

UNIVERSITIES, INTELLECTUALS,
AND THE STATE
IN LATIN AMERICA

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INTELLECTUALS AND THE STATE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY MEXICO. By RODERIC A. CAMP. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. Pp. 279. \$25.00 cloth, \$10.95 paper.)

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE STATE IN LATIN AMERICA: PRIVATE CHALLENGES TO PUBLIC DOMINANCE. By DANIEL C. LEVY. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. Pp. 434. \$27.50.)

LOS INTELLECTUALES Y LAS INSTITUCIONES DE LA CULTURA. By JOSE JOAQUIN BRUNNER and ANGEL FLISFISCH. (Santiago: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 1985. Pp. 390.)

According to a recent study issued by the regional office of UNESCO for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, the most surprising development in the last three decades has been the tremendous expansion in enrollments in the region. Juan Carlos Tedesco's *Tendencias y perspectivas de la educación superior en América Latina* discusses the ongoing debate about the role of universities in Latin America since the reformist movement began in Córdoba, Argentina, in 1918. Over time, however, the terms of the debate have changed from the demands of the student movement to the role of universities in national life, including such issues as methods of university governance, organization of universities, the contribution of universities to national development, and the problems of curriculum and scientific research.¹

Major scholarly works have dealt with issues of elite formation and the role of the university in supplying highly qualified leaders to run the state apparatus and economic enterprises.² Seminal essays have addressed the complex relationships between the state and the universities as well as the dilemma facing Latin American universities regarding dependency and democratic modernization.³ Overall, the growth in literature on Latin American higher education in Spanish and English (and to a lesser extent in Portuguese) reflects the expansion and diversification of universities and the increasing role of the state in the region.

Yet analysts writing on Latin America have not shown much curiosity about the role of intellectuals in the universities and their relationships within university structures and with the state. Surprisingly little work has been done to assess the importance of private higher education and its interactions with the state and with intellectuals. The three books under review here all cover fields that lack scholarly traditions. They address overlapping topics but employ diverse theoretical perspectives.

The title of Roderic Camp's *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico* can mislead the reader. The work appears to deal with the complex and manifold relationships between intellectuals and the state in Mexico but actually focuses on Mexican intellectual life between 1920 and 1980. The text provides information on elite intellectuals, their families and social background, careers, and mentors as well as their relationships with academic institutions, mainly the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (ENP). Camp also analyzes the constraints faced by Mexican intellectuals, such as censorship by government agencies and media owners as well as self-censorship. Only one short chapter and part of the conclusion actually explore the relationships between intellectuals and the state, with the main focus being intellectuals who have served in the government. Camp's book nevertheless fulfills its stated goals in a logically consistent manner that produces no unexpected findings.

This is not the case with Daniel Levy's *Higher Education and the State in Latin America: Private Challenges to Public Dominance*. His study analyzes the Mexican, Chilean, and Brazilian systems of higher education as examples of strikingly new developments throughout Latin America. Levy studies the expansion of public higher education as well as the increasing strength of private higher education. He covers the latter phenomenon with a thoroughness rarely devoted to it, except by militants and interested parties. In categorizing and discussing complex problems of contemporary Latin American universities and the state, Levy has produced a distinguished study whose powerful arguments are sound and convincing.

José Joaquín Brunner's and Angel Flisfisch's *Intellectuals and Cultural Institutions* deals with a single case study of the reformist movement within the Universidad Católica de Chile between 1967 and 1973. The book also explores new avenues for analyzing a novel phenomenon in Latin America, the establishment of the academic profession. In doing so, Brunner and Flisfisch provide a vivid analysis of the struggles among competing groups of intellectuals that mirror the interests of various political parties. Their analysis also reveals that these intellectuals fought for personal prestige and power as well as for a new mission for the university.

Together these three books illuminate such social trends as intellectual movements, the growth of private higher education, the rise of professionalism, and state intervention in cultural affairs in Latin America. The authors do not share theoretical viewpoints, however. Camp begins with socialization theory; Levy approaches comparative politics from a somewhat neo-Weberian outlook; and Brunner and Flisfisch adopt a nonorthodox Marxist approach. As a result, attention is focused on different levels. Camp's unit of study is the individual intellectual and his or her relationship to social institutions,⁴ whereas Brunner and Flisfisch tend to conceptualize intellectuals as members of social classes divided by political loyalties and ideological views. Levy's locus is the institutional setting, whether the university or the state.

Camp's *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico* compares Mexican intellectual life with that in the United States. Most of his guidelines were adopted from contemporary American writers. Camp defines an intellectual as "an individual who creates, evaluates, analyzes, or presents transcendental symbols, values, ideas, and interpretations on a regular basis to a broad audience" (p. 38). He draws a clear distinction between intellectuals and the intelligentsia. He views the latter as groups of academicians or professionals whose knowledge is narrow and somewhat specialized and who are unable to develop great ideas. In other words, Camp perceives intellectuals as broad-minded, bold, and creative while the intelligentsia are the equivalent of technocrats.

To fit Camp's conceptualization, Mexican intellectuals had to demonstrate five behaviors: using the intellect as a means of making a living; searching for truth; emphasizing the humanities or using a humanistic approach; being creative; and being critical of the existing order. Camp argues that these characteristics may be universal; in any case, they certainly fit in well with traits typical of North American intellectuals. What appears to be specific to Mexican intellectuals is their belief that political activity is essential to intellectual life. For some of them, moreover, public involvement is necessary, and little reference is made to the issue of independence from the state.

With these theoretical considerations in mind, Camp selected 337 intellectuals who have influenced postrevolutionary Mexico, that is to say, elite intellectuals. Throughout the book, Camp provides several categories of data on Mexican intellectuals: those who studied abroad; their professions or career patterns; the public posts they held; their awards and academic distinctions; and the periodicals in which they published their ideas. Camp also provides tables and figures on the socioeconomic status of Mexican intellectuals, probably as an empirical proxy for social class. He presents social class in a conventional manner—high, middle, and lower classes with gradations in between.

Camp's findings are predictable simply because of the centralization of Mexico's political and social life: most of his elite intellectuals live in the Mexico City area (along with eighteen million other people); many of them studied at UNAM or the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, as did most of this century's political leaders; and slightly less than half have occupied important public posts. Camp identifies most intellectuals as belonging to the so-called middle class. He also describes their intellectual affiliation with past and present circles. Most of the best-known intellectuals maintain close ties with prominent cultural leaders, such as Octavio Paz and Carlos Monsiváis. Each circle has its own "influence zone" and its own publications. The Paz group owns *Vuelta* and the Monsiváis group owns *Nexos*, both monthly journals that circulate nationally.

In what may be the strongest facet of his study, Camp examines the recruitment function of universities, academies, mentors, and circles. In his view, Mexican universities maintain and legitimize the existing political order but also serve to educate intellectuals and intelligentsia who may criticize that order. Camp argues that the growth of the social sciences and the increase in enrollments in universities are potential threats to the state. But he does not explain how universities themselves serve as recruiting agencies for leading intellectuals. Rather, he appears to share the view of one of his respondents that in this recruitment function, the mentor is more important than the university: "young people are attracted to individuals, not institutions, . . . institutions work better at informing rather than forming young people" (p. 125).

Although *Intellectuals and the State* provides much information on Mexican intellectual life, it offers no sense of history or grasp of the ideological conflicts and debates that exist among intellectuals. The text reads more like an extended exercise in quantifying data, accompanied by an elegant presentation, than like an essay in political science. Even in the quantitative arena, Camp's presentation is disappointing because it never provides the complete list of the 337 intellectuals in his sample.

Paradoxically, both the strengths and weaknesses of Camp's study lie in his methodological approach. Most of the materials he uses to prove his points come from a computerized data bank of biographies and careers of nearly 350 Mexican intellectuals. He draws on an additional data bank on the careers, social background, and related information of some 1400 prominent Mexican politicians.⁵ Camp handles difficult issues well in portraying intellectual life in postrevolutionary Mexico. But in order to make his argument coherent and consistent, he has reduced leading intellectuals to numbers, statistical figures, empirical references, and footnotes. Camp demonstrates that many intellectuals share similar family backgrounds and social status and are affiliated

with the same institutions, but he provides no in-depth analysis of the social conditions that allow only a handful to become leading intellectuals or of the social ambience and conflicting political environment in which Mexican intellectuals live and function.

While Camp's research is designed to gather and present data systematically, Levy's work is explanatory in nature. Because so much of what is known about Latin American private universities comes from government officials and political activists who may be either advocates or detractors of private education, scholars need more comprehensive information on the subject.⁶ Levy not only offers a historical record of the genesis and growth of private universities in Latin America but searches for the causes of the phenomenon. In doing so, he explains the relative importance of private higher education in a setting dominated by public institutions.

Crucial to Levy's discussion is his conceptualization of state failure. He goes one step beyond his previous book, *University and Government in Mexico*.⁷ In *Higher Education and the State in Latin America*, Levy's main construct is the state rather than the government or the public sector. This perspective greatly broadens his understanding of the politics of higher education in Latin America. His usage of the concept of the state is close to that of Nicos Poulantzas, who views the state as a concentrated complex of social class relations. Yet Levy maintains the formality that characterizes comparative political science. He also interprets facts and trends from a neo-Weberian perspective, especially that of Randall Collins. Levy argues forcefully that in developing public higher education, some Latin American states have failed with respect to social class, politicization, and economics.

Levy's data fit his model well, and he is thus able to demonstrate and reconceptualize his findings. The declining elitism of public universities has been perceived by Latin American upper classes as the result of state failure. Both the indigenous and transnational bourgeoisies have viewed the expansion of the universities as a plebian invasion of their traditional sanctuaries. According to Levy, "Soaring enrollments . . . destroyed boundary maintenance between these and rising groups. A new private sector therefore became necessary to retain separateness and superior social status" (p. 47).

The growth of enrollments from *masificación* was also accompanied by youth unrest, turmoil, and widespread social protest. The universities became the sites of political activism, recruitment centers of new cadres for left-wing parties, and arenas of continuous struggle. These groups and emerging social strata attempted to use the public universities to organize reform or revolution. This politicization of university life and the inability of governments to cope with it were viewed as failures of the state. As a result of these struggles, public universities

became more autonomous of the state. This development gave rise to the creation of new private universities to promote order and progress without political interference.

The declining quality of education was perceived as economic failure on the part of the state by business groups and conservative parties in general. Politicization and *masificación* hurt the capacity of public universities to perform their economic roles, technical training in particular, which in turn weakened students' preparation for the job market. Thus public universities, instead of serving social needs, became barriers to national modernization. This trend provided yet another rationale for creating more private universities.

These perceived failures gave rise to waves of expansion in private institutions of higher education, whether for purposes of maintaining social class separation, keeping order and academic prestige, or preparing the work force assumed to be needed for economic development. Levy explains the renaissance of Catholic higher education as a historical backlash. In fact, the Catholic universities established during the colonial period were closed in the nineteenth century by liberal governments or confined to serving religious functions. Since the late nineteenth century, however, a plethora of religious institutions have been created all over Latin America. Finally, Levy explains the formation of private institutions—demand-absorbing non-elitist universities as a response to population growth, the expansion of secondary education, the rise of credentialism, and state unwillingness to continue to sponsor growth in public higher education.

In sum, *Higher Education and the State in Latin America* provides an excellent overview of relationships between the state and the universities. Levy's book reflects extensive multinational research and an impressive knowledge of the region. He also demonstrates a sophisticated appreciation of historical change, although his theoretical approach is close to that of conventional political science.

At first glance, it seems that *Los intelectuales y las instituciones de la cultura* provides a link between Levy's analysis of universities and Camp's study of intellectuals. But unlike Levy and Camp, who spend little time discussing theoretical issues, José Joaquín Brunner and Angel Flisfisch devote two of the three parts of their book to theory building. To explain the rise of the academic profession in Latin America, the authors develop a complex discussion of intellectuals and intellectual ideas. They draw on their extensive review of the classical theorists (Marx, Weber, Gramsci, Brecht, and Parsons) as well as contemporary thinkers (Poulantzas, Shils, Gouldner, Debray, and Sarfatti Larson) to adopt a neo-Marxist Gramscian approach in the end. Brunner and Flisfisch conceptualize intellectuals as a social category of individuals with shared values but contradictory political positions.

Brunner and Flisfisch view cultural institutions, along with universities, as having been the womb for intellectuals. To support this view, they offer a historical discussion of how the professions (and the professional guilds) were created and how their social activity gradually passed from society at large to the universities. Brunner and Flisfisch are particularly careful to discuss some of the class conflicts that surround the process. They argue that in the long term, the modern profession could only emerge after certain social and economic conditions had been created: specialized training of the agents of those professions whose "marketable" products are specific abilities and skills based on abstract knowledge; standardization of the services offered by such professionals and the criteria fixed by the professional guild (the creation of monopolies in the use of the professional skills); and the claim that all professional services have a public character and must therefore yield economic returns and social status. A specific ideology of the professions flowed from these conditions, its main feature being that a professional must be certified by a cultural institution.

Generally speaking, these conditions were flourishing in Europe and the United States by the late nineteenth century. But due to underdevelopment, they arose in Latin America only after World War II. In most Latin American countries, universities were organized according to the model of the French university created by Napoleon. One major attribute of this model is a sharp separation among the professions and an emphasis on the role of the university in transmitting existing knowledge. According to Brunner and Flisfisch, the Latin American university left no room for academic activities like scholarship until recently. Therefore the academic profession was viewed as a disturbing influence from developed countries.

Brunner and Flisfisch argue that the academic profession is fundamentally defined by its research activities. That is to say, as an activity of the intellect, research is the production of knowledge and wisdom. Those who perform such activities are therefore intellectuals. The late development of the academic profession in Latin America, however, created many conflicts in traditional universities because it implied changes and reform of structures, forms of government, and curricula. The ideology of the academic profession—built around concepts like academic freedom, rationality, the scientific method, and individual interests of researchers—stood at the center of debates and struggles.

An excellent case supporting the authors' claims is the reform movement begun in the Universidad Católica de Chile in 1967, which was terminated in 1973 by the military coup. Although the overall reform attempt failed (the university structure maintained its traditional character), centers of research were created, new faculty were appointed to conduct research as their main activity, and some regulations

were established to preserve academic freedom. The movement in this university benefited from the May 1968 events in Paris as well as from experience with some forms of democratic government from the earlier Chilean student movement (an issue these authors do not analyze). Also, the curricula of many fields incorporated new subjects that somehow reflected the ideology of rationality, scientific investigation, and similar concepts. These events and tendencies were framed by struggles and contradictions among intellectuals as well as between them and political parties and the state. Brunner and Flisfisch conclude their study with an essay on the authoritarian culture that began with the military coup of September 1973.

In content, *Los intelectuales y las instituciones de la cultura* overlaps with Camp's *Intellectuals and the State*, but the authors diverge in terms of their theoretical and intellectual concerns. Camp never captures the passion, the vision, or the folly of intellectuals in their struggles among themselves for prestige and social status or for positions within the power structures of the universities or the state. This sense is precisely the strength of Brunner and Flisfisch's book, which provides fascinating insights into the sociology of universities in Latin America and the conflicts created and left unresolved by the emergence of new social segments. There is much to admire in this book: an eloquent discussion of competing theories and persuasive descriptions of university politics in the midst of widespread social turmoil. Unfortunately, however, Brunner and Flisfisch often employ dense language and complicated syntax that obscure their arguments. They also fail to analyze in depth the relationships that existed between intellectuals and the political parties under the Christian Democratic and Allende governments in Chile. The authors note that some faculty were formally affiliated with these parties, but they do not assess the ways in which university professors actually attempted to implement party lines at the Universidad Católica. Their study would also have benefited from a discussion of the role of the state in university life and in the rise of the academic profession.

Camp's intelligentsia is comprised of what Brunner and Flisfisch call intellectuals, although they use a somewhat broader conception that corresponds to the classical European tradition. Thus *Los intelectuales y las instituciones de la cultura* deals with the mass of intellectuals who, lacking both family background and elite education and connections, end up among the ranks of wage earners. Perhaps the thousands of university graduates who fit most of Camp's prerequisites for intellectuals but lack access to prestigious circles, academies, or publishing houses may be the harbingers of a new type of social activist. They may be the vanguards of the new class in Latin America (as Alvin Gouldner would say), or perhaps organic intellectuals (following Gramsci's notion), or perhaps a new petty bourgeoisie that mitigates class conflicts

but also exacerbates them. In either case, these graduates comprise a potential threat to the political culture and nature of power that Camp evokes so well at the outset of his book.

Each of the three books reviewed demonstrates a different set of strengths that more than overcome the weaknesses. These three books are also significant in opening new avenues for research and analysis of the rapid and diverse developments in higher education in Latin America.

NOTES

1. Juan Carlos Tedesco, *Tendencias y perspectivas de la educación superior en América Latina* (Paris: UNESCO, 1983), 6.
2. For a conventional Western social sciences perspective, see *Elites in Latin America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), edited by Seymour Martin Lipset and Aldo Solari. For radical and neo-Marxist approaches, see *Universidad, clases sociales y poder*, edited by Germán W. Rama (Caracas: Ateneo, 1982).
3. See, for example, *La crisis de la educación superior en México*, edited by Gilberto Guevera Niebla (Mexico City: Nueva Imagen, 1981); Noel McGinn, "Autonomía, dependencia y misión de la universidad," *Foro Universitario*, series 2, no. 4 (Mar. 1981):18–28; and Darcy Ribeiro, *La universidad necesaria*, 4th edition (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1982).
4. Where Camp provides names of leading intellectuals (in tables 3 and 4), no women are listed. Camp's methodology for choosing elite intellectuals relied heavily on respondents. He selected only five women to answer his questionnaire (pp. 43–46). Although the lack of women in his universe should have led Camp to suspect a possible bias in answering the survey, this issue is not discussed. It therefore seems reasonable to suspect bias in the process of selecting respondents. To my knowledge, there are many women who fit Camp's criteria for leading intellectuals.
5. These data were used in a previous work. See Roderic Ai Camp, *La formación de un gobernante: la socialización de los líderes políticos en México post-revolucionario* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981).
6. This is not to suggest, however, that politicians know little about the subject; I think they know quite well what they are talking about. Levy systematizes some of those voices. For another study on Mexican private universities from a somewhat more political perspective, see Patricia de Leonardo, *La educación superior privada en México* (Mexico City: Línea, 1983).
7. Daniel Levy, *University and Government in Mexico: Autonomy in an Authoritarian System* (New York: Praeger, 1980). For a critique of this book, see Noel McGinn's and Carlos Ornelas's review of that work in the *Comparative Education Review* 26, no. 1 (1982): 15–17; and Susan Street's review in the *Journal of Higher Education* 53, no. 6 (1982): 716–18.