America* (Duke 2010) that the growth of democracy in Latin America has been accompanied by declining social and civil rights, violence more acute than any other region of the world.

<sup>28</sup> We are talking here about The Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico (Ramos), The Labyrinth of Solitude (Paz), and the Mangy Parrot (Fernandez de Lizardi). Scherer founded *Proceso* in 1976 after being ousted as the editor at *Excelsior*. Most believe he was ousted at the bidding of President Echeverría, for his critical reporting.

<sup>29</sup> General José de Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, the drug czar, was found to be in league with Amado Carrillo Fuentes, el Señor de los Cielos (1997); Raúl Salinas (aka Mr. 10%), the brother of president Carlos Salinas, who amassed a fortune said to be in excess of \$100 million US while his brother was in office; Mario Villanueva, governor of Quintana Roo, went missing for two years after being accused of allowing the cartels to use the state for the transshipment of drugs (1999).



<sup>30</sup> Anabel Hernández, *Los señores del narco*. Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo.

<sup>31</sup> Sylvia Karl "Rehumanizing the Disappeared: Spaces of Memory in Mexico and the Liminality of Transitional Justice." *American Quarterly*, 66(3), September 2014, 727-748.

<sup>32</sup> Carlos Resa, *El estado como maximador de rentas del crimen organizado: El caso del tráfico de drogas en México*. Mexico City, Biblioteca de Ideas del Instituto Universitario de Gobernabilidad.

<sup>33</sup> [http://seguridadcondemocracia.org/administrador\\_de\\_carpetas/biblioteca\\_virtual/pdf/Trafico-de-armas-docto183.pdf](http://seguridadcondemocracia.org/administrador_de_carpetas/biblioteca_virtual/pdf/Trafico-de-armas-docto183.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> The Interior Ministry acknowledged in 2013 that 26,121 people had gone missing during the Calderon presidency. In early 2014, Osorio Chong said the number connected to the drug war was actually 8,000, and then in June 2014 the ministry raised the number to 16,000.

<sup>35</sup>

<http://www.inegi.org.mx/inegi/contenidos/espanol/prensa/Boletines/Boletin/Comunicados/Especiales/2014/septiembre/comunicacion1.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> This according to a [report from the Secretary General of National Public Safety \(SESNSP\)](#).

<sup>37</sup> According to data from the national statistics institute INEGI, 78% of police in the country earn less than \$727 per month.

<sup>38</sup> While running for president he managed to work out a deal with Televisa, to provide him with constant glowing coverage and to savage his enemies. Leaks just before the election revealed that a secret unit inside Televisa called "Team Handcock" actively promoted the EPN candidacy. They made videos promoting EPN and engaged in a campaign to discredit his rivals going back to 2009.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Mariana Mora, of the Centro de Análisis e Investigación, whose priorities also align with the Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Paxman, "Iguala, clase y raza / Sin Maniqueísmos." *La Jornada*, November 16, 2014. <http://www.lja.mx/2014/11/iguala-clase-y-raza-sin-maniqueismos/>.

<sup>41</sup> In the January 26 march for human rights, a banner was hung on one of the buildings on the Zócalo by the Frente Popular Revolucionario.