

# Presentation

## EDUCATION, POWER AND STATE CONSTRUCTION... THE FEDERALIZATION OF EDUCATION IN MEXICO

The military has never respected federalism as it sets up its garrisons to tyranize cities and villages, install and remove governors, and decide elections. As soon as the Federation attempted to invade the country with teachers, it rose up in protest, defending the façade of a local sovereignty already undermined and circumvented.

José Vasconcelos, *El Desastre*<sup>1</sup>

The expansion of the federal system triggered an immediate and unequal reaction in the different states and local powers. Various pacts and accords were signed between the central government and state authorities which generated new relations, on occasion friendly, but more often conflictive. The growing presence and intromission of the federal executive branch spurred efforts by various governors to evade the tutelage radiating out from the center and reaffirm their autonomy. Many sustained educational projects not only distinct from, but even antagonistic to, those of the federal government. The Republic revealed itself as a mosaic with regards to its ethnic conformation.

Engracia Loyo, *Gobiernos revolucionarios y educación popular en México*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> José Vasconcelos, *El Desastre. Tercera Parte de Ulises Criollo*, Mexico, Ediciones Botas, 1938, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Engracia Loyo, *Gobiernos revolucionarios y educación popular en México, 1911-1928*, Mexico, El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1999, xiv.

Luis González demonstrated, a half century ago now,<sup>3</sup> that the rhythm which marks the pace of the ensemble of aspects that constitute national histories reveals quite distinct dimensions when observed from a regional perspective. The broad processes at the center of the narratives of the construction of a nation acquire different, sometimes contradictory, explanations when examined through the eyes of small localities or entire regions. Such was Luis González' explanation of why San José's inhabitants did not become revolutionaries in the 1910-1924 period but were *revolutionized*; that is, they suffered the *Mexican Revolution* like some kind of terrible plague that descended upon them.

One direct corollary of the Revolution were efforts by Presidents Obregón and Calles to implement programs and strategies designed to strengthen their control over Mexico's different regions and entrench the power of their post-revolutionary governments. Many of their actions were meant to reinforce the federal government's presence in numerous fields that, according to the Constitution of 1917, were prerogatives of the state and municipal levels of government, but their initiatives often sparked disputes with local elites and power groups. As a result, the policies implemented by the federal government took on distinct rhythms, dynamics and characteristics in each place. One clear example was José Vasconcelos' project that proposed, from the seat of the recently-created Department of Public Education, establishing rural schools in areas long ignored by the educational systems of various states.

As Juan B. Alfonseca points out in the article that opens the *Thematic Section* of this issue of *Relaciones* that process, which spanned three decades from the 1920s to the 1940s, was a “politically sensitive topic”. Policies elaborated to bring educational programs to rural areas were a cause of ongoing tension between the federal government's jurisdiction—which included the right to intervene in matters of education—and the sovereignty of individual states to implement their own schooling policies. The heated debates that arose occasion-

<sup>3</sup> From the first edition, published 47 years ago: Luis González, *Pueblo en vilo*, Mexico, El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1968.

ally turned into conflicts. As a result, while Mexico did gradually succeed in constructing a national model of post-revolutionary educational development, the impact and outcomes of federal policies were felt unevenly in different states and regions.

The *Thematic Section* presents a small sample of case studies that reveal just how varied and problematic the process of federalizing education in Mexico really was: Juan B. Alfonseca examines the eastern region of the Valley of Mexico (Texcoco and Chalco); Ariadna Acevedo Rodrigo Puebla's Northern Sierra; Carlos Escalante Fernández the northern area of the State of Mexico; Juan Ramón Manzanailla Dorantes the municipality of Espitia in Yucatán; and Salvador Sigüenza the northern sierra region of Oaxaca. The plethora of regional analyses now available to complement the innumerable publications on this topic that have appeared in Mexico in recent years suggests that the time may be ripe to conduct comparative studies with other Latin American realities, such as the earlier case of Sarmiento's educational policies in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Argentina, or the Peruvian experience with Leguía which was contemporary to the process in Mexico.

Imagining an earlier reality based on a 16<sup>th</sup>-century document is a fascinating exercise that becomes even moreso when we attempt to incorporate the physical and geographical environment it mentions by translating the coordinates and imaginary of the men who described it to correspond to our own, now so distinct. This is what Armando Hernández Souberville proposes in leading us to the quarry of pink stone that appears in the document he presents, penned in 1596 by the *alcalde mayor* of San Luis Potosí.

The *General Section* begins with an article by Ricardo F. Macip that analyzes the transformation of marginalized fishing villages in Oaxaca into communities that offer eco-tourism services, where the principle focus of publicity is sea turtle conservation. Macip examines how this transformation took place, explaining that it was tightly-linked to the presence of organizations of civil society, though his primary interest is in the theoretical and political aspects of this transformation. Today, thanks to the actions of those communities and their environmental discourse, the turtles "no longer fear humans..."

The 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Age of Enlightenment, has been considered the epoch that marked the appearance of public opinion with its quintessential vehicles of expression: newspapers, gazettes, journals, dailies and weeklies. One especially interesting, though little-studied, element in that phenomenon involves the economic strategies implemented by those projects to assure their survival. Manuel Suárez Rivera discusses the case of the *Gazeta de México*, published in Mexico City by Antonio Valdés more or less continuously from 1784 to 1805. His study leads Suárez to venture the argument that Valdés' *Gazeta* was in the vanguard of the transition from 'artisanal' to 'modern' journalism.

The two contributions that close this section share a certain relation, as both deal with gender relations and the problem of equality/inequality between men and women. Ubaldo Dzib plunges into an analysis of gender relations in rural Mayan society that covers several generations (1940-2010), showing special interest in the construction of discourses of gender equality and the condition of women in that rural context. He argues that it is necessary to insert gender relations into the broader spectrum of class relations and hierarchies among groups in order to adequately contextualize this phenomenon. Patricia Arias, in turn, presents a detailed analysis of the last will and testament of a woman from the rural society of the state of Jalisco in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (1905-1920), specifically the town of Teocaltiche. She reminds the reader that the norm in the rural societies of the time, especially in indigenous and peasant groups, was to exclude women completely from testamentary documents and the practices of inheritance, where they were subordinated to men. Was Teocaltiche's society distinct from others of its time in this regard?

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