THE PORFIRIATO IN TIME AND SPACE

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THE ROOTS OF LO MEXICANO: SELF AND SOCIETY IN MEXICAN THOUGHT, 1900–1934. By HENRY C. SCHMIDT. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1978. Pp. 195. $11.50.)

LEOPOLDO ZEA: FROM MEXICANIDAD TO A HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY. By SOLOMON LIPP. (Ontario, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1980. Pp. 146. $8.00.)

EL POSITIVISMO DURANTE EL PORFIRIATO. By WILLIAM D. RAAT. (Mexico: SepSetentas, 1975. Pp. 176.)

THE AGE OF PORFIRIO DÍAZ. Edited by CARLOS B. GIL. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977. $4.95.)

EPISTOLARIO ALFONSO REYES—JOSÉ M. CHACÓN. Edited by ZENAIDA GUTIÉRREZ-VEGA. (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1976. Pp. 285.)

THE PORFIRIAN INTERREGNUM: THE PRESIDENCY OF MANUEL GONZÁLEZ. By DON M. COERVER. (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1979. Pp. 322. $6.95.)

A central question in the history of modern Mexico has been that of what is Mexican. Between the Reforma (1855–67) and World War II, the question seems to have been answered. But precisely when and to what degree are not clear. Nor is there general agreement as to what is "native," what has been imported and made Mexican through assimilation, and what has remained foreign. Occupying the middle of this time frame is the Porfiriato, the authoritarian regime centered around Porfirio Díaz that dominated Mexico from 1877 to 1911. As things "in-between" tend to do, the Porfiriato has occasioned the greatest attention, the most contention in the historiographical question of *la mexicanidad*.

The question of *lo mexicano* has primarily been the province of political and intellectual historians and of those examining historical circumstances from a philosophic perspective. The Porfiriato is the focus of attention for several recent works, an important ingredient for others. The authors tend either toward narrowness in their factual detail or toward inflation in their interpretative framework. Indeed, they frequently raise the conflict in terms of the concrete historical reality versus the larger interpretative framework or put it in negative terms as facts versus speculation.

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As vital as facts and interpretation are to the study of history, they render understanding narrow and incomplete without the tools of analysis that derive from the historical perspective. The latter are concerned far less with the certainties of answers than with the potential and the insight of questions. In considering the problem of what is Mexican, particularly in its relation to the Porfiriato, the authors of the works under consideration have been too preoccupied with answers to seek out a broader range of analytical perspectives with which to view la mexicanidad and the Porfiriato. This omission has been common in modern Mexican historiography in general. In the rush to gather details, sketch biographical and institutional portraits, flesh out topical problems and issues, and capture the character and "essence" of the Mexican experience, the range of analytical perspectives available in such work has too often been forgotten.

Two such perspectives that are fundamental to the study of history and are often disregarded are those of time and space. The creation of nation-states in the modern era has generally been an arduous and ambiguous phenomenon. The meshing of localities, regions, and nations into one integrated national historical experience has hardly been as facile and uncomplicated as those interpretations lacking a sophisticated spatial perspective have made it out to be. Peering out over the "national" landscape from the edges of Mexico City, projecting institutions, political trends, ideas, world views, and sociocultural patterns to the far corners of the "national realm" has been a common practice in Mexican historiography. What is so often overlooked is that groups and peoples can have different historical understandings and intentions regarding a given geographical space. The broad imposition of historical realities must be tested more carefully in a spatial context.

Human experience is also shaped and altered in a temporal context. A given historical experience is not only determined by circumstances of the moment (the present) but also by circumstances in the process of *becoming* (the future) and by circumstances that have already occurred, be they in the lifetime of the people in question (the immediate past) or before (the distant past). In ignoring the periodicity of historical experience, or setting extensive time frameworks, this complex temporal perspective is overlooked.

As implied above, temporal and spatial perspectives underlie the questions of what is Mexican, who is Mexican, and when did they become so. Temporally, the Porfiriato is at the center of this question. For some, it is the crucial present in which things Mexican began to take shape. For others, it is the necessary prelude, the immediate past, to the forging of the Mexican nation and people in the fiery ordeal of the Revolution of 1910 and its aftermath. For still others, the era of Porfirian rule is an unfortunate interruption of a process begun in the Reforma

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and completed by the Revolution, or possibly a necessary part of that long process.

The spatial dimension runs through the whole time framework in which the question of la mexicanidad is placed. Is there a core within the country that is "Mexican," to which other regions then accommodate themselves, especially those considered "peripheral" to the nation's heartland? Is lo mexicano an identity that is formed in the country's urban centers and then is disseminated into the countryside? Does it emerge in a particular socioeconomic class or racial caste and then spread to or impose itself on other social groups? Consideration of the Porfirian era is vital to such questions. National institutions and structures emerged or became solidified for the first time during the period, encompassing such areas as education, transportation, communications, culture, the economy, and administration.

The authors under consideration confront these implicit temporal and spatial aspects in varying ways and to different degrees. Henry Schmidt, in his study of the intellectual and cultural origins of lo mexicano, pushes the distant past of native sensibility back to the early colonial period. He nevertheless cautions that "a chronology cannot be imposed on some elements in the Mexican consciousness . . . the problem of twentieth-century identity often rests on older ideas transmuted by the mythology of national regeneration in the post-revolutionary period" (p. 3). The last decade of the Porfiriato serves as the necessary immediate past in which later postrevolutionary trends first developed, an intellectual as well as political transition from the Porfirian era to that of the Revolution. The crucial present is a combination of the decade of violence and upheaval in which "a developing logic of ideas and political concourse catalyzed the process of national identity," and the years from 1920 to 1934, which "saw the real emergence of modern nationalistic inquiry in Mexico," culminating in the work of Samuel Ramos, whose analysis "completed in the realm of ideas the nativist permeation of painting, music, and the novel" (pp. 110, 161).

Schmidt is cognizant of the spatial implications in his search for the roots of lo mexicano as he traces its evolution through the nineteenth century and the Revolution (1910–20). Envisioning Mexico as "torn . . . by internal forces divided among themselves and threatened by encroachment from abroad," Schmidt suggests that nineteenth-century Mexicans could not move from local or regional identities to a national one, yet their increasing awareness of their relationship with the Western world forced them to do so. The Porfirian regime was central to this process, he argues, as it steadily widened that relationship while forcing national currents to grow rapidly. Yet "the idea of Mexico still did not exist convincingly for all citizens" (p. 34). The resulting polarization between things cosmopolitan (much of the Porfirian national currents

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being linked with them) and things native was not resolved until the Revolution. Through the Revolution came "a discovery of national being intimating that the world process [the bridging of the gap between the local or regional and the international] could emanate from within rather than from without" (p. 37). The revolutionary decade of violence and upheaval furthered the "modernization" process initiated in the Porfiriato, "significantly diminishing the traditional life of the *patria chica*" (p. 84), but it also provided "a group encounter among the Mexicans . . . generating the sense of a new era . . . in which the emergence of the pueblo . . . became the most important determinant of national identity" (pp. 68, 69). "The question as to whether this identity would be hypothesis, rhetoric, model, or failure became the story of twentieth-century Mexico" (p. 37). Although much of this interpretation rests largely on secondary sources, Schmidt's analytical sophistication is noteworthy and insightful.

Touching bases with behavioralist approaches to the question of lo mexicano, in *Leopoldo Zea*, Solomon Lipp takes a philosophic approach through a survey and interpretation of the work of that distinguished Mexican philosopher and intellectual historian. Spatially, Zea views Mexico's quest for national identity as part of a larger Latin American phenomenon. In no other Latin American country, concludes Lipp, has this search for national awareness and identity "been manifested in so acute a manner as in Mexico in the course of the past several decades" (p. 3). Yet temporally, Zea does not see the process as being completed.

According to Lipp's interpretation of Zea's views, the search for national identity began with the Romantic Liberals after independence. The colonial past represented a way of life that had been borrowed, imposed, or both and that was in conflict with emerging nativist elements in the culture. The problem for Mexicans (and all Latin Americans) in the nineteenth century became how to decide first what was alien and what was truly "their own," and then how best to root out the former and nurture the latter. One side sought out universal (that is, North Atlantic) ideologies, values, and institutions to apply to the "national" reality. Their critics said this approach would only import a new alien way of life to replace the old one, destroying the beginnings of a national culture in the process. The other side sought to defend things nativist in the face of foreign imports, believing that a national ethos would come to fruition if isolated from external contamination. Their critics responded that this view was only confusing things native with things Iberian, with the latter suffocating the former, while the potential spur of external stimulants to the growth of things national was checked. Despite the influx of liberalism, positivism, and North Atlantic modernization in general, as well as the nationalistic movements of the early twentieth century (especially Mexico's Revolution), the conflict has not yet been fully resolved,

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according to Zea and Lipp. The transition period begun nearly one hundred and fifty years ago continues, "the Latin American [i.e., Mexican] has not yet emerged in spite of all efforts to the contrary" (p. 60).

According to Lipp, Zea finds the Mexican essence (indeed, that of the Latin American in general) best illustrated by the country's reaction to positivism, at which time the Mexican "felt himself divided in two, truncated as it were, without any hope of ever being put together again" (p. 60). It is William Raat's central thesis in *El positivismo durante el Porfiriato* that the impact of positivism on Mexico was only minimal at most. The reaction, he contends, was to an alien philosophy that never took root, not to an assimilated world view that divided the national soul. Raat criticizes Zea's interpretation of positivism and the Porfiriato (one generally accepted up to this point) in terms of speculative history versus one rooted soundly in the empirical evidence. Yet Raat's critique of Zea's broad interpretation and Raat's revisionist thesis itself can be evaluated from the spatial and temporal perspectives. Spatially, although Zea's study of Mexican positivism came first, he is heavily influenced by the broader Latin American phenomenon of the search for national identity and positivism's impact on it. There is a danger (to which Raat alludes), however, of superimposing such a continental pattern upon the Mexican case when the connection is made only through particular events, intellectuals, and ideas without a more holistic empirical investigation of the national reality. Yet Raat himself rarely ventures beyond the capital in evaluating the impact of positivism on Porfirian Mexico.

Temporally, although Zea fits Mexican positivism into a broad time scheme, he does not perceive a time framework within the period itself. It is treated as one extended present. Raat, in contrast, carefully delineates such a temporal framework by separating the pre–1892 years, when positivism remained an alien ideology, from the years 1892–1910, when it became widely identified with the Díaz regime by the regime's opponents. This development was largely the consequence of their reaction to the ascendance of the *científico* political circle within the regime. Raat argues that positivism's official status was limited to that of a philosophy of education and that the científicos themselves were not fundamentally positivist in their thinking. Raat's temporal perspective on either side of the Porfirian period, however, is weak. He cites several factors favoring the diffusion of positivism from the immediate past (the Reforma and the restored republic), but he fails to follow them up systematically to evaluate their impact on the Porfirian present. Any connection with the distant past is ignored altogether. As to the "revolutionary" future, he makes only the remark that "with the passing of time, the positivist slogan of 'order and progress' was replaced by that of *'lo*

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mexicano' " (p. 166). Positivism's "passing" is marked by its demise as the sole official philosophy of education in 1910. Schmidt's work fortunately suggests that positivism's relation and legacy to the revolutionary period was far more consequential and complex.

By comparison, Carlos B. Gil in his *Age of Profirio Díaz* is careful to note the connections between the Porfirian era and both the immediate past (1855–76) and the distant past of the postindependence years; but he does so only with the topics of civil order and ideology. The linkage of the Porfiriato with the postrevolutionary era is stated in Gil's introduction, but is not illustrated in the selected readings. Within the Porfirian era itself, no internal time perspective is acknowledged, merely topical organization. Spatially, Gil pays close attention to regional diversity within Porfirian Mexico in the section on society (life and labor). Yet the same regional perspective is absent in his selections for the pre-Díaz period.

The final section of the Gil anthology is a bibliographical essay by Anthony Bryan that raises historiographical questions and suggests needed areas of research. The essay surveys Porfirian historiography topically, although it fails to pursue fully the interrelations of the topical areas. Bryan nevertheless raises some penetrating analytical questions with temporal and spatial overtones. He proposes that the regime's performance be judged within the nineteenth-century liberal ethos, as well as being compared with what has been labeled the *neoporfirismo* of the present-day rulers of Mexico. More specifically, he asks what was the relation of the Porfiriato to Mexican liberalism and why was there a change in the científicos' relation to Díaz in 1903. He stresses the importance for the revolutionary era of understanding the politics of the last decade of the Díaz regime.

Spatially, Bryan emphasizes the need for regional and local studies to make possible a truly comprehensive analysis of the nature and extent of the regime's control and of the specific relationship between local and national politics. In this connection, he questions whether the real structural components of power were not "local institutions such as church groups, municipal organizations, kinship networks, industrial concerns, and nascent political organizations" (p. 176). Bryan points out that in the workings of the Porfirian economy, the influence of foreign investment has been pursued to the neglect of the role of local economic elites. He then calls for a closer look at the socioeconomic repercussions of the era in distinct regions of the country, "if we are to understand the basic structural components of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Mexico, and the subsequent economic revolutions in the agrarian and industrial sectors" (p. 180).

Bryan suggests in conclusion that a fundamental question in the study of modern Mexican history is the relation of the ways of life and

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government under the Porfiriato to those that resulted from the Revolution. Would that Zenaida Gutiérrez-Vega had heeded this advice in the volume on the correspondence between Alfonso Reyes and the Cuban intellectual José M. Chacón between 1913 and 1959. Aside from largely narrative and descriptive introductions, remarks, and notations, the book contains little besides the published letters themselves. An effort was made to work out a time framework within the years of correspondence and to link them to different spatial locales, but this structure has not been significantly analyzed.

Alfonso Reyes, one of the principal intellectual figures of twentieth-century Mexico, came from a distinct regional background in the Northeast, with its focal point in the burgeoning city of Monterrey. His father was a powerful figure in the Porfirian regime, although he distanced himself from it during its waning years. Young Reyes was part of the Ateneo de la Juventud, a group of young student-intellectuals in the capital who challenged the tenets of positivism, particularly as it related to educational philosophy. In 1913, with the overthrow of Madero, Reyes was sent into diplomatic exile in Europe because of his links with the *porfiristas* through his father, who recently had been killed. Gutiérrez-Vega notes all of these biographical particulars, but makes no real attempt to connect Reyes's immediate Porfirian past with his intellectual development in Europe, in ambassadorial posts in Latin America, and in Mexico upon his return in 1939. Nor does the author explain Reyes's primary intellectual endeavor—his attempt to bridge the growing gap between the Hispanic worlds of the peninsula and the Western Hemisphere.

In his study of the only non-Díaz administration of the Porfiriato, *The Porfirian Interregnum*, Don Coerver initially appears to grasp the larger analytical implications of his work. The introduction firmly lays out the temporal relation of his monograph to modern Mexican historiography:

> For many years after the Revolution of 1910, the historical image of the Porfiriato seemed to be frozen in its terminal form. . . . [It] concentrated attention on the Porfirian period as a background to the national upheaval ushered in by the Revolution of 1910. This approach accentuated the negative aspects of the Porfiriato and presented the period from a twentieth-century viewpoint rather than as a nineteenth-century phenomenon. There was little appreciation for the problems or the processes involved in the evolution of the system which started with the Revolution of Tuxtepec in 1876. Consequently, the early years of the Porfirian epoch were only vaguely perceived through the historical mists of inattention and over-emphasis on later developments. [Pp. 1–2]

As Coerver notes, however, recent historical reevaluation of the Porfiriato has been facilitated greatly by the opening of Díaz's personal archives in the early 1970s and has helped disperse those clouds of historiographical inadvertence. "In the light of this greater emphasis," he

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concludes, "the time seems appropriate for a fresh look at the historical role played by the González administration. . . . This study will examine continuity and change in an attempt to determine how the González presidency fits into the Porfirian epoch as a whole" (pp. 2–3).

Then Coerver begins digging into the detail of those years, soon forgetting the analytical framework with which to approach that particular portion of the Porfirian era. After the token, two-page transition from the postindependence past (which only focuses on the issues of effective suffrage and no reelection), he proceeds immediately to the González interregnum, by way of the 1880 election. Coerver rarely emerges from this time-stilled tunnel of detail (two exceptions occurring in portions of the chapters on foreign relations and the economy) until his conclusion. Before drifting into a humdrum summary of the text, he deduces that "there was a continuity of power, but it was not dependent upon Díaz's manipulation of González" (p. 298). Thus, despite the commendably extensive research, Díaz's role and responsibility in the González interregnum are hinted at, but never analytically explored to allow such continuity to be significantly and carefully delineated.

To his credit, Coerver displays a strong temporal orientation within the years of the González administration itself. But, as in the case of Raat's study of positivism (only to a larger degree), the attentiveness to the temporal perspective "within" does not carry over to that "without." There is also a similarity in spatial treatment. Although having the advantage of a much shorter time span, Coerver only infrequently ventures beyond the confines of the Federal District. He relies almost exclusively on the Mexico City press and on federal documents. Only the periodic use of consular dispatches from the field and letters from local dignitaries in the Díaz Archives run counter to this narrow "national" perspective. Moreover, in his one principal effort to provide a regional dimension (in considering González's twin policies of conciliation and control vis-à-vis the states), Coerver nonetheless limits himself almost exclusively to the Díaz Archives and the capital press. No background is provided for the incidents detailed; their explanation is confined to González, his agents, and the individual state officeholders (pp. 75–94).

In the historical realm of political ideals and policies, of national character and identity, the dichotomy between speculative interpretation and narrative detail is particularly hard to bridge. How does one measure or judge the influence of formal ideas, political ideologies, and world views in the historical circumstances of a given society? Does one look for their diffusion only in institutions or among intellectuals and politicians, especially those in the most important centers of powers? Do they coincide with the past, present, or future set of historical circumstances? Are they generational? Who gives historical reality its direction and ordering, the people of the times, the "visionaries" of the era, or

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historians in hindsight? Such analytical questions suggest the complexity that so often screens interpretative frameworks from empirical evidence. Such questions added to the analytical perspectives from which they derive (which together comprise the historical perspective as a whole) are, I would suggest, the means to bridge the gap between interpretation and evidence.

The spatial and temporal perspectives are two of the most important analytical tools at our disposal in examining what is Mexican, who are Mexicans, when they became so, and what has it meant for them to become so. In particular, they can assist us in delineating the boundaries, character, and legacy of the Porfiriato. Perhaps in no other era of modern Mexican history is the issue of what is and who are Mexican so much in question, so little understood.

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