

MORENA and Mexico's Fourth Historical Transformation

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On July 1, 2018, Mexico elected a left-of-center president for the first time since Lázaro Cárdenas was elected in 1934. Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and his National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) won the elections by a landslide, with 53.2 percent of the vote and 64.3 percent citizen participation, winning a majority in both chambers of Congress. The mandate is therefore quite strong. Significantly, both Congress and the cabinet have gender parity, a first for any Latin American country. Given the importance of these elections, Diálogos por la Democracia at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) organized a three-day conference in November 2018 to analyze the challenges for the new government, which promised a “fourth transformation” for Mexico. The first historical transformation was Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1821; the second was the liberal reform struggle for a secular state, separating church and state in the 1857 constitution; and the third was the 1910 revolution culminating with the 1917 constitution and its progressive agrarian reform and labor legislation. Political violence was key to producing each of these transformations. If it happens, the fourth transformation would be the first peaceful one. The odds of achieving something significant enough to be considered a fourth transformation are huge, but cautious optimism is warranted. I outline the main issues and challenges discussed at the conference by prominent scholars, politicians and intellectuals.

Human Rights

Mexico arrived to 2018 as a cemetery with about 200,000 people having been killed since 2006, and about 40,000 disappeared. Several speakers addressed this issue from various perspectives. Exploitation, oppression, and inequality are the

root causes that make the ruling class turn to repression, said Abel Barrera Hernández, of the Tlachinollán Center for Human Rights in the highlands of Guerrero State. He therefore contested the proposition that “the struggle for human rights is the axis of all struggle” because their violation is merely a symptom. Yet, concrete responses and solutions are needed. The new government must respect and promote human rights, said Father Miguel Concha, acknowledged as the dean of the human rights struggle. He posited the indivisibility of three aspects of human rights. First, transitional justice, which should be accessible to all in order to avoid revictimization. Spaces from the bottom up should become available. Second, we need a paradigm shift in security and to stay away from militarization. Third, the neoliberal state must be disarticulated for one that guarantees human rights. Civil society demands the establishment of a truth commission on human rights at the federal level. As a start, Barrera Hernández called for the immediate derogation of the Interior Security Law and demilitarization.

Alternation in government by different political parties does not guarantee a regime change, asserted Alejandro Encinas, a longtime politician on the Left, now undersecretary of Human Rights, Migration and Population. New paradigms for state reconstruction are required. Human dignity and human rights must become the center of attention to recover collective well-being. Mexico has gone through a deep humanitarian crisis due to the state’s weakening and the empowerment of other de facto powers such as organized crime. Mexico has become a giant clandestine grave, with 26,000 unidentified dead people. Migrants, on the other hand, will not be criminalized. Those foreigners that the United States considers aliens and stateless, the Mexican state will have to make them subjects

of rights. Furthermore, the new government will promote union freedom, with secret, direct, and universal balloting by workers. Workers' freedom of organization and union democracy are the new goals.

Human rights for Indigenous peoples have added requirements: they involve acknowledging Indigenous rights to autonomy, land, and territory, as mandated by Mexico's endorsement of United Nations conventions. Neil Harvey argued that, while the elections demonstrated widespread popular discontent, the new MORENA government runs the risk of repeating past practices with regard to Indigenous peoples. If we look critically at the post-Independence, liberal reform, and revolutionary periods, Indigenous peoples participated in each of these transformations, but they were later subordinated to new regimes that either stripped them of their lands in the name of progress or provided land reform as a means of garnering political support for a centralized and authoritarian regime. We must therefore be wary of the potentially negative impacts of the proclaimed fourth historical transformation under AMLO and MORENA. Megaprojects such as the Tren Maya and the creation of new agricultural plantations in southern Mexico are of particular concern and have brought criticism from the Zapatistas, the National Indigenous Congress, and several local organizations. In Harvey's opinion, they rightly fear that AMLO may simply be continuing the same rural development policies of his predecessors. An alternative approach would be for AMLO and his advisers to listen and learn from communities that have actively resisted such policies and built more ecologically sustainable and socially just forms of development. The extent to which such an alternative is embraced or rejected will determine whether or not the fourth historical transformation is a case of *déjà vu* or not for Indigenous peoples in Mexico.

Corruption and Impunity

Mexico occupies one of the worst ranks regarding corruption of its penal system in the world. Only 2 percent of crimes reach conviction sentences, said Santiago Nieto, now head of the Financial Intelligence Unit in the Secretariat of Finance. There

are other routes through which convictions or reparations are made for a mere 8 percent of the cases. AMLO does not seek vengeance but justice as the new *modus operandi* of the state. When the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was in power, there were the "*diesmos priistas*," 10 percent payments that public officials demanded to issue a permit or some other government concession; then the "*panista moches*," or shares given to public workers in the time of the National Action Party (PAN). During the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto's PRI, the modality of phantom enterprises emerged: they received huge payments from the government for no work performed at all. This creates a disloyal competition with legitimate firms and hinders their development in the private sector: phantom firms will no longer settle for 10 percent of the share but for 100 percent of public resources. The challenge, therefore, includes both political will and institutional changes. There is political will in the new administration and its challenge is to eliminate the protection of illicit, phantom "enterprises."

It is a human right to live without corruption, said Nieto. The state must exercise the penal option on money laundering and corruption. There should be communication and cooperation between the Secretariat of the Public Function and the Attorney General now called *Fiscalía*. To improve the messaging on corruption toward the public, the *Fiscalía* should be autonomous from political power in public prosecution and execution of the law. The constitution is the sum of all of the nation's projects; it has neoliberal elements but also social ones. We need to think more in group rights than individual rights. The judicial branch of government needs to realize that this is a system: the law must be coordinated. Penal action must become central also to recover stolen public goods and immediately apply financial intelligence.

Such struggle requires juridical efficacy. Luz Mijangos, former major accountant of Mexico City's Ministry of Finance, addressed this issue in fighting corruption and impunity. The context is that *de facto* powers like organized crime are often more powerful than authorities. Efficacy in combatting corruption and impunity has never been achieved. Political corruption has been progressing and,

strategically, it replaces all decisions of political power. There are various holes in the national anticorruption system, but there is a model with some advancements. There must be synergies and coordination among all those combatting corruption, including citizen committees. The bases of proof need considerable strengthening. For instance, in civil society investigations of corruption cases like that of Odebrecht, proof must be convincing so that the attorney general can build a sound case. To perfect or improve the proofs, there should be direct access to data bases such as notaries. The judicial power must develop a responsible attitude to reach an adequate standard of proof and translate the anticorruption policy in concrete actions to achieve its goals.

Addressing impunity has been an official goal since Miguel de la Madrid's administration (1982-1988). His campaign slogan was "moral renovation." But there were no popular organizations that might have helped him in the fight against impunity, said José Agustín Ortiz Pinchetti, now director of FEPADE (Fiscalía Especializada para la Atención de los Delitos Electorales). López Obrador proposes the democratization of the country and the fight against corruption and impunity. AMLO has both the political will and the courage to tackle these issues. He has a very good record on fighting impunity from governing Mexico City (2003-2006). But in 2018 the entrepreneurial class is much stronger. Perhaps a few emblematic cases of punishment would go a long way to assert the rule of law.

Corruption scandals were at the root of the demise of Enrique Peña Nieto and the PRI, said Stephen Morris; they contributed to the deterioration of their image. After the 43 students disappeared from Ayotzinapa, Peña Nieto tried to reform the law of accountability, but it was too late. In contrast, these scandals contributed to improve AMLO's and MORENA's image. Morris is skeptical, however, that corruption and impunity can be eliminated in merely six years. One of the main goals of the new administration should be to start changing the culture of corruption and to start citizen participation in combating it.

MORENA: From Social Movement to Political Party

If there is a single factor that best explains the 2018 electoral result, it would be MORENA. For Héctor Díaz Polanco, head of its Honor and Justice Commission, MORENA was a hegemonic construction and a powerful structure, the most powerful in Latin America. MORENA had to lock the entrance key to party memberships in 2017: it had reached 3 million members out of nearly 90 million registered voters. There was a transformation process in which militants and sympathizers became actively involved in the elections. MORENA had eight to ten observers in 68,000 balloting places, making sure that fraud would not be committed. In total, there were 650,000 members at balloting places and, in Chiapas, 100 percent of them were looked after by MORENA militants or sympathisers.

MORENA represents an intermediary point in Latin American politics. There have been movements without parties and parties without movements. In contrast, MORENA is a party of movements. Redistributive politics has had an ambivalent effect in Latin American politics. For example, in Bolivia 3 million in a population of 10 million were risen from poverty, and similar results were obtained in Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela. But the exclusive social-assistance policy focus in those countries had a boomerang effect: the former poor became conservative voters as they became mere objects of public policy. They transformed their collective vision into an individualistic one and reappeared in the sociopolitical process voting for the Right. What is needed is to create a politically formed class of voters that become subjects of their own development.

This is an old dilemma: reform or revolution. What is the fourth transformation all about? The past three transformations were also revolutions; the fourth must also be one, but it must take a moral, economic, and political leap. Only the first steps are being taken: deep rooted reforms; this is the condition for revolution. MORENA's political structure must be constructed so as to avert failure, and this includes the following points, said Díaz Polanco: (1) gender democracy, equality between

men and women, starting with congress and cabinet; (2) leaders' qualification for leadership roles; (3) the structure of political formation must be strengthened, starting with support of half of all party revenues received from the government, in proportion to MORENA's votes; (4) a deepening of ethics both in the party and the government; and (5) combatting corruption within the party.

Enrique Dussel, the famous UNAM philosopher, reminded us of Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" or, in Spanish, "*transformarlo*." So, what about the fourth transformation? It is a transformation, not a revolution, but neither is it a reform. In politics there cannot be a perfect system. Planning cannot be done perfectly. Imperfect planning can be done and it implies possible and inevitable error. In politics nothing is certain because it is very complex. It can never give a definitive solution to anything. A reform may be done so that the system survives and continues to go on in the same way. Transformation would be a deeper change in the future. For anarchists, whatever is not revolution is reformist: this is what the extreme Left holds.

Capitalism leads to ecological catastrophe. Its profit-maximizing logic must change. The first transformation was the conquest that uprooted the millenarian civilizations. Indigenous peoples taught us how to live respecting nature. Walter Benjamin says we must put a brake on modernity. And Naomi Klein says that capital cannot be ecological. The essence of the fourth transformation is organization from below, from the bottom up, community by community, with their communal police forces. Critical realism is about doing the possible with ethical criteria. "I am not an optimist, but I am hopeful," concluded Dussel.

Gerardo Otero presented an overview of leftist political parties and social movements in Latin America, proposed a theory of the political-cultural formation of subordinate classes, and derived the chief challenges for the MORENA government. He observed that social movements which supported electoral transitions and governments became demobilized or co-opted by emerging

social-assistance policies of the state. In contrast, autonomist movements that refused to engage with the state, like the Zapatistas in Mexico, became mostly marginalized. By themselves, both strategies of transformation have generally failed their popular constituencies. The dynamics of class formation toward a popular-democratic society must be based both from the bottom up and from the top down, from social movements rooted in civil society and from the institutions of the state. He proposed that MORENA, as a party, has the main responsibility to contribute to the strengthening of social movements. It must encourage their capacities for mobilization and to exert pressure from below in their engagement with the state in promoting the popular-democratic alternative. This bottom-up and top-down combination is the only alternative to deepen the popular-democratic project within capitalism with a view to transcend it in the future.

Mexico is today the capital of critical thinking, said Juan Carlos Monedero, of Universidad Complutense de Madrid and a representative of Spain's Podemos Party. Civil rights are reversible, and we can think of these in terms proposed by Spinoza: fear is associated with monologue, while hope is associated with dialogue. The Right, argues Monedero, always bets on fear, in which there can only be monologue. In Latin America, the evangelical sects have been sent to stop dialogical liberation theology, while in Europe those who have bet on fear are winning. Everything has become a commodity. Finance capital makes it impossible for the nation-state to operate. Let's remember that capitalism locates itself in the weakest link, or where there are the fewest protests: women, Indigenous peoples, subaltern countries. The struggles of women and Indigenous peoples are thus anticapitalist. At all times, plan B or plan C of capitalism has been fascism.

We on the Left must assume that we come from defeats, says Monedero, but the agenda for the pursuit of liberty, fraternity, and equality is still current. Pessimistic intellectuals are conservative: we should be hopeful pessimists or tragic optimists. Poor analyses by the Left can be very harmful. For instance, the autonomist Spanish movement Indignados was an annoying mosquito to the

powerful; Podemos, however, a party that is willing to participate in the electoral process to attempt transformation from the top down, frightens them a lot.

MORENA cannot be hollowed out. There must be a clear differentiation of fractions: in congress, in social movements, in government, etc. The party must go beyond the government and pressure the parliamentary fraction to pursue its program. Mexico must relink itself to the South. The people must be politicized and create its own narrative. The laws that Podemos made were done by the people, so the people must be given credit for that. If we don't trust the people we go nowhere; the Right is afraid of them. "May all of the Davids unite with hope."

John Ackerman, director of Diálogos por la Democracia at UNAM, said that AMLO must be everyone's president, but he can also be an opposition government to economic power. His goal, in fact, is to separate economic from political power. There is a left wing that lives off its faith, its doctrine, and its maximalism. But we need to measure the causes and consequences. Karl Marx warned the Paris Commune that it would be massacred; there are problems that have no theoretical solution, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos put it. Memes, on the other hand, produce relief, but they are conservative and demobilizing. It is fine to generate irony, laughter, and tension, but we must stay focused. We cannot lower the guard. Leaderships are indispensable. In parallel, we must promote deliberative circles or groups so that these generate new leaderships. In Podemos, for instance, all leadership positions are decided in primary elections. When individuals owe their positions to the people, then they are not as loyal to the party as they are to the people. This dynamic helps prevent parties from becoming detached bureaucracies, it becomes a condition to advance in a popular-democratic direction.

In sum, conference participants were realistic in describing the tremendous odds confronting Mexico's new government. They insisted on fighting both the root causes of human rights violations and their immediate manifestations. There are plenty of grounds for pessimism. But given the concrete

history of MORENA as a party of movements, there is also hope that Mexico can be transformed with both institutional and policy changes from the top and continued pressure from below. //