

Mexico and the Vectors of North American Integration

Rhina Roux*



Lee Celano/Reuters

Presidents Calderón and Bush and Prime Minister Harper at an SPP meeting.

I

In the maelstrom of globalization, a profound, long-term transformation has taken place in Mexico over the last 20 years: a subordinated integration of our national territory into the new North American regional space. This integration, which encompasses not only the economic-productive dimension expressed in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), but also the political-military sphere, is undermining the material and cultural foundations of the Mexican state and destroying the equilibriums in an institutional set-up based on the presidency as the pinnacle that symbolized and articulated state sovereignty. The fragmentation of the country into territorial fiefdoms, the fragility of the institutions, exoduses of migrants and daily violence that has become pandemic are some of the symptoms of this historic change.

* Political scientist and professor-researcher at the Autonomous Metropolitan University, Xochimilco campus.

II

So-called “globalization” is, in essence, the unbridled expansion, without national, legal, state or social barriers, of the universe of the commodity, the de-regulated world market. This renewed expansion is accompanied by the political reconfiguration of the global space. The fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), the U.S. launch of its Enterprise for the Americas (1990), the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the launch of the European Union (1993), NAFTA’s coming into effect (1994) and the rise of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (1995) symbolized the end of an era. In the new geography of capital, the creation of regional, supra-national economic spaces, the opening of borders for the free transit of money, goods and capital and the incorporation of new territories in the circuits of accumulation became the trends. Fueled by technological innovation (computer science, micro-electronics, genetic engineering, nano-technology), the breakdown of time-space barriers for

the mobility of capital is changing the face of the entire globe, prompting what Carl Schmitt called the “spatial revolution”: a historic redefinition of the spaces of human existence implying not only new proportions and measures in political activity, but also a change in the structure of the very concept of space, similar to that which occurred with the conquests of Alexander the Great, the Roman Empire, the European crusades and the conquest of the Americas.¹

In the Western hemisphere, this great transformation translates into a trend: the integration of Mexico into the U.S. economy and markets. This process, which includes neither the free movement of labor nor the harmonization of labor rights, but anchors profitability of capital in geographic and wage “comparative advantages,” did not begin with the signing of NAFTA, but with the establishment of the first auto plants and the spectacular growth of the maquiladora industry on Mexico’s northern border in the 1980s.

This capitalist reorganization of territorial space, similar in scope to what happened in the late nineteenth century with the construction of railroads, included the advent of industrial corridors that selectively connected northern Mexican cities and ports with U.S. export markets: the San Antonio-Monterrey corridor, the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez corridor (linked to the Texas and New Mexico military-industrial complex) and the San Diego-Tijuana corridor. Certain analyses situate these corridors as part of an even vaster shift consisting of the creation of “transnational economic regions” including cities in Canada, the United States and Mexico, connected among themselves by the economic-trade corridors of North America.²

In this frenetic foray into Mexican territory, the new universal kingdom of the deregulated market has broken a state community woven over a long, conflictive historic process. Over the last 20 years, the devaluation of labor power, labor flexibility, turning land and collective natural resources (water, coastlines, forests, beaches, rivers, lakes) into com-

modities, privatizing public goods and integrating into the U.S. economy and markets have been the axes of a form of modernization that has ended by collapsing the material and symbolic pillars of the Mexican state. Meanwhile, the form of integration with the United States surrounds national authority, creating new areas of turbulence.

III

For international elites, the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union was the symbol of the foundation of a new world order. Ten years later, the attacks on the Twin Towers accelerated the construction of the legal and institutional architecture of the new imperial command and its doctrine, “preventive war.” Breaking modern international law, destroying the bases for the U.S. republic and violating the elementary rules of politics, this new world order thus inaugurated what Giorgio Agamben called the *state of exception* as a permanent technique for governing.³ From the Patriot Act to the cancellation of *habeas corpus* in the United States and the U.S. chief executive’s announcement of a cascade of regulations to further the “fight against terrorism”, these actions have constituted this new imperial command. By suspending the rule of law, it is *de facto* founding a new political order. In the foundations of that new order is the criminalization of the enemy, including migrants.

In the Western Hemisphere, the construction of the juridical-institutional architecture of the new imperial command is accelerating and deepening the subordinated integration of Canada and Mexico to the U.S. regional security project announced in 1999 with the Enterprise for the Americas. The project, whose strategic objective was to create a hemispheric area for free transit of goods and capital from Alaska to Patagonia (the Free Trade Area of the Americas, or FTAA), also included the creation of a hemispheric security zone. In recent years, the accords about intelligent borders and the creation of a regional military command (Northcom), incorporating Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean in the U.S. military security perimeter, have been the axes for deepening this trend.

If territorial expansion at Mexico’s expense was, together with the War of Secession, one of the pillars for capitalist accumulation to take off in the United States, today, this country’s military-industrial complex is preparing for the institutionalized pillage of national goods and to include Mexico

In recent years, the accords
about intelligent borders and the creation
of a regional military command (Northcom),
incorporating Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean
in the U.S. military security perimeter, have been
the axes for deepening integration.

in the United States' territorial jurisdiction. Announced in March 2005, the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP) proposed turning the continent into the best place to do business, arming it to deal with internal and external challenges. This new project, designed and launched without the participation of Congresses or Parliament, has three axes: 1) eliminating barriers to capital flow in energy, transportation, financial services and technology; 2) guaranteeing the supply of oil to the United States; and 3) adjusting Mexico and Canada's government policies to U.S. geo-strategic security imperatives, implementing mechanisms for surveillance and control of border crossings at ports, airports, by sea and in the air.

The SPP says absolutely nothing about the mobility of labor or the regulation of migratory flows. In contrast with the European Union, confederated around a single currency, free circulation of individuals and a common bank and parliament, North American integration maintains and reinforces national borders, subordinating its neighbors to the United States. This integration not only impedes the free mobility of the work force, but it also criminalizes Mexican migrants, who are excluded on both sides of the border.

Representatives of the three countries' great financial corporations, organized in the Council on Foreign Relations, have already come out for speeding up this trend. Their central recommendation is to establish by 2010 at the latest a "North American Community," whose limits would be defined by a common external tariff and an external security perimeter.⁴ Its promoters talk with conviction and will act in consequence. The first step has already been taken, with the so-called Mérida Initiative, a project of the U.S. executive that includes the transfer of financial resources from the United States to Mexico and Central America for "the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime": equipment to monitor air space and sea lanes, broadening out the "maneuvering room" of U.S. intelligence agencies in Mexican territory, controlling migratory flows and aiding the Mexican army are some of the axes of this new scheme for regional security, which, in fact and without direct troop intervention, extends U.S. military jurisdiction to Central America.

IV

The Mexican state, with its codes of command and obedience, its sources of legitimacy, its rituals and symbols, was

configured in a great historic arc. Intersected by the Mexican Revolution, fundamental processes took place in that historic arc that were part of the construction of a national state: the delimitation and state control of a territorial space, the affirmation of a sovereign power, the material and symbolic configuration of a state community and the construction of the great unifying myths of the nation. That historical process presupposed the fulfillment of four conditions: 1) subjecting the Catholic Church to state jurisdiction; 2) preserving the integrity of national territory in the face of the threat of U.S. territorial expansion; 3) centralizing the national chain of command, subduing regional strongmen and local leaders and affirming its exclusive authority *vis-à-vis* foreign powers and commands; and 4) pacifying the country, putting an end to the long cycle of agrarian violence opened up in the nineteenth century and continuing into the first decades of the twentieth. This process, which for Mexico's Liberals meant fighting a civil war (the War of the Reform) and the empire of a foreign prince, Maximilian of Habsburg, did not come to a close with the Liberal victory. It extended to the post-revolutionary regime, expressed in the legal dispute over Article 27 of the Constitution and continued until the expropriation of the oil industry in 1938.

At the same time, the trend that is dragging Mexico toward the north implies territorial reorganization beyond national borders, ceding attributes of the Mexican state and a historic change in relations with the United States. This dimension of the political transformation of Mexican politics appears, on the surface, up to now, as:

- 1) *The erosion of sovereignty*, that is, of the existence of the state power as a single, supreme command within a territory. Internally, this undermining of authority is expressed in the fragility of the presidency as an institution and the country's fragmentation into political areas of influence and territorial fiefdoms controlled by gangs of drug

In contrast with the European Union,
confederated around a single currency,
free circulation of individuals and a common
bank and parliament, North American integration
maintains and reinforces national borders,
subordinating its neighbors to the United States.

traffickers, all linked to each other. Externally, it is expressed in the surrender of state authority in internal strategic matters: economic policy, the use and destination of natural resources, national security policy, foreign policy, and education, financial and monetary policy.

- 2) *The transformation of the army*: its change from being an institution in charge of safeguarding state sovereignty to being a kind of national police force, trained in counter-insurgency and police control of social conflicts. This is what the incorporation of the army into the national public security structure and the attempt to subordinate it to external military authorities are.
- 3) *The replacement of foreign policy* based on solidarity with other peoples and the principle of national self-determination (the Estrada Doctrine) with a relationship of vassalage to U.S. security interests.
- 4) *The incorporation of Mexican territory into the U.S. military security perimeter*.

This change is of historic scope and significance. No previous modernization project had implied a change of the state. The Liberal historic project always attempted to change the country by imposing the impersonal rules of the market. But in their time, all the Liberals based themselves on the idea of the existence of a *sovereign internal authority* and *state control over the national territory* (soil, sub-soil, seas and air space) as elements of the state that should be retained.

V

Can a society like Mexico's, whose historic roots are so different from those of the United States, transform itself into a society ruled exclusively by the market and the entrepreneurial spirit? Is it possible that the tendency that is dragging Mexico toward the north will culminate in its integration into a new regional entity whose outline we can barely imagine?

The integration of Mexico with the United States is an objective, real, irreversible tendency, whose driving force is not to be found in the profile of the political elites, but in the economy and geo-politics. This trend began to materialize in the 1980s with the establishment of the first auto plants and the spectacular growth of the maquiladora industry in

The construction of a fence along
the border with Mexico is the continuation
of the "geo-politics of racial prudence"
that has served as a protective
shield *vis-à-vis* what in the Anglo imaginary
is *l'invasion barbare*.

northern Mexico. It has matured in the industrial corridors that physically link the cities and ports of central-northern Mexico with the industrial and trade centers of Canada and the United States, and in the immediate future, it will continue with the creation of the great transnational trade corridors. This trend is reinforced by the autonomous counter-tendency—until now uncontrollable—coming out of the very movement of workers: the almost half a million Mexican migrants who cross the border heading north every year, making Mexico the world's largest exporter of migrants.⁵

As has happened throughout the entire history of modernity, this unstoppable expansion also finds its limits in the history and culture of peoples. By contrast with old Europe, whose nations share a common past knitted together by 10 centuries of spiritual union, the nations of North America come from different histories and cultural matrices. The differences between Mexico and the United States are not only quantitative: they cannot be measured solely by rates of productivity or trade balances of exports and imports. The positions and counter-positions of these two neighboring and distant nations also belong to the order of civilizations.

Mexico's cultural matrix, historically sustained in the persistence of the Mesoamerican civilization, was translated in the imperial discourse as a racial border that established precise limits between the two nations, limits that, in the imaginary of the North, separated a white nation from a nation of Indians. That racial line, which constitutes modern colonial domination, is today opening up new areas of turbulence. The construction of a fence along the border with Mexico is the continuation of the "geo-politics of racial prudence" that, inaugurated at the time Mexico's territory was plundered in 1847, served as the basis for a rejection by the elites of the north to the annexation of all of Mexico's territory.⁶ The fence is a protective shield *vis-à-vis* what in the Anglo imaginary is *l'invasion barbare*.

The concrete forms the new universalization of capital takes in the world and each of its regions, as well as its pre-

cise meanings in life and the collective imaginary, do not depend solely on economic cycles. They are subject to cultural arrangements forged down through history: those symbolic configurations based on which ethnic groups, communities and peoples receive and interpret, question and dispute, adapt and model the meaning of this great transformation. This is perhaps the logic that guides under the surface the movement of Mexican migration: industrial workers and Mixtec, Zapotec, Trique, Mixe indigenous, working and living in California, Chicago, New York. This is one of the novel forms of silent appropriation of territories and riches by the Mexican subordinate classes, who in their exodus take with them ancestral identities, creating new transnational subordinate communities.

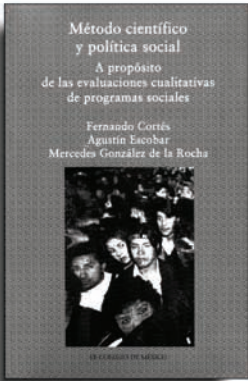
The transformation underway is an open process, whose final outcome is by no means predetermined. The modern organization of Latin American migrants also heralds a new era. New universal rights, recognized beyond national borders, are part of Latin American workers' demands in the streets of the United States: labor rights, protection and cit-

izenship are part of these new concrete, specific contents of the universal republic of the rights of human beings opposed to global capital's state of exception. ■■■

NOTES

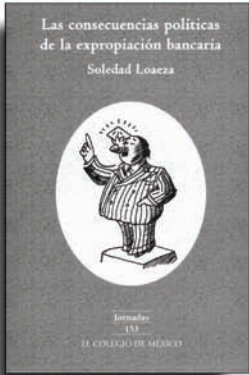
- ¹ Carl Schmitt, "Tierra y mar. Consideraciones sobre la historia universal," Héctor Orestes Aguilar, comp., *Carl Schmitt. Teólogo de la política* (Mexico City: FCE, 2001), p. 367.
- ² Víctor M. Godínez, "La economía de las regiones y el cambio estructural," Fernando Clavijo, comp., *Reformas económicas en México, 1982-1999* (Mexico City: FCE, 2000), pp. 370-371, and Claude Bataillon, *Espacios mexicanos contemporáneos* (Mexico City: FCE/El Colegio de México, 1997).
- ³ Giorgio Agamben, *État d'exception. Homo sacer* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003).
- ⁴ John P. Manley, Pedro Aspe and William F. Feld, comps., *Building a North American Community* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press/Independent Task Force 53, 2005).
- ⁵ Figures indicate that between 2000 and 2005, 400,000 Mexican migrants crossed the border into the United States, making Mexico the world's largest sender of migrants, exceeding even China, India and the Philippines. Raúl Delgado Wise, Humberto Márquez Covarrubias and Óscar Pérez Veyna, "El abaratamiento de la fuerza de trabajo mexicana en la integración económica de México a Estados Unidos," *El Cotidiano* no. 143 (May-June 2007), UAM Azcapotzalco, pp. 63-70.
- ⁶ José Luis Orozco, *De teólogos, pragmáticos y geopolíticos. Aproximación al globalismo norteamericano* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2001), pp. 117-123.

El Colegio de México




MÉTODO CIENTÍFICO Y POLÍTICA SOCIAL
*Fernando Cortés
 Agustín Escobar
 Mercedes González de la Rocha*
 Primera edición, 2008


Novedades editoriales



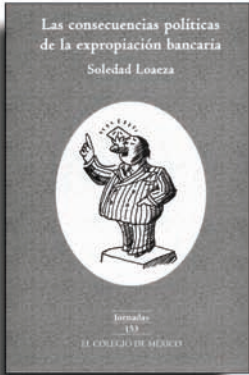
LAS CONSECUENCIAS POLÍTICAS DE LA EXPROPIACIÓN BANCARIA
Jornadas 153
Soledad Loaeza
 Primera edición, 2008



ARQUITECTÓNICA DE VOCES
Federico García Lorca y el Poema del Cante Jondo
Christina Karageorgou-Bastea
 Primera edición, 2008



ESPAÑA EN EL DEBATE PÚBLICO MEXICANO, 1836-1867
Aportaciones para una historia de la nación
Tomás Pérez Vejo
 Primera edición, 2008



ESPAÑA EN EL DEBATE PÚBLICO MEXICANO, 1836-1867
Aportaciones para una historia de la nación
Tomás Pérez Vejo
 Primera edición, 2008

Informes: El Colegio de México, A. C. Dirección de publicaciones, Camino al Ajusco 20, Pedregal de Santa Teresa, 10740 México, D. F.
 Tel.: 54493000, exts. 3090, 3138 y 3295. Fax: 54493083. Correo electrónico: publicolmex@colmex.mx
www.colmex.mx