

Education, Culture and Values

VOLUME I

SYSTEMS OF EDUCATION  
Theories, Policies and Implicit Values

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Edited by  
Mal Leicester, Celia Modgil  
and Sohan Modgil



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London and New York

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# 4

## Contested Values and Disputed Cultural Identity in Mexican Higher Education

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KEN KEMPNER and IMANOL ORDORIKA

Every nation's educational system is the product of its historical, cultural, social, and geographic circumstances. Historically, the principal educational tasks for a nation have been established in accordance with local needs, traditions, and available resources. Unfortunately, the complexity of modern nations no longer allows the simple luxury of a practically focused and parochial education. Although the people of a nation may still value local educational traditions and customs, contemporary nation states wishing to participate in the global economy must find a place for themselves within the international division of labor. Nations wishing to participate in this global market must then adopt economic, educational, political, and social models considered legitimate at the world level.

Whereas some nations have historically controlled vast amounts of natural resources and have developed large technology systems, other nations have not been so fortunate. Herein, we find the basis for the tension surrounding international conflict, dependency, and the classical distinctions between developed, developing, and underdeveloped countries. The choices for developing and newly industrialized countries are very limited when the resources and technology are controlled by the few developing countries. In the modern world even the possession of valuable natural resources is not enough, however, for economic success. To compete in the global market underdeveloped nations must produce their own commodities, seek a competitive advantage (typically, cheap labor) for their products, modernize their technology base while trying to stay ahead of the other underdeveloped countries seeking the same competitive advantages. To accomplish this developmental task underdeveloped countries require an

educational system capable of teaching their citizens the technical skills for production and the knowledge to adopt, create, and manage modern technologies. Whereas simple, agrarian economies necessitated only simple educational systems, complex modern economies now require equally complex educational systems. What a nation values internally may no longer be of external value in the world marketplace.

How a developing nation's internal values clash with the external values of global capitalism and the ways in which these values are disputed internally to shape higher education is the focus of this chapter. We consider here the case of Mexico as an example of a nation struggling to maintain its own cultural identity. Mexico offers an excellent example of a developing country on the periphery of the core, industrial nations – wanting the respect and economic rewards of a developed nation, but seeking this on its own nationalistic terms. In our analysis of how values have shaped Mexican higher education we are especially interested in understanding what is unique about Mexican higher education in comparison to what is unique to Latin America, to other developing nations, and to higher education systems in general.

To understand the unique cultural, historical, and social circumstances of Mexican higher education we are guided by several basic assumptions in our inquiry:

- (a) We view education as a site of struggle and confrontation. As we discuss below, higher education, in particular, is the site of confrontation over access to knowledge and social mobility for the middle classes. Mexican higher education has been shaped by this often violent struggle with students who have

- demanding access, independence, and freedom of expression against the dominant ruling party (the PRI).
- (b) Cultural perceptions (values and beliefs) shape and are in turn shaped by university structures and policies. This dialectic of values and beliefs both shaping and being shaped contributes to the unique character of Mexican higher education and national politics.
  - (c) Cultural perceptions develop as historical and contextualized products and producers. As we have proposed, a nation's educational system reflects its unique historical, cultural, social, and geographic circumstances. Mexico is certainly no exception.
  - (d) In a peripheral country values and cultural perceptions are also shaped by dominating models. Mexico has been shaped, first, by the historical circumstances of its colonial relationship with Spain and, second, by the geographic circumstances of its proximity and dependent relationship with the USA.
  - (e) Values are not static. They evolve historically through these processes of confrontation. Not only have external, historical relationships influenced Mexican values, politics, and higher education, but so too have internal relationships and circumstances. From the Mexican Revolution to the Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) social, political, and nationalistic values are in constant flux.
  - (f) Historical development of values give form to the contemporary nature of higher education institutions. Given the central role higher education plays in national politics and economic development, the character of higher education institutions are not neutral. Higher education is both the site of political struggle and the exposition of modern global capitalism. Contemporary higher education reflects contemporary values.

Specifically, in our inquiry of Mexican higher education we consider the following basic set of questions:

- 1 Is Mexico unique compared to other Latin American countries and other developing countries in how its values have shaped its system of higher education?
- 2 What role does the value of privatization play in restructuring Mexican higher education? Again, is this uniquely Mexican or is it more a reflection of the larger world market of ideas and higher education?
- 3 How successful is Mexico in its struggle to maintain its national identity and values in the face of global capitalism?
- 4 What role is higher education playing for a peripheral country such as Mexico in its quest for a place at the table of the core countries who control and maintain global capitalism? Is Mexico's role to be a service country for the core or will it be a knowledge producer itself?
- 5 What role does the state play in promoting educational reform? How do the values of the modern state contrast with the historical values of Mexico, especially the Mexican Revolution?

In this chapter we will address, first, the effect of the state on higher education. Second, we will review the historical antecedents of contemporary higher education in Mexico and the effect societal values have had on the formation of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). In this review we will consider how policies in UNAM have been strongly shaped by intense confrontations over societal and educational values and the strong interrelationship between societal and collegial dynamics. Finally, we address contemporary issues in Mexican higher education with particular focus on the debate over equity and efficiency. We conclude by summarizing the basic questions we pose in this inquiry by distinguishing what is unique about the Mexican experience of higher education.

### Higher education and the state

The state, in [Gramsci's \(1971\)](#) view, is the combination of coercion and hegemony. Hegemony is the process of consensual domination through the articulation of a diversity of social groups and interests. It is established through the mediation of ideology ([Mouffe, 1979](#)), the terrain "on which [people] move, acquire consciousness of their own position, struggle," it is "a practice producing subjects" ([Gramsci, 1971](#)). Hegemony is always an active process. It is not simply a complex of dominant values and beliefs, "it is always a more or less adequate organization and interconnection of otherwise separated and even disparate meanings, values, and practices, which specifically incorporate in a significant culture and an effective social order" ([Williams, 1977](#), p. 115).

Because higher education is part of the state's structure of hegemonic institutions, understanding a nation's system of higher education necessitates an inquiry into the degree the state imposes its economic and ideological control. The state, of course, is an actor in its own right and seeks to gain its ideological hegemony through its "apparatuses" (Althusser, 1971) or institutions (Gramsci, 1971). The state, for example, may choose to distribute education as a commodity to the lower classes to secure their good will to legitimize the state's political control (Weiler, 1983).

Education, as any hegemonic institution, is a site of class struggle through which the state attempts to impose its domination over the subordinate social classes. When the nondominant classes see higher education, in particular, as the path to upward mobility, attempts by the state, in some countries, to limit access are met with swift, and sometimes violent, reactions. The wishes of upward mobility by the lower classes are mediated by the economic realities of how many resources there are to distribute and by the state's interest in maintaining its hegemony. Whereas the state may distribute education to the lower classes as a form of compensatory legitimation to gain their good will (Weiler, 1983), the lower classes may gain no economic advantage if concomitant changes in the economy are not also made. Because "education cannot of itself promote peripheral economic change" (Walters, 1981, p. 95), the state's compensatory use of education may actually create greater dissatisfaction among the lower classes and weaken the state's political control.

The role of the state and its use of the educational apparatus available to it differ, of course, depending upon the social, economic, cultural, and political circumstances of the country under consideration, particularly for dependent countries (Cardoso and Falleto, 1979). Structuralist and class-struggle perspectives must account for the individual conditions of dependency of each country and the constraints under which the state operates in relation to its place in the larger regional and global situation. Nevertheless, reproductive and class struggle theories of the state are critical in understanding the role higher education plays in Mexico and how nationalistic values shape its structure. In particular, the Mexican revolution (1910–17) generated a unique educational philosophy and values that have been transmitted and accepted for generations. In this humanist tradition, higher education was conceived

as a means for national cohesion, for the creation and re-creation of Mexican identity and culture, as a promoter of universal values, as a space to reflect upon, understand and solve the problems of the country, and as an agent to inculcate a scientific spirit among the population. Above all, the Revolution established the idea that public education should respond to the general interest of society because it enhances living standards and the changes for social, economic and cultural improvement of the people (Cueli and Arzac, 1990).

The modernization projects of the former Salinas and current Zedillo governments for public higher education are in open contradiction, however, to the historical traditions of the Mexican Revolution. For the first time in many years the interests and needs of the private sectors prevail in the definition of policies towards higher education institutions and the global economy, as dictated, for example, by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Similar to what Slaughter (1990, p. 46) found in the USA, the Mexican state is "socializing the cost of development"; that is, public resources are being used to underwrite private enterprise. Due to the state's financial crisis and pressures from private sector economic groups, support for higher education has been reduced and redistributed to support private sector initiatives. The state, along with the wealthy classes and business interests, has put enormous pressure on higher education to establish new efficiency measures and other forms of privatization to justify the redistribution of resources. While maintaining the myth of the neutrality of the university, the bureaucratic response to this budget crisis has been to focus on business as the basic constituency for the university in order to acquire private funding and support for public institutions.

Within this climate of economic crisis and the privatization of higher education, the university has become the site of confrontation between two broad directions and constituencies for reform:

- the state's imposition of reform through bureaucratic authorities;
- the opposition's alternative proposals for democratizing in the university governance, access, and support for students to enable them to persist to graduation.

In Carnoy and Levin's terms (1985, p. 231), these two constituencies can often be viewed as those interested in greater equality versus those interested

in greater efficiency. Within this debate resource allocation is contested in terms of the state's responsibility to finance higher education against the concept of alternative revenue sources and civil society's participation in the support of higher education. The social uses of knowledge and the legitimate function of the university are also central to this debate. From the modernist perspective of the state, higher education must prioritize career preparation and knowledge production in terms of the requirements of the market. Within this perspective applied science and technology research are the most important areas of the institution and social sciences and humanities can be sacrificed because they are not considered productive and efficient.

What will constitute the future of legitimate academic knowledge, academic vocations, and knowledge products for Mexico is currently being contested. How the state legitimates its role in reforming higher education is mediated by the hegemony of the ruling PRI party and private interests, on one side, and the democratizing interests of the nondominant classes, on the other. Ultimately, the question [Gumport \(1993, p. 6\)](#) poses for the development of higher education in the USA is equally appropriate for Mexico to consider: Is the commercialization of knowledge for revenue enhancement a legitimate direction for higher education in the twenty-first century? Because the circumstances in the USA differ dramatically from those in Mexico, however, the question of the state's role in higher education must be posed in terms of the unique cultural values and national history of Mexico. To further understand these cultural values and how they have influenced higher education we present in the next section an overview of the historical determinants of the unique character of Mexican higher education.

### **Origins of Mexican higher education: between scholastics and science**

The origins of higher education in Mexico go back to the sixteenth century in the early colonial period. Only a few years after Cortes defeated the Aztec resistance (1521), the Spanish put together a formidable educational effort in an attempt to Christianize and educate the indigenous population. It was not unusual that education was in the hands of the Catholic Church, given its main objective

to bring Christianity to the Indian souls. Furthermore, the Church was the only institution capable of organizing and putting together such a project.

From 1523 to the end of the sixteenth century, many innovative minor and major schools and colleges were founded. These institutions reached a wide variety of ages and groups. They provided instruction in religion, Spanish, fine arts, jobs and crafts (Vazquez, 1981). The first antecedents of colonial higher education were the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, founded by Bishop Juan de Zumarraga in 1536, and the Colegio de San Nicolas de Hidalgo, founded by Bishop Vasco de Quiroga in 1540. The most important institution of higher education during this period, the Real y Pontificia Universidad de Mexico (Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico), was also promoted by Zumarraga. It was founded by royal decree in 1551 and officially inaugurated in 1553. This period has been called the Mexican renaissance by some scholars (Vazquez, 1981).

The Real y Pontificia Universidad de Mexico was organized in the scholastic tradition of the Universidad de Salamanca in Spain. It was a medieval institution in which preservation of the religious dogma was considered far more important than the discovery of truth (Osborne, 1976). At the end of the century and the early 1600s, European universities started to change as a consequence of the scientific revolution. The Universidad Pontificia and the Colegios were also involved in the polemics between scholastics and the emerging empirical sciences. Both institutions maintained a conservative stance towards the new trends in European higher education.

The Colegios and the University were deeply affected by the Council of Trent (1545–64); the consequences, however, were very different for both institutions. The Universidad Pontificia was weakened by the Trent decision to educate future priests in specialized seminars. As a consequence of this decision, the student population decreased and economic support was reduced. The Colegios, on the other hand, were strengthened with the approval of the Jesuit educational project (Wences, 1984). The Society of Jesus was allowed to found many colegios mayores (major colleges). These institutions would become more open and innovative in pedagogy, methodology and curriculum. Intense critiques against scholastic philosophy and theology generated an academic reform movement

in the colegios during the eighteenth century. Jesuits expanded the debate about the scientific revolution, and headed the struggle against scholastics in favor of the modern natural sciences (Wences, 1984).

When the Jesuits were expelled in 1776 a large part of the education system collapsed. The struggle between scholastics and science, however, did not come to an end. The demands of King Carlos III for more concern about the sciences were not met by the Universidad Pontificia (De Gortari, 1980). New secular higher education institutions, parallel to the University, were founded by the Spanish crown in an attempt to develop the arts and sciences. The development of an innovative variety of new institutions, Real Seminario de Minería (Royal Mining Seminar), The Academia de Bellas Artes de San Carlos (San Carlos Fine Arts Academy), the Real Escuela de Cirugía (Royal School of Surgery), and the Jardín Botánico (Botanical Garden) was not enough, however, to produce a profound transformation of the system.

The colonial period of Mexican higher education coincided with an era of intense debates and transformations of cultural perceptions of the world, knowledge, and education in the presence of events like the Protestant reform and the scientific revolution. Societal values rooted in diverse contexts and historical settings were shaken and transformed in distinct ways and to different degrees. The clash between the Catholic Church and Protestant reform, between religious dogma and science, had a differential impact on southern and northern European universities. The colonies shared many similarities with Spain, but the presence of large Indian and Mestizo populations, the difference of economic roles and political structures, and the mixture of cultural perceptions generated a different set of values which were confronted and reshaped in the arena of higher education.

Scholastic and science-oriented institutions survived the colonial period. The dispute between scholastics and empirical science, between the University, on one hand, and the *colegios* and royal schools, on the other, endured despite the war of independence. This conflict and continuing tension between the national values of scholasticism and science within higher education was never settled and assumed new forms in the modern era of early independent Mexico.

### **The dispute for the nation: religious versus liberal education**

In 1821 Mexico finally acquired its independence from Spain. The early years of independent life (1821–67) were characterized by intense conflicts between liberals and conservatives, by foreign interventions, and reform wars. In the confrontation between liberals and conservatives, struggles about and within education played a major role. One of the main issues in this dispute was about the Church. Liberals argued that the new nation's progress depended on the occupation of the Church's properties, the abolishment of privileges for the Church and the military, the expansion of education to popular sectors of society, and its total independence from the Church (Mora, 1963).

Liberals viewed education as a means to insure the exercise of freedom and, through this, national progress. But it was not the vestiges of colonial education which were to play that role. The liberal project for higher education was founded in the royal seminars and schools established by the Spanish crown in the latter years of the colony. The colegios were transformed into secular Institutos Científicos y Literarios (scientific and literary institutes). The University retained its conservative stance on the side of the Church and the conservative party. In 1833 the Real y Pontificia Universidad de Mexico was closed by the liberals and characterized as useless, irreformable, and pernicious (Mora, 1963). Detractors labeled the University "useless" because they alleged nothing was taught and nothing was learned. The University was also considered "irreformable," because any reform presupposed the ethical and moral base of the old establishment. Obviously, the University was useless and non conducive towards the ultimate objectives of the establishment. The University was, furthermore, considered "pernicious" because it "gives place to the loss of time and the dissipation of the students." The establishment of the time concluded, that it was necessary to suppress the University (Mora, 1963).

The University was reopened by the conservatives in 1834, closed by the liberals in 1857, reopened in 1858, and closed by Juárez in 1861. During the French invasion Emperor Maximilian restored the University and finally closed it in 1865 to the dismay of his conservative allies. At the root of this confrontation lies the clash between the values of religious dogma and scientific orientations



that have continually affected the debate over higher education in Mexico. During this historical period, nonetheless, both parties were clear about the importance of the Church's role in controlling education for the preservation of conservative values and religion.

In the final liberal victory against the French invasion, the conservative party and the Church, the University and the colegios were permanently closed and religious education was banned. In the construction of the new secular educational system (1867–74) the unchallenged liberal government turned its eyes to a modern philosophy imported from France by Gabino Barreda: positivism, the philosophy of order and progress.

Barreda was a disciple of Comte in Paris. Upon his return to Mexico he attempted to spread the ideas of this new philosophy and make a strong effort to show the liberals to be the bearers of the "positive spirit." He argued for the assumption, by the liberals, of the motto *liberty, order and progress*: liberty as the means, order as the base, and progress as the end (Barreda, 1973). Barreda founded the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (National Preparatory School, now a part of UNAM) with its curricula based on the structure of positive science. A few years later Barreda reduced the motto – liberty was dropped as a metaphysical concept. Order and progress was the slogan of the newly created Preparatory School and provided the ideological base for the coming dictatorship (Wences, 1984).

### **Modernization and order: the adoption of positivism**

The adoption of the new philosophy of positivism shaped the entire public education system. At the higher education level Barreda's Escuela Nacional Preparatoria was the principal example. In an attempt to provide general and encyclopedic knowledge the new Preparatory included, among others, courses in arithmetic, logics, algebra, geometry, calculus, cosmography, physics, chemistry, botanics, zoology, universal and Mexican history, German, French, and English (Wences, 1984). It is not surprising that this philosophy of order and modernity constituted an element of continuity in education in the transition from the democratic governments towards the dictatorship and provided essential ideological elements for the survival of the latter until 1910. Positivism permeated the

whole education system and constituted the ideological base for Porfirio Diaz's dictatorship. To promote their guiding value, the ruling political party called themselves *los científicos* (the scientists).

Before 1910 and during the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, Justo Sierra created the School of Higher Studies within the National University, which was the predecessor of the schools of Philosophy and Sciences. Justo Sierra argued that the National University could not situate itself in an ivory tower, far from the needs and expectations of Mexican society. But a strong reaction against the dictatorship and its ideological foundation was to come with the revolutionary uprising in 1910. At the level of philosophical ideas, a reduced group of notable intellectuals, the Ateneo de la Juventud (Ateneus of Youth), provided a strong critique of positivism from a humanist and religious perspective. At the political and military level, the peasant masses who were to appear in the public arena to promote their own values would completely change the course of Mexican history.

Religious humanism reappeared against the discourse of scientific rationality and order. The Ateneo provided a group of very important intellectuals who would reject some of the values of positivism. One of these intellectuals, Jose Vasconcelos, would play a major role in the new educational projects of the revolution. A complex mixture of the social demands and equality values of the revolutionary armed struggle and some elements of positivism and universalistic humanism would permeate the first educational projects of the populist governments that emerged from the revolution. This mixture would not be exempt from tensions and conflicts that would shape the future of higher education in Mexico.

### **Populism versus conservatism in higher education in the 1920s**

At the end of the armed struggle in Mexico to overthrow the dictatorship between 1910 and 1917 the situation of the National University was extremely unstable. As an institution inherited from the Porfirio years it was branded as "reactionary" and a "product of the dictatorship." After some attempts to eliminate it, in 1921 the Mexican state decided to incorporate the University into the process of social reforms that the state was implementing.

Vasconcelos became the first rector of the

National University after the Revolution. He would later become the Minister of Education of the new *Secretaria de Educación Pública*. Vasconcelos combined a rejection of positivism and its belief that education should be a motor for progress. Instead he argued that beyond any utilitarian objective education should focus on getting rid of the profound cultural deprivation that Mexico had suffered (Vasconcelos, 1981). At the same time he considered himself not a rector of the University but a “delegate of the revolution” and he called the intellectuals and the University to work for the people and abandon the ivory tower (Ilinas Alvarez, 1978). The University would not follow.

It is easy to understand the rejection of the University considering the revolutionary orientation of the new state and the immediate past history of this higher education institution. The National University was inaugurated merely two months before the beginning of the 1910 movement. The revolutionary upheaval was contemplated with strong reservations, not with fear or indifference, by the students and faculty whose vast majority came from the upper income groups in society. Unfortunately, the state’s attempts to link the University to the populist education project never succeeded. The University increased its distance from the new educational policies of the state until, finally in 1929, the state agreed to grant the University autonomy. With this action, the institution was able to break completely at the time from the state’s process of social transformation.

Two fundamental elements explain the granting of autonomy for the National University. First, the student strike (which did not start with the demand for autonomy) took place in a period of enormous political tensions throughout the country. The recent assassination of a former president and the presidential candidate, Obregon, the armed uprising of General Escobar, the end of the first Mexican *guerra cristera* (religious war), and the independent presidential candidacy of Jose Vasconcelos were events with very dangerous implications for the populist government. The spreading of the student strike required a fast solution to the University problem. Granting the University autonomy was a concrete measure that could defuse this problem. Second, the University’s refusal to be part of the state’s education projects can explain autonomy as a decision with the objective of further isolating it from those policies.

This experience is very different from what

occurred in most other Latin American countries. In Mexico, political and social change preceded university transformations, whereas in many other countries the universities themselves were responsible for such social change. This situation generated a contradictory process in which the University always trailed or resisted progressive social transformations in Mexico. This contradictory process is even more anomalous when one considers that many liberal Mexican intellectuals are found at the National University. The inherent turmoil both in politics and in internal university relations can be attributed to this unique Mexican clash of values between a modern revolutionary state seeking to legitimate its power and a resistant university seeking academic and social autonomy.

### **Socialism versus academic freedom from 1930 to 1940**

In 1933 the relations between the National University and the state became critical, as this was one of the most difficult moments in the history of this institution. The *Primer Congreso de los Universitarios Mexicanos* (First Mexican University Congress) took place in Mexico City during the second week of September 1933. The different opinions and clash of social and political values became polarized into two grand blocks. One block was represented by Vicente Lombardo Toledano. He was one of the most important national worker union’s leaders and Dean of the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* (National Preparatory School), a part of the National University. The head of the other group was Antonio Caso, a philosophy professor at the University. Caso was also Lombardo’s teacher and a well-known intellectual, member of the *Ateneo de la Juventud*, former *Porfirista*, and founder of the School of Higher Studies with Justo Sierra.

Lombardo Toledano argued that the Mexican universities had to assume a commitment to the proletariat. Therefore, a materialist scientific approach should prevail in the academic orientation of higher education institutions. Antonio Caso disputed that these institutions should be oriented by a neutral science, with no previous commitment to any theory, due to the ephemeral nature of all such theories (Caso, 1971; Caso and Lombardo, 1975). Lombardo Toledano’s position won the debate and the Congress. The Catholic students of the National University, however, commanded by the

conservatives Gomez Morin and Brito Foucher, expelled by force Lombardo, Rector Medellin and most of the left wing professors.

The government responded with the approval of a new Organic Law (1933). Full autonomy was granted at this point. The University's right to the title "National" was revoked. After a last grant of 10 million pesos, public funding for the University ceased. The 1933 law sanctioned a democratic organization. A collegial model prevailed. The University Council was its highest authority and it had the faculty elect the rector and school deans. At the level of schools and faculties, faculty and student bodies were very important in the decision-making process. Gomez Morin was the first rector during this period. For him, Brito Foucher, and the conservative activists of the National Catholic Student Union, this decision implied a total victory against the state and the socialist ideas. It was also a triumph for the "free educational enterprise" which created the option of a "neutral institution" with "good manners and creeds." In spite of this attitude the University regained a progressively increasing public funding from the state beginning in 1938. During his presidential period, General Lazaro Cárdenas put forward a radical policy for social reform. As part of this project, a nationalistic and popular educational system was developed. The popular and nationalistic orientation of this project was evident in its objective, as stated by Cárdenas, to: "work together with the union, the cooperative, and the agrarian community to combat all the obstacles that are opposed to the liberating march of workers until these obstacles are destroyed" (Cárdenas, 1978, p. 82).

This new educational policy was popular and uniquely nationalistic in its purpose to immediately benefit students from worker or peasant backgrounds. To make this possible, a support system for poor students was established. This system provided free housing, food and academic materials and extended its coverage to students from primary to higher education levels. During this period the Mexican state's higher education project was based on the newly created Instituto Politecnico Nacional (National Polytechnic Institute). The Politecnico served as the focal point for Cárdenas' educational project by promoting the Mexican value of freedom of access to education for the subordinate classes.

### **The golden age of the university (1940–60): a developmentalist view of education**

The educational policy promoted by Cárdenas came to an end with President Avila Camacho. Similar to the Agrarian Reform and the nationalistic industrialization program promoted by Cárdenas, the popular education system was constrained and in many cases reversed by the dominant ruling party and the state. The new economic model centered its attention on the bourgeoisie and the emerging urban middle sectors. The new policies were able to successfully summon the regime's older opposition. The government's alliance with liberal intellectuals favored a re-encounter between the University and the state. The new government was willing to provide full support to the Autonomous University of Mexico. The Catholic groups within the University, however, kept loyal to their anti-state tradition. They were able to make Brito Foucher the new rector. Eager to maintain control of the University in the hands of the most conservative groups, Foucher imposed deans on several schools and faculties. This generated a student strike. Foucher's violent response generated a new crisis and he was forced to resign. Catholic and liberal groups both named their own rectors.

To resolve the impasse of University leadership, President Avila Camacho suggested that both rectors resign and that an extraordinary council, composed of former rectors, would select a new rector for the University. The new rector would have the faculty convene a University Council specially called to generate a new organic law to be proposed to Congress. Alfonso Caso, Antonio Caso's brother, the newly appointed rector, created the Organic Law for the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) that was approved by both houses without major modifications. This Organic Law, in place since 1945, established the condition of the University as a decentralized public corporation which would have the autonomy to govern itself (within the limits imposed by this law), administer its resources, and define its academic policies. The University would also be publicly financed.

Within this new governance structure of UNAM many of Brito Foucher's projects to establish control by the rector over the appointment of deans and to establish an indirect elective system for the university council were put in practice. An

automatically organized and closed governance body with higher authority than the University Council was created: the Junta de Gobierno (Governing Board). Supporters argued that this body would guarantee the independence of the University from the government and political groups and would ensure the depoliticization of the institution. With the new law, Caso attempted to establish a balance between bureaucratic (rector and directors) and collegiate authorities (university council and technical councils) at two different levels: university (centralized), and faculty or school (decentralized).

The 1945 Organic Law was the consequence of a strategy with the purpose of limiting the university community's participation in the decision-making process and to disarticulate the political initiatives of the different sectors of the University. With the law in place, liberal intellectuals were able to take the reigns of the University and fully implicate this institution in the development project of the new regime. The period from 1945 to 1966 at UNAM was relatively stable and is often referred to as the "golden years" of the University. The institution was a relatively small harmonious community within which a collegiate model prevailed. In 1954, President Miguel Aleman inaugurated the University City. This action symbolically sealed the establishment of a new pact between Mexico's National Autonomous University and the state. At the end of the 1960s this pact would once again be broken.

### **Humanism vs the global market**

The year of 1966 inaugurated an era of intense confrontation within UNAM and between the university community and the government. In the late 1960s the professional expectations of middle-class students clashed with the economic reality. It was the end of the Mexican Miracle. Hundreds of professionals produced by UNAM were underemployed. The economic contradictions and the eroded dreams of the Mexican Revolution generated enormous social struggles within and outside the universities. The lack of democracy and the repressive characteristics of the government were more evident in the light of these events. This clash of cultural values and the appropriate role for UNAM was the context for the student struggles of 1966 and 1968 in most Mexican public universities.

After the repression of the 1968 student movement, where 300 students were massacred, the Luis Echeverria government invested heavily in higher education institutions. This provided an important expansion of student enrollment and, consequently, an increase in faculty. Although the perception of the University as a vehicle for social mobility was restored during this period, a new tradition of democratic opposition against the government, ironically, became embedded within the institution. By the mid-1970s an important fraction of the rebellious students of the 1960s had become permanent members of the UNAM faculty. Because of the state's desire to legitimize and consolidate its power, the Mexican left was free to grow, more or less, within the protected environment of the universities. Faculty and administrative workers' unions were created and new confrontations against the University authorities were generated. In spite of these inherent contradictions, the state continues to be the most important employer of university professionals.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s enrollment and investment in higher education institutions expanded the world over and Mexico was no exception. Enrollment grew during this period in UNAM from 170,000 students to 275,000 in the wake of student protests in 1968. Following the massacre of students the Mexican government needed to rebuild the legitimacy it had lost within the middle urban class sectors and among intellectuals. During the presidency of Luis Echeverria (1970–76) there were many resources to distribute. The state invested heavily in public higher education with the fundamental purpose of closing the breach between the urban middle sectors and the state, opened by the 1968 student movement. During the Jose Lopez Portillo presidency (1976–82), an economic crisis required a reduction in public expenditures. Investment in public higher education was still large but new requirements were established to rationalize this investment and organize educational institutions along the lines expected by the state. The corresponding official discourse was that of "educational planning."

Planning, of course, was the state's euphemism for imposing its policies on what had recently been an autonomous university. This new policy of "educational planning" exacerbated the already existing tensions and contradictions within the University that are products both of external political intervention and the existing internal dynamics

within the University itself. As a principal component of the social, political, and economic system in Mexico, the interaction mechanisms between UNAM and the state are complex and often volatile. As Brunner (1985) notes, such cultural mechanisms between universities and the state are expressed in diverse spheres and frequently produce flagrant contradictions.

Obviously, UNAM is a part of the power structure of Mexican society. In fact, UNAM's rectors meet regularly with the Mexican presidents and many of the latter have commented and written extensively about UNAM. National disputes between public and private interests and the conflictual attempts to redefine the latter, determine and are also determined by the confrontations between the state and the University and within the University. This reality of UNAM's place within the social power structure suggests that the main obstacles to change within UNAM are the product of the lack of legitimacy of the mechanisms used to orchestrate university reform and the incapacity to establish agreements among the diverse political actors in the University (Muñoz, 1990, p. 58). The main impediments to any structural transformation within UNAM are, therefore, political (see Ordorika, 1996). This uniquely Mexican situation between the state and its national university, UNAM, can be attributed to the power relations within the University and the intense and complicated interdependence with the Mexican government. Similarly, these power relations and struggles within UNAM can only be understood when viewed as interwoven with those in the broader Mexican society.

### Contemporary trends and current debates

As a consequence of the state's need to gain legitimacy in the 1960s and 1970s investment in higher education grew in real terms until 1982 (Martinez and Ordorika, 1993). During the presidency of Miguel de la Madrid (1982–8) the financial crisis worsened and structural adjustment policies were adopted. Investment in public education was reduced drastically. This retrenchment was paradoxically called "educational revolution." Carlos Salinas, President between 1988 and 1994, focused his discourse on the concept of "modernization" for all Mexico's economic, social, and educational

systems. As in de la Madrid's era, Salinas' principal argument was the quest for quality, even at the expense of reducing educational opportunity for many Mexicans. The "modern" emphasis has been placed on the gaining of administrative efficiency (Martinez and Ordorika, 1993). In this context, public higher education institutions have been severely judged and questioned for not being "efficient." The evaluation and indictment of higher education has, however, been oblivious to the historical contribution of these institutions to national development. Again, we see the contradictions of the cultural values espoused in the founding of the autonomous university, UNAM, and its political fortunes in confronting the hegemony of the state.

From 1982 to the present and in the midst of the economic crisis, there has been an important shift in the hegemonic project within the state. Neoliberal policies have been adopted and the traditional accumulative and distributive role of the Mexican state has been minimized. These changes have produced many struggles in Mexican society and important confrontations within the ruling party and the state itself. In the educational sphere, the state has reduced investment in an attempt to limit its intervention in several levels of the public education system (particularly at the higher education level).

UNAM's hegemonic forces (bureaucracy and faculty elite) agreed with the new state policies and attempted changes to comply with them in 1986 and 1992 to raise tuition, restrict enrollment, standardize testing, and introduce other forms of assessment and evaluation. This situation generated important student and faculty struggles at UNAM from 1986 to 1993. This is not, of course, the only confrontation between the proponents of equity and efficiency (although most of the confrontation is voiced in these terms) in the arena of education (Carnoy and Levin, 1985). The struggles within UNAM are also part of the broader confrontation taking place in society to define the role of the state and the extent of its intervention in the future social, economic, and educational development of Mexico.

In the last twenty years four different university administrations have failed in their intent to transform the development of UNAM. These attempts have been the proposal to change the University's General Statute by Rector Guillermo Soberon in 1979, Rector Octavio Rivero Serrano's University Reform in 1983, modification of the regulations for

registration, exams and tuition by Rector Jorge Carpizo in 1986–7, and the unsuccessful venture to raise tuition by Rector Jose Sarukhan in 1992.

The contradictions and failure to institute either the reforms that the state or the opposition wish within higher education are expressed in conflicts around the issues of access, social uses of knowledge (career preparation, and research and service), governance, and allocation of resources. In Carnoy and Levin's (1985) terms, these are the inherent contradictions within any educational system and, therefore, not particularly unique to Mexico. These confrontations are the result of multiple determinants among the present economic conditions of students and faculty and their views about the role of the state.

The conflicting national views and values are what define the controversy over higher education in Mexico and provide its uniqueness among other countries in Latin America, developing countries, and higher education in general. These perspectives are based on unique historical linkages between the urban middle class and the welfare state. The 1968 student movement, the process of faculty and staff unionization, and the quest for a democratic reform at UNAM generated a conservative reaction and the articulation of a new social formation which has since ruled UNAM. This bureaucracy has hoarded political participation and decision making by subordinating the collegial to the bureaucratic governing bodies.

Although the official discourse has condemned politics and has stressed the technical and academic nature of the University, this process has developed into a subordination of the academy to the political interests and performance of the bureaucracy. Any perceived problems in the higher education system are, therefore, attributed to bureaucratic inefficiencies in need of further administrative or state intervention. From this perspective of modernization theory student rights and faculty academic freedom are argued as the impediments and causes of poor performance. If the educational system has not, in fact been functioning on behalf of the collective citizenry, then modernists see the problem as an inefficiency of the system, rather than a defect in the system itself (Fägerlind and Saha, 1989, p. 273).

The legitimating aspect of public higher education becomes secondary to the efficiency-oriented policies of the state-controlled modernists. This policy of the Mexican state towards public higher education was recently expressed, essentially, in

three measures (Programa para la Modernización Educativa 1988–94):

- 1 An aggressive financial policy with severe budget cuts and an extreme reduction in faculty's salaries.
- 2 Strong support to private higher education institutions.
- 3 New objectives for higher education:
  - implement an evaluation system for public higher education to be run by the state and private sectors;
  - reorient the universities toward the new requirements of labor markets;
  - determine through evaluation the levels of productivity, performance, efficiency, and quality of institutions, departments and faculty;
  - strengthen and create linkages between universities and private enterprises.

The implementation of this Modernization Program for higher education confronts both the historical circumstances of higher education in Mexico and the inherent political conflict between two factions struggling to control the universities. On one side there is the vague and heterogeneous idea of broad groups of faculty and students guided by a set of proposals for democratizing governance and expanding access. On the other side is the government's attempts to impose efficiency on the University through bureaucratic authorities, suggesting policies guided by privatization and modernization. This is the classic conflict between equality and efficiency.

## Conclusion

Because the shaping of Mexican higher education is an evolving process we cannot offer a definitive conclusion on what the final product of Mexican higher education will be. As we have shown in this chapter, however, we can offer a glimpse into the future of which values and policies will continue to shape Mexican higher education. The conflicting values and unsettled disputes we have reviewed have combined and juxtaposed to generate a unique culture of higher education in Mexico. Briefly, we review here the principal characteristics responsible for the unique circumstances of Mexican higher education in the past and for the future.

- 1 *Scholasticism vs science*: the growing trend towards empirical research and technological development has been mediated by the strong tradition of scholarship and academic activity that focuses on producing a synthesis and reformulation of previous knowledge and theories. Historically, Mexican intellectuals have disputed the balance over positivistic and humanistic traditions. Each tradition, in turn, has served to support liberal and conservative stands against and for revolution and academic freedom. It is not a consistent or easy argument to understand without identifying the historical context and the traditions being contested. The character of this debate is truly a contextual one, unique to the times and circumstances of Mexican political, social, and intellectual history.
- 2 *The market vs social mobility*: currently, even with the strong market orientation of the dominant political party (PRI), arguments in favor of promoting such policies have to be considered in terms of maintaining and increasing the functions of social mobility. Market-oriented policies must account for and compromise with the historical traditions of supporting the public good and promoting equitable national development. The strength of these values is founded in the Mexican Revolution, which forces market-oriented perspectives to adapt to these powerful traditions. For example, an increase in higher education tuition is argued in terms of making the upper classes provide resources for lower class students and expanding their opportunities to access higher education.
- 3 *Academic freedom vs the state*: once a conservative stance against the revolutionary government's policies, academic freedom has become one of the main arguments against market-driven strategies proposed to guide academic programs and research. Academic freedom coexists with an almost indisputable view that establishes the University's commitment to work for independent development, to improve the living conditions of the lower classes, and to work toward the solution of specific social problems. The value and historical tradition of the interconnection between academic freedom and social commitment is very evident in the case of the Zapatista uprising. Faculty and students have been one of the most important sources of urban support for the Zapatista rebels. Many faculties have reoriented their research projects to look at the situation in the state of Chiapas from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Some faculties have also become advisors for the Zapatista organization (EZLN). Students have also been the most important source of solidarity throughout the country. Even the institution itself, UNAM, officially assumed the need to increase its understanding of ethnic groups, marginalization, and health and social conditions. UNAM reactivated and created new centers and committees related to studies in Chiapas. In 1994 the UNAM University Council called for a peaceful solution between the rebels and the state.
- 4 *Societal transformations vs university transformations*: Mexico differs from other Latin American countries, as we have noted, in that societal transformations have generally preceded university transformations. The Mexican Revolution offers a typical case of how higher education has not transformed itself prior to societal changes brought about by the state. In contrast, university reform in Argentina preceded broader social transformations in the early 1930s. More recently, however, student activism has changed the historical precedent of the University lagging behind social reform. The struggles and student massacre in 1968 played a major role in promoting democratization of Mexican society at the time. Similarly, in the mid-1980s, the student movement again preceded the broad Cárdenista movement during the election of 1988.
- 5 *Autonomy vs dependence: internally and externally*: the contested liberal and conservative nature of UNAM, as revealed in the Caso-Lombardo debates, provides yet a further example of the unique interrelationship which Mexican higher education has with the state, the Church, and private enterprise. Because UNAM is so large its politics take on the character of a small nation or medium-sized city, as disputing factions of conservatives and liberals vie for control of this state apparatus. Although other nations have highly centralized systems of higher education, UNAM is unparalleled in size and scope of one institution. For example, whereas the University of Tokyo is the undisputed top of the higher education pyramid in Japan, it does vie with a few other prestigious federal universities and private institutions for exclusive access to business and government power (see

Kempner and Makino, 1996). UNAM, however, is as prestigious as the most exclusive public and private institutions combined in most other countries. UNAM also has only minor rivals in Mexico for its exclusive status (i.e., Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, and Colegio de México). The internal and external disputes within and between UNAM and the state indicate how central the institution is to the broader Mexican society and the unique interrelationship it has with the Mexican state.

In our inquiry of how values affect Mexican higher education we have raised a number of questions, none of which have definitive answers. First, we considered how unique are Mexico's circumstances of higher education compared to other Latin American countries and to other developing countries. As we have noted, the extreme degree of centralization of UNAM gives it a distinct character unlike most other institutions in the world. As Mexico City has become the largest city in the world, it is not surprising that its national university would also have the largest campus and university. Whereas many other developing countries have a similar, hyper-urbanized central city (Bangkok, Taipei, Seoul, etc.), UNAM is unique in its size, centralization, and interrelationship with the state. These circumstances are not universally positive, however, as they have created the contested situation at UNAM that pits warring factions against each other for political dominance. Certainly, disputes and struggles among intellectuals occur in other countries' national institutions of higher education, but few single institutions have the access, power, and impact of UNAM on the national climate.

Next, we questioned the value privatization plays in restructuring Mexican higher education. Related to this question, we also considered how successful Mexico has been in maintaining its national identity within this global market competition. The contemporary policies of modernization of the Mexican government indicate the central role that privatization is now playing in restructuring higher education. Calls for efficiency and stronger relationships with business and industry are at the forefront in the policies to modernize. Reform, however, is not merely a process of becoming modern. The strong traditions of scholarship, academic freedom, and autonomy mediate attempts by the

state to modernize higher education. UNAM's reticence to reform has at times been a liberal stance against the dominance of a repressive state and at times a conservative reaction to a revolutionary government. As state policies change with new governments, it does not always appear dysfunctional for UNAM to only slowly adapt to these changing political circumstances. This too provides the reluctance to embrace the new policies of modernization. Socializing the costs of development, as Slaughter (1990) terms it, favors the interests of business and industry over the dreams of social mobility of the underclasses. The unanswered question, of course, is whether Mexico can maintain its national values and identity in the global competition for goods, services, and ideas. Will Mexico advance beyond its status as a developing nation on the periphery or will it continue to be a service nation for the core?

In this chapter we have questioned further what role higher education and the state itself will play in maintaining the balance between global development and the preservation of the national values and ideals of the Mexican Revolution. On one hand the sheer size of UNAM and its inability to reform rapidly preserves many of its historical values. On the other hand, however, Mexico may continue to be at a disadvantage on the world market as a producer of knowledge when the historical traditions of UNAM favor synthesis and reinterpretation.

The current policies of modernization are an attempt to move Mexico from the periphery to the core through reallocation of resources from public to private interests in education, research, and economic development. What role UNAM will play and should play as Mexico seeks to produce knowledge, services, and commodities for the world market is not yet clear in the state's quest to modernize. What is clear from the state's efforts is that problems in modernizing UNAM are perceived due to "bureaucratic inefficiencies," as opposed to a greater awareness of the historical traditions the state is wishing to modernize. Rather than understand the historical basis and political reality of the problems, the state has embarked on a process of administrative intervention to root out inefficiency. What is certain is that bureaucratic intervention will continue to be contested between the proponents of the state's modernistic interests in efficiency and the social advocates for equity and freedom at the National Autonomous University of Mexico – UNAM.



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