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A RIGHT TO LEVIATHAN: GRASSROOTS POLITICS IN THE CITY OF PALACES

By

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Written under the direction of

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Right to Leviathan: Grassroots Politics in the City of Palaces

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This dissertation examines the growth and development of contemporary Mexico City from the Mexican Revolution through the present. The twentieth century birthed two Mexican ‘monsters’, I argue, the PRI—the ‘ruling party’ that dominated Mexican politics for roughly seven decades until its ouster in 2000—and the capital, Mexico City. I pay special attention to the relationship between these two leviathans as they struggled through a century of revolutionary changes. An historical exploration of this relationship yields three interrelated conflictual trajectories, each of which receives in turn a more targeted investigation through specific cases. I explore the first of these, the city’s proliferating environmental, political, social, economic, and other crises, most of an increasingly dire character, through an examination of the history of ‘the right to the city’ in Mexico City from its earliest conceptualizations in the late 1980s through the public endorsement of the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City in 2010. My investigation moves through the second trajectory, the troubled path of democratization and party politics in the capital city, by way of a largely ethnographic engagement with a planned redevelopment project along one of the city’s historic boulevards, *Avenida Chapultepec*. I follow the third trajectory, the growing tension between the city and the national state and the PRI—which appears in several distinct manifestations—through an historical reconstruction of the decades-long processes of ‘political reform’ by which the city finally achieved its political “emancipation” in January of 2016, and an ethnographic exploration of the contemporary social and political context surrounding these ideas and events.

Taken together, the cases here considered contribute several significant conclusions and open up several new avenues for the study of urban political geography. My approach to dialectical investigation provides a basis for innovative methodological and empirical considerations, not least in the way of political imaginaries elaborated in pursuit of radical change and the potential implications thereof. The plural and shifting meanings of revolution in Mexico City, the process of battling seemingly incontestable hegemonies, and the dangers and benefits of grassroots social and political movements forging partnerships with political parties or arms of the state all likewise hold potentially pathbreaking insights for the study of the character and pace of urban political change.

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## List of Abbreviations

ALDF—Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal (Legislative Assembly of the Federal District)

CCMDC—Carta de la Ciudad de México por el Derecho a la Ciudad (Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City)

CDHDF—Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal (Human Rights Commission of the Federal District)

CPCCMDC—Comité Promotor de la Carta de la Ciudad de México por el Derecho a la Ciudad (Promotional Committee of the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City)

ECLAC (CEPAL)—UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Comisión Económica para América Latina)

GDF—Gobierno del Distrito Federal (Government of the Federal District)

HIC-AL—Habit International Coalition-América Latin (Habitat International Coalition-Latin America)

IEDF—Instituto Electoral del Distrito Federal (Electoral Institute of the Federal District)

IFE—Instituto Electoral Federal (Federal Electoral Institute)

INE—Instituto Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Institute)

INEGI—Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (National Institute of Statistics and Geography)

LPC—Ley de Participación Ciudadana (Law of Citizen Participation)

Morena (or MoReNa, or MORENA)—Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (National Regeneration Movement)

PRD—Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution)

PRI—Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)

PAN—Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)

PARM—Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana (Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution)

UNAM—Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico)

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## Introduction

Mexico City has been many things to many peoples over the course of the last millennium. To the Aztecs, it was a defensible position and eventually the seat of an impressive empire. To Cortés the *conquistadores*, it was the crown jewel of what would become New Spain, already a thriving metropolis requiring only the gilding of a Spanish baptism. Generations of Mexican and European rulers in Cortés' wake found a similar purchase in the city, a means by which a backward or stunted country might find the saving grace of modernity. To foreign visitors, the city has often been a magnet for depths of emotion many hardly knew they possessed. The wonders of its natural splendor and civic achievement are matched only by the horrors and ravages of its twentieth-century development, whether these are experienced from the air or on the ground. It has been conquered and reconquered many times over since it first took its place as the Aztec capital, and continues to be the object of desire to politicians and their parties that it once was for conquerors and *caudillos*. It is the beating heart of a vibrant and diverse country whose culture and history refuse easy qualifications, whose biomes and landscapes contain some of the planet's rarest plant and animal life, and whose climatic range boasts an impressive spread of Köppen-Geiger classifications, from its dry alpine peaks and immense northern deserts to its dense Yucatán jungles and the many natural harbors spread across its vast Caribbean and Pacific coastlines. Sitting near the center of the country some four degrees below the Tropic of Cancer, Mexico City's environment proves true to national form as the site of a Humid Subtropical highland climate with infamously wet summers and flora and fauna that are truly splendid, like the curious *Axolotl* found only in the remnants of the great lake in Xochimilco at the city's southern edge, whose adorable permanent smile and all-around infectious cuteness caused a viral spike in internet interest in the critically endangered species in recent years. To generations of migrants from Asia, Europe, Central America, and Mexico's own hinterlands, the city has signified the potential for economic and social opportunity, and it continues to entice such pilgrims with precisely this promise. Now the largest city in the Western Hemisphere, the 'Aztec

Metropolis' is home to some of world's wealthiest and poorest people, as are so many of the rapidly expanding cities of the so-called "Global South". Its environmental problems are the stuff of legend, quite literally, and the local and national political corruption and oppressive state violence that have plagued the capital for a century at least only further tarnish its national and international reputation. This state of affairs has called forth a great many academic studies in recent decades, most of which make sincere and careful attempts to understand and explain how the city ended up mired in such seeming political disorder, quotidian violence, impending environmental catastrophe, and chaotic patterns of urban development.

This dissertation follows in this tradition of Mexico City studies foreign and domestic, and also seeks to illuminate previously under-explored terrain in the subfield of urban geography. In the fashion of this tradition, I cannot fail to recognize Mexico City's monstrosity, nor fail to note the dangers of this side of its development and history. Also like those of some others, my assessments of these grim realities are tempered by a sincere personal affection for a place that has become increasingly familiar to me and that I now consider a second home, and even more by a sober recognition of the city's many triumphs and impressive feats of high and low culture alike. What began for me as a dissertation project based on an innovative urban social movement that just happened to be based in Mexico City, haltingly, jerkily, and sometimes painfully transformed into a research agenda rooted in the particularities of the capital city's turbulent history and precarious geography. I consider this dissertation a first substantial effort in my broader endeavor to understand the nascencies of Mexico City's contemporary social, political, economic, and environmental ills, the ever-expanding sets of solutions and agendas proffered to address them, and conflictual fault lines that open up around and through these issues as interests compete for all manner of influence in the course of the city's dance on the edge of survival.

This study is based in my understanding of dialectical materialism, particularly in the mode of abstraction laid out by Ollman (1971; 1993; 2003). This approach has had certain consequences for both the mode of investigation and of presentation, though perhaps not always in ways that will be immediately apparent to the reader. As Marx once explained of his own method:

Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out their interconnection. Only after this work is done, can the actual movement be adequately described. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere a priori construction.

Thus it is, for example, that the “revolutionary structure of feeling” I introduce as an analytical apparatus in Chapter Four may appear as an invention spawned from misguided conceptual ‘coquetry’, as Marx might have it, of the grandest idealist design. What goes unseen in this mode of presentation, however, is the wide-ranging and incessantly iterative analytical process by which this guiding principle was discerned. It would of course have been possible to follow any number of other analytical avenues in seeking to understand the process of ‘political reform’ in Mexico City (the subject of Chapter Four), but each would have brought a different set of connections into focus and illuminated or obscured various explanatory or contextual factors. In this case, it was my intention to provide a basis for understanding the ‘movement’ of political reform and the particular events, documents, and arguments pertaining to it from not only a political but also a social perspective. That is, as I argue that understanding political reform requires abstractions spun from a somewhat lengthier temporal extension than are typically on offer—so as to include its inescapably significant social dimensions—such factors as public reception ought not simply to drop off at the end of the story but rather should form part of its frayed and incomplete ending, however muddled this may make the composition of the overall narrative.

The most important aspect of this dialectical methodology to be laid out at the outset is the function of abstraction.<sup>1</sup> Abstraction, according to Ollman (2003: 60) deals with “the intellectual activity of breaking this whole down into the mental units with which we think about it”, a process that necessarily does a certain violence to the world as it actually exists. Following the method Ollman elaborates, I take as axiomatic the notion that no thing, person, relationship, event, (etc.) is ever only what it appears, however faithful a surface appearance may be to what it purports to represent. That is, this is not simply a dichotomy of necessarily partial appearance and an underlying reality. Rather, the same ‘thing’ is instead conceived as a relation, or rather a series of relations. Each such relation can take on any number of appearances when viewed from different angles, with each perspectival adjustment bringing different connections into and out of focus. Changing the angle of approach in this sense does not change some ontological essence that exists apart from the position of the analyst. Rather, this analytical position rejects such a premise of ontological discreteness. Such ‘Relations’, as Ollman labels these relational ‘totalities’ (collections of relations particularly named), appear differently based on the angle of approach, among other factors, in part because the way a Relation is approached is one of the many factors of its functional existence (an approach to dialectics to be more fully elaborated in Chapter Two). One way to demonstrate the import of this approach is to illustrate the practical utility of casting abstractions that are sufficiently broad to capture their relevance to a given issue or topic. For example, Mexico’s *Partido de la Revolucion Democrática* (PRD) was founded in 1989, and many academic and popular treatments of the party begin their analysis of this political party at this time or shortly before, with its origins in the FDN (to be discussed in Chapter One). Such a treatment will bring into focus the relations between this party and the circumstances surrounding its inception, including its participation the 1988 presidential election (as the FDN), its relationship to the parties that formed the FDN, and the party to whom it lost the election (the

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<sup>1</sup> See also Chapter Two.



PRI). Other treatments will cast a broader abstraction, setting their inquiry temporally further back in the 1980s and bringing into focus the tensions between what would eventually become the FDN and the PRI which still housed many of these elements, the PRI's internal factional tensions, and the macroeconomic policies and events that greatly exacerbated these trends. Still other treatments might reach even further, to include the stable decades of PRI leadership during which many of the leading members of what would become the PRD were trained and during which some established enduring patronage networks throughout Mexico City and the country more generally. None of these three approaches are precisely 'correct', as if one of these three representations is more faithful to the essential PRD that is somewhere awaiting its ultimate discovery. Rather, each abstraction brings different connections into focus, with different analytical possibilities. The first choice may be most useful for probing the dynamics of political pluralism and electoral reform in the 1990s, leading to the first presidential opposition victory since the Mexican Revolution in the 2000 elections. The second may be most useful for exploring the tensions between the PRD and the PRI, or between the PRD and its own breakaway party (Morena) since 2012 or thereabouts. The third may be most useful for understanding the particular character of PRD practices and party operation in the city, especially with respect to electoral manipulation, graft, clientelism, and other tactics and strategies traditionally associated with the PRI. With each of these temporal and relational abstractions of the PRD, different connections come into view, each expressing potentially compelling explanations for the behavior of PRD operatives in the city's poorest neighborhoods, for instance, or for the rumors of an alliance between PRD and PRI executives in the upcoming presidential elections. To mislay even one aspect of this process of abstraction, in this case temporal extension, would leave such valuable connections hopelessly obscured.

This framework was not arbitrarily chosen, nor was it the product of my blind adherence to Marxian dogma. Indeed, some of the ways I intend to push dialectics toward its creative potential

as a material force (see Chapter Two) may ruffle some of the most liturgical of Marxist feathers. Rather, this research approach is highly appropriate to Mexico City if for no other reason than that it most closely approximates the way that language and meaning are bent and manipulated in the everyday rhythms of *chilangolandia*.<sup>2</sup> Though I am as yet still quite a distance in my learning from being able to confidently explain the depths of meaning conveyed with each wink, grin, or alteration of pitch among the capital's residents, I have become attuned to the vastness of this universe of meanings and their limitless shades and resonances. Few words spoken in Mexico City, I argue, have only one referent, especially when the wide world of kinesics (body language) allows for practically infinite variations of inflection. To be sure, this is to some degree the case in most if not all languages. Mexico City Spanish, however, is famous for its interplay of simultaneous meanings. Language games of masculinity, sexual dominance, political sarcasm, and many more themes are openly discussed and implicitly or explicitly played, sometimes ending in raucous laughter and sometimes in physical violence, especially among men. After all, Mexico City is the land of the *albur*, a hyper-sexual joke, insult, or social challenge built from a pun, a phonetic manipulation of a name or common saying, or some other twisting or bending of a phrase to give it a sexual or emasculating meaning. This is a language that (especially male) foreigners, including Mexicans from outside the city, are encouraged to learn quickly if they are to avoid public ridicule. The capital's residents have also invented so many quotidian uses for the verb *chingar* (usually translated 'to fuck') that a comical (and comically large) usage dictionary (the *Chingonario*) is sold in tourist shops and bookstores throughout Mexico City, and now even abroad. Practically, shades of meaning simultaneously spoken in different registers routinely run

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<sup>2</sup> *Chilango* is a common nickname for residents of Mexico City. *Chilangolandia* is therefore 'land of the *chilangos*'. Some of the many conflicting accounts of the name's genesis have it that it once referred solely to newcomers to the city, as opposed to 'native' residents of longer tenure. In common parlance throughout the city, however, the name can now largely be understood to refer to any resident of the capital, and indeed the urban region. The less popular *defeño* no longer seems an apt characterization, as it names a resident of DF, the Federal District, which was formally renamed *Ciudad de México* (Mexico City) in January of 2016.

through conversations in Mexico City, and language is commonly understood as a highly expressive and flexible form of communication. Words, phrases, inflections, pitches, rhythms, etc., bend and twist the meanings they are meant to carry, producing an emotive current beneath the superficial flow of words to inflict pain, convey love, make a filthy joke, or rearrange power dynamics, often in combination. This is not, of course, to say that nothing can be accurately understood amidst this maelstrom. Rather, as even a foreigner may easily learn, the field of meaning in Mexico City is best approached not as an archeological dig, where inert treasures are carefully discovered and delicately handled, but rather as a dance in which partners are constantly exchanging and the key is to move within the flow of the music. This approach to language complicates any simple picture of Mexico City society, and has too often led to appraisals of a duplicitous intent to mask a singularly ‘true’ reality with flowery language or political pageantry. Though there is doubtless plenty of such behavior to be found, I argue that Mexico City is best and most fully understood by means of an approach attuned to deciphering the infinite shades of meaning that may exist between an absolute truth and a bald-faced lie.

### **Outline of the Dissertation**

I have organized this dissertation into four main chapters, the first of which provides the historical and thematic context for the others, and opens up problems explored in turn in subsequent chapters. Chapter One thus provides a selective history of Mexico City through the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, and of Mexico’s ruling party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) and its precursors, beginning in the aftermath the Mexican Revolution. Through a wide-ranging engagement with secondary literature from geography, sociology, history, and urban planning (among others), this chapter presents a history focused on the ever-changing relationship between Mexico’s two great ‘monsters’, its capital city and its ‘ruling party’. Over the course of roughly one hundred years, successive stages of development or redevelopment first turned a sleepy former viceroyal seat into a ‘modern’ capital with every

western convenience and diversion, though plagued by political corruption and the wounds of a deep and widening inequality in the distribution of the era's unbridled accumulation of resources. When revolutionaries deposed the great don, a period of chaotic government overthrows and rebellions tore asunder what Díaz had so skillfully wound in his palatial capital, until the stabilizing hand of Lázaro Cárdenas fully consolidated power in the party that would become the PRI, reestablishing control of the country's vast regions and delivering on many of even the most radical promises of the revolutionary constitution of 1917. In the name of the revolution, the PRI continued to funnel national resources toward the capital, which had legally become like the personal protectorate of the president in 1928. Between 1940 and 1980, ISI policy fueled rural to urban migration at incredible rates, and the city exploded past the boundaries established for the special Federal District, its frayed and distant edges now populated largely by poor migrants housed in self-constructed dwellings only spatially distinct from the tenement-style housing increasingly characteristic of the old center's deteriorating neighborhoods. As the contradictions of these policies set in, not least in the city, tensions within the PRI came to a head. As its factions began to splinter, the victors turned the party toward neoliberal policies that only further devastated the city's poorest areas, as government employment and social subsidies were slashed in line with international austerity mandates brought on by decades of debt financed expansion and rampant corruption and graft. Increasing authoritarianism, unfortunate geological events, and the perception of abandonment all led to an increasing distance between the PRI and city's populace, who began to call for a more genuine democracy in the 1980s in particular. Their efforts to win this democracy would not produce the intended results, however, as the PRI's ultimate fall came not at the hands of the breakaway leftist PRD but rather the conservative PAN, whose leadership took full advantage of the electoral reforms begrudgingly passed in the wake of stolen elections and revelations of a degree of corruption inside the PRI that could no longer be contained. Meanwhile, the city that had been the seat of the PRI's power had turned against it, and had grown to mammoth proportions with social, political, and ecological problems that lived

up to its tenebrific titles far more than the political party often labeled its ‘leviathan’ ever had. Ultimately, I argue that three conflictual trajectories emerge from this history, surrounding, respectively: 1) the incredible depth but more especially breadth and variety of urban problems that became increasingly and uncomfortably legible in the city during from the 1980s onward; 2) increasingly obvious problems of the city’s democratic process, including especially the fractious nature of left-leaning political parties and coalitions, authoritarian and other negative tendencies inherited from earlier political eras, and the suppression of ‘genuine’ democracy by a variety of means; and 3) a tension between the city and the national state, often expressed as conflict between the parties in control of each. In each subsequent chapter, I explore these trajectories through the investigation of specific cases.

Chapter Two follows the first of these strands through an exploration of one prominent set of civil society groups and social movements that coalesced around the idea of ‘the right to the city’ in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Using data collected from the archives of one of the NGOs that formed part of the core of this coalition of forces, along with archived media reports and several expert interviews, I follow this group and its ideas as they partnered with a PRD mayor and several rights-based institutions in the city to produce and promote the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City from 2008 to 2010. In the summer of 2010, the Charter received the public endorsement of the mayor and the majority of the city’s *delegados* (sub-municipal executives), and subsequently played a prominent role in several local struggles. The political significance of the Charter diminished rather quickly, however, in the face of a new mayoral regime less than enthusiastic about its principles, and moreover about the political baggage it now carried as an initiative of a previous administration from which the new mayor seemed to wish as much distance as possible. I argue that the very dialectical nature which made the concept attractive to those forces focused on simultaneously addressing the city’s now legendarily large and increasingly dire set of ills formed the basis of its executive rejection at the hands of the new

mayor, who insisted that the city to which the Charter's demands had been addressed simply no longer existed. Still, the Charter's promoters held out hope that it might still serve as the onset of the final stage, as so many had initially demanded, of the city's political emancipation from the national state and the party that controlled it, and perhaps form the basis of a new urban constitution as a part of this process.

Chapter Three presents a powerful political drama focused around a planned redevelopment project in the *delegacion*<sup>3</sup> of Cuauhtémoc in the fall of 2015. Using ethnographic observations, interviews, and extensive media and social media coverage and debate, I follow the public rollout and eventual electoral defeat of the *Corredor Cultural Chapultepec*, the first of a rumored ten megaprojects PRD mayor Miguel Ángel Mancera and his public/private development czar had planned across the city. The project, which would have converted one of the city's historic avenues into an elevated lineal park designed by the architect son-in-law of billionaire telecom and real estate mogul Carlos Slim, was defeated roughly two-to-one in a public 'consultation', a decision the mayor unexpectedly decided to honor. I view this process through the lens of 'postpolitics', which I argue encourages a focus trained on the ways in which opportunities for genuine disagreement are preemptively foreclosed, such that what remains subject to public debate, scrutiny, and participation is only a desiccated set of predetermined options that allow for precious little alteration of the plans of elites. I argue, however, that the narrative often associated with 'the postpolitical condition' is overly totalizing, often missing or ignoring the emergence of politics that fall outside an unnecessarily privileged style of revolutionary transgression of the 'police order'. Instead, following a growing literature developing along a similar trajectory, I urge a study of postpolitical *hegemonies* produced within and constrained or enabled by the specificities of time and place. In this case, PRD control over the planning process and the

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<sup>3</sup> *Delegacion* can be translated 'borough' in this context, as it denotes one of sixteen administrative subdivisions of the Federal District (and now Mexico City).

process of public participation was won in large part by a promise of increasing democratization. As the *Corredor* saga beautifully demonstrates, this made the hard-won hegemony of the mayor and his party vulnerable at precisely this point.

An often cynical grassroots and resident community enlivened by the unexpected victory of the anti-*Corredor* forces turned their attention the following spring toward the culmination of the process many hoped the Charter would begin, the restoration of full local democracy to the capital city. This process, collectively known as ‘political reform’, is the subject of Chapter Four, which takes a perhaps unusual tack in exploring its history and significance. The chapter begins with a set of ethnographic scenes through which I seek to elucidate the quotidian political climate within which political reform was pursued and enacted in 2016. This is followed by an historical reconstruction of the forces, events, and rationale behind the several decades of incremental changes that ultimately led to the constitutional reforms of 2016 and the restoration of the statehood taken from the city by the PRI’s predecessors in 1928. The product of a much-maligned ‘pact’ between the PRD mayor and the PRI president, these reforms dissolved the Federal District and revived Mexico City as the national capital and thirty-second state, and made provisions for the drafting of its first constitution, timed so that its conclusion would coincide with the ratification of the country’s revolutionary constitution a century before in 1917. These reforms—which seemed to suddenly arrive at a break-neck pace amid a frenzy of public pronouncements and publicity campaigns that usually contained only partial information about what was after all a sweeping set of changes and processes (some of which were subject to public participation)—were received with a complex mixture of skepticism and excitement by a populace well used to political trickery and manipulation but nevertheless enticed by the idea of genuine reform and the potential of ‘real’ democratization. To contextualize these often contradictory sentiments, I explore what I refer to as a “revolutionary structure of feeling” that continues to surround and, I argue, structure public reception and reaction to political reform, drawing parallels to

revolutionary memories, feelings, and hopes never fully erased by a century of revolution gone awry.

The concluding chapter summarizes the contributions of this dissertation to the study of urban development and political change. Specifically, I argue that the case collectively presented in the preceding chapters indicates the necessity of reassessing prevailing theories about the pace and trajectory of revolutionary change, built around a reconsideration of Gorz's theory of "non-reformist reforms". A violent century of revolutionary urbanism in Mexico City thus makes, I argue, an invaluable contribution to the study of rapid urbanization and peripheral urban growth, public participation and the uses of democracy, and territorial conflict and political revolution.



## Chapter One

### A Century of Monsters, Machines, and Megaurbanization

#### Introduction

“To its detractors (and even to a few of its admirers), Mexico City is a nightmare, a monster out of control. It is home to some twenty million people, nearly a quarter of the country’s population. An average square kilometer contains 5,494 human beings, the highest demographic density any city in the world. And it just keeps growing...The city is also the scene of an unprecedented ecological catastrophe, both natural and human in origin, that has driven venerable experts to despair while long-time residents take it all in stride, reading the day’s air pollution index in the same perfunctory way that other people glance at the weather forecast. As if that were not enough, Mexico City is also the seat of a ruling party that, in its over-centralization, corruption, authoritarian pretensions, and frequent ineptitude, seems nothing less than the political reflection of that unwieldy urban behemoth.”  
 -Timothy Henderson  
 (in Kandell, 1996)

“The so-called progress has given us the dubious privilege of becoming the most populous city in the world, with nearly twenty million inhabitants. All the industry concentrated in the city only serves to worsen the traffic jams, with cars and trucks going ever more slowly amid ever louder noise. Many of those who live on the fringes have no drains or drinking water, no electric light or telephones. And yet despite such depravation, they...are drawn as if by a magnet to this city of many faces, which can be simultaneously so beautiful yet so cruel, so stark in its contrasts, so racist toward its own people, and yet so vulnerable.”  
 -Elena Poniatowska (2000)

“Walter Benjamin called Paris the capital of the nineteenth century, and in *Delirious New York* Rem Koolhaas positioned Manhattan as the urban Rosetta stone of the twentieth. Mexico City will play a similar role in the twenty-first. The orderly European model for cities, and even the bustling but carefully planned United States archetypes that followed it, have already given way to another version, in which much of the world’s population lives—enormous impoverished hypermetropoli which, with virtually no planning whatsoever, have expanded to accommodate monstrously multiplying populations.”  
 -David Lida (2008)

By most estimates, Mexico City is the most populous urban area in the western hemisphere, and one of the most populous cities in the world.<sup>4</sup> Though it equally finds easy comparison to North American counterparts (picture the financial gravity of New York and the political power of Washington, DC spread over the sprawling and colorful low-built terrain of Los Angeles) and to the recently booming megacities of the so-called ‘global south’, it also finds a certain distinction in the complex mixture of admiration and

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<sup>4</sup> See the United Nations’ report *World Urbanization Prospects* (2014 revision) which lists Mexico City as the world’s third largest city as of 2010, behind only Tokyo and Delhi. 2020 projections, however, place Mexico City in seventh position behind, respectively, Tokyo, Delhi, Shanghai, Beijing, Mumbai, and São Paulo.

derision offered for its description, artfully captured by its most common monikers: the monster (*el monstruo*), the city of palaces (*la ciudad de los palacios*),<sup>5</sup> and the lake of fire (*el lago de fuego*). Invoking the monstrous nature of this Mexican Moloch and those who have labored to control it is a common theme across academic and popular portraits of the city (see Davis, 1992; Kandell, 1996; Bruhn, 1997; Lida, 2008; Ross, 2009; Hernandez, 2011), and the sheer scope and scale of its orbital proportions, whether they are considered relatively or absolutely, undoubtedly merits such bestial estimations. The problems that stem from this monstrous geography are likewise almost mythically formidable, be they political, economic, social, or environmental in nature. Once the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán at the center of Lake Texcoco in a great valley hemmed in by twin mountain ranges that collide to form its southern terminus and produce a series of elegant volcanic peaks, the city has made frightful and wondrous impressions on foreign visitors for centuries. Contemporary travelers continue to marvel at the monster, though descriptions now often focus on the immensity of the city's sprawling slums and informal settlements, its nearly unparalleled traffic congestion (whether of private autos or public transit of various kinds), and the depth and pervasiveness of its pollution.<sup>6</sup> It is a city that displays perhaps better than any other what Holston (2009; and see Dagnino, 2007) calls "the perverse paradox", a situation in which nominal democratization is accompanied by the persistence or even worsening of

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<sup>5</sup> A label often incorrectly attributed to Alexander von Humboldt (see de Mauleón, 2015), this name was given to the city by the long-winded English traveler—and future governor of the English Colony of Victoria, Australia—Charles La Trobe, whose travel diary, *The Rambler in Mexico*, describes his entry into Mexico City thusly (La Trobe, 1834: 102): "And, when approaching the main valley, the villages thicken around him, with their streets, cheered and beautiful amid the general sterility, by groups of the graceful peruvian [sic] pepper-tree; and the roads are seen crowded by long strings of laden mules, and gay cavaliers,—and the stupendous works of human design, harmonize with those of nature, and prepare him for the sight of one of the most extraordinary scenes in the world, whether we regard the works of men, or those of God, the Artificer of all. And such is the Valley and City of Mexico."

<sup>6</sup> Though the city of course has its international apologists, as well. *The New York Times*, for instance, ranked it first among its "52 places to visit" in 2016.

various social ills, including pervasive violence and socio-economic inequality. It is in some ways a perverse attraction that continues to draw migrants and visitors to the Mexican capital, just as it has for the last hundred years, whether they are enticed by a fleeting promise of upward mobility, the savage beauty of the valley's landscapes, or the seductive dance of its powerful political dramas.

Mexico City's path to mythic monstrosity is informed by its primacy in the history of Mexico, a country in which the constant blending of new and old world spiritual, aesthetic, political, and economic trajectories is forever on display in new and interesting ways. A far cry from the novelty Norton (2003) sees in his "feral cities", Mexico City's monstrosity is as old as the treacherous geography provisioned by the eruptions of Popocatepetl and its slumbering neighbors, the earthquakes over which their faults preside, and the shifting silts left behind by the intermontane lake upon which the Aztec capital was erected. In the wake of the Mexican Revolution, the capital city entered a new phase of growth that would fundamentally alter and complicate its geographies. The Revolution also birthed another monster, however. The winners of the "fiesta of bullets" that was the protracted series of wars and intrigues collectively known as the Mexican Revolution formed from its aftermath a political party and eventually an associated electoral and legislative machine that would rule the country and the city relatively unchallenged for roughly the next seven decades. As the city grew and developed, so too did the party alter its strategies and attempt to maintain its control over the expanding metropolis. In the century that followed the Revolution, the party that bore its name and the city that bore its scars staggered through a conflictual relationship that saw them both continually reshaped and episodically reformed.

This chapter will explore the century of change that produced Mexico's two great monsters, its capital city and its ruling party. This historical geography will follow similar but more targeted treatments of the city or the ruling party, such as Eckstein's (1988) consideration of urban development, the urban poor, and the legacy of revolution, Davis's (1994) detailed history of the PRI and its relationship with the growing metropolis through the lens of its expanding transit networks, Bruhn's (1997) careful study of the dynamics of the PRI and the breakaway PRD, especially in the crucial 1988 elections, and Gutmann's (2002) assessment of Mexican democracy as seen through an ethnography set in one of the capital city's *colonias populares*. What this chapter will attempt, however, differs from these previous studies both in its emphasis on the changing political geography of the city through the twentieth century and in its consideration of the multi-faceted and expanding set of crises faced by national and local governments that resulted from decades of unrestrained growth and the policies and actions of the PRI and its executive heads in particular. In examining the exponential expansion of the city in the post-revolutionary decades, every attempt will thus be made not only to illustrate the entangled scales of state authority and the everyday geographies with which they attempt to contend, illustrating the fault lines created in each by the other, but also the problems that spin out of this dangerous dance of urban and political development through the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

The chapter is organized into three temporal periods: 1) the Porfiriato (when the city was under the control of Porfirio Díaz), the Mexican Revolution, and the consolidation of the PRI in the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940); 2) the decades of 'explosive' growth and the "Mexican Miracle" (the 1940s through the 1970s); and 3) the 1980s and

1990s, ending with the PAN victory in the 2000 national presidential elections.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, I argue that the city's twentieth-century development and the problems that arise from its governance and rapid expansion set the stage, so to speak, for three related conflictual trajectories: 1) the PRI's internal and external political crises, producing factions that break away to form the PRD in the late 1980s and eventually leading to its first ever loss of executive authority in 2000 (and for later factional conflict in the capital city down the line); 2) the broad-based nature of leftist grassroots opposition movements in the capital city, best exemplified by the coalition that eventually produced the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City publicly endorsed by the majority of the city's executive authorities in 2010; and 3) the conflict between the national state (and the ruling party that was once considered coterminous with it) and the capital city, which was nominally concluded in 2016 with the city's political "emancipation" via constitutional amendment granting it the status of Mexico's thirty-second state. This is a timely analysis in 2017, as the country concludes its jubilant celebration of the centennial of the 1917 revolutionary national constitution and at least the beginning of the end of the long and bloody series of civil wars begun in 1910, and as the city embarks on a new political chapter as a nominally-independent body and one among many states of the Mexican Union.

### **The Porfiriato, the Revolution, and the Party**

José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz Mori was first elected to the Mexican presidency in 1877, a post he would relinquish only for a brief four year period (1880-1884) until he abdicated his throne in early 1911 and fled to exile in Europe. A seasoned general who had participated in several major wars, including the War of Reform, Díaz began his political

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<sup>7</sup> The question of "political reform" of the city (via the national constitution) and its autonomy within the union will be directly addressed in Chapter Four.

career as a liberal reformer who championed the fight against presidential re-election. Ironically, he would later amend the constitution of 1857 (twice) to ensure the legality of his own hold on power in perpetuity (after initially turning presidential power over to trusted subordinate Manuel del Refugio González Flores after his first term). Given the incredible degree of control he was able to achieve over the various arms of the Mexican state, the military, and even the notoriously resilient and fiercely independent regional *caciques* (power brokers or strongmen), not to mention the enormity of his vision and its singularity among his political peers, his influence on the trajectory of Mexican political economy and the development of the capital city would be difficult to overestimate. Hailed abroad as the great modernizer and the *caudillo*<sup>8</sup> to end *caudillismo*, Díaz brought stability and centralized control to a country whose political culture in the seven decades since its independence had been characterized by several civil wars, several foreign invasions (including by the US, which took possession of a large portion of northern Mexico through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican American War (1846-1848)), several multi-term presidents (including Antonio López de Santa Anna Pérez de Lebrón, who sat the presidency some eleven separate times), and a string of presidencies that ended by violence or abdication under threat of violence.

To secure control of the country's far-flung and highly diverse regions, Díaz recruited a ruthless rural police force loyal to himself. "By the 1880s", Johns (1997: 68) reports, "the *rurales* had shed enough bad blood to kill most of the brigands and to cause those who thought about taking their place to think again. Their job of pacification done, they became a rural police force that made sure things went Díaz's way." These *rurales*,

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<sup>8</sup> *Caudillo* can be translated as 'strongman', 'leader', 'figurehead', or 'warlord', and refers to both to a person and to a style of leadership typically characterized by a charismatic personality at the head of a loyal military force.

along with Mexico City's police force and the military, were pacified by steady promotions and even more by Díaz's highly permissive stance on graft (Johns, 1997; Caistor, 2000). As Joseph and Buchenau (2013: 22) concede, "Had Díaz not consolidated his particular regime, it is possible, even likely, that the lesser caudillos he (and Juárez) neutralized would have continued to tear the republic to pieces." With political authority thus concentrated and the stability of the regime thus ensured, Díaz pursued an aggressive program of modernization in Mexico's infrastructures and several of its prominent industries. On his watch, Mexico's rail system in particular grew immensely, linking the country's distant ports, mines, and agricultural regions.<sup>9</sup> He looked to the cities of Europe for aesthetic and political inspiration for his renovation of the Mexican capital, which was swept clean at his command by his loyal police force (but often otherwise left to its vices, provided these didn't offend the *gente decente* ('decent people')). Praise flowed in from foreign dignitaries and observers, as did foreign capital as soon as Díaz reestablished the country's financial solvency and made the servicing of sovereign debts a serious priority (Joseph and Buchenau, 2013). Joseph and Buchenau separate the Porfiriato into two phases, the first from 1877 through 1905 and the second from 1905 until his regime began to fall apart in late 1910. In the first stage, Don Porfirio's reforms and projects pulled together a war-weary and highly regionalized and rural country, and transformed Mexico City into a modern, fashionable capital replete with fancies and splendors fawned upon by a steady flow of foreign visitors and the wealthy elites and political insiders privileged with a seat at the General's table. As the following excerpt from *The New York Times* (1900) illustrates, Mexico's 'sister republic'

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<sup>9</sup> *The New York Times* reported in 1910 (following Godoy, 1910) that Mexico's railroads had grown from 578 kilometers at the beginning of Díaz's reign in 1877 to 24,160 kilometers as of 1909.

seemed (in the main) willing to accept certain democratic sacrifices in the name of ‘order and progress’:

Happily, Mexico has at present an energetic, liberal-minded, and progressive President—Porfirio Diaz [sic]—who was only recently re-elected for another term. The President had occupied the same high office for eight years, and perhaps it is not too much to say that the republic has had more real, substantial progress under his wise rule than has been made during any other period since 1820. While, on the one hand, he carefully keeps the religious element from interfering with and controlling the civil Government, Diaz [sic] has also done much toward the repression of crime, the advancement of education, and the development of commerce of the country. For example, in the promotion of such enterprises as coffee plantations, sugar and tobacco factories, cotton and flour mills, railway extension, construction of hotels, street railways, &c., the President offers every facility for the importation of materials and machinery, and encourages speculators and capitalists backed with the requisite credentials.

In the latter stage, the same foreign press outlets and dignitaries that had sung his praises for more than two decades turned against him, no longer willing to stomach the obvious political repression and widespread graft and corruption of his regime, nor the increasingly obvious gap between the ostentatious wealth of Don Porfirio’s inner circle and the grinding poverty of the country’s urban and rural underclasses. The same *New York Times*, after lauding the “master builder” for several decades, turned the corner on Díaz with notable haste, as exemplified by the following line from the opening of a commentary on a Díaz’s public pronouncement of his then forthcoming resignation in May of 1911:

The workings of the mind of an old man who dwells largely in the past, and has been kept or has kept himself ignorant of the extent of the disaffection in his country, are revealed in the Sunday manifesto of Porfirio Diaz [sic], which has proved so futile that the fiercest battle fought on the mainland of this continent in fifty years...began within twenty-four hours of its utterance.

Díaz, an initial reading of such assessments might permit, had simply gotten old and lost his ability or zeal in the process. Closer examination of these assessments, however,



reveals an attention to the growing contradictions of the regime, the seeds of which were sewn through Díaz's own efforts to modernize the country and its capital city (*The New York Times*, 1911):

Díaz [sic] himself has educated his people for something better; he has built schools and extended free education throughout the country; he has encouraged industry, and secured for Mexico an honorable and important place among the Nations. The natural result is that there is no longer a Porfirist Party to depend upon. The people demand a real republic and the enforcement of the Constitution. Whether they have developed sufficiently to govern themselves, under conditions of perfect freedom, remains to be seen. Their right to make the experiment is indisputable, though the terms of the no-re-election bill, a measure dominated by emotionalism rather than reason, may somewhat discourage hope of a good beginning.

The dissipation of US support in particular paved the way for the eruption of revolution from among Mexico's countless disaffected populations, from the dispossessed and otherwise landless peasants who spanned the country to those of privileged birth kept at arm's length by the regime and its aging leader. In an interview that appeared in *Pearson's Magazine* in 1908, Díaz stated his intention to retire from the Mexican presidency two years hence in 1910. Though he declared that his leadership had finally prepared his country for democracy, he ultimately broke this promise, which served as the final straw for his political opponents. In response to his refusal to honor this commitment, Francisco Madero González, who had been plotting his revolution relatively without interference from the US government while exiled in Texas,<sup>10</sup> launched the Mexican Revolution in the late fall of 1910, and within six months Porfirio Díaz had abdicated. The next ten years would witness several periods of open warfare between the major factions of the Revolution and the state, and, in select arenas, the US Army and Navy. These years of war would undo much of the difficult work Díaz had done to

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph and Buchenau (2013: 36) claim that Madero even enjoyed "the tacit support of the U.S. state and business community" at the outset of the Revolution.

integrate Mexico's diverse regions and centralize its powers of governance in the capital city, and to garner recognition, respect, and credit for the country internationally. This conflict also brought to the fore a tension between the capital city and the national territory over which its governments attempted to extend their authority. This tension would take a variety of forms over the next century, and would play a significant role in shaping both geographical and political developments as politicians, parties, and citizen movements vied for the upper hand in a series of scalar and socio-spatial conflicts.

A period of relative stability set in with the onset of the "Sonoran Dynasty", a series of three presidential terms from 1920 through 1932 (plus a brief interim presidency in 1920) won by generals and political operators from the northern State of Sonora. These included, respectively: Felipe Adolfo de la Huerta Marcor, leader of the Agua Prieta revolt (the last major overthrow of the revolutionary period) who served as Interim President for roughly six months in 1920; General Álvaro Obregón Salido, who served as President from 1920-1924; and Plutarco Elías Calles, who served as President from 1924-1928 and exerted great influence<sup>11</sup> on the Mexican government thereafter as the so-called *jefe máximo* ('supreme chief'). Though these leaders formed a governing alliance that allowed them to maintain control of the presidency through the 1920s, they ultimately differed over how to deal with other revolutionary leaders (notably northerner Pancho Villa) and the problem of presidential succession. The turmoil caused by Obregón's assassination shortly after his re-election in 1928 brought the government under the control of Calles, to a greater or lesser degree, for the better part of the next six years (a period often referred to as the 'Maximato'). In 1929, he sought to solidify the

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<sup>11</sup> There is a wide-ranging disagreement on precisely how much control Calles was able to exert over the state as the *jefe máximo*. See Ross (2009) and Joseph and Buchenau (2013), for example, for highly contrasting interpretations.

Sonorans' control of the state by organizing the National Revolutionary Party (*Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, hereafter PNR). Through this organization, Calles intended to direct the policies of the presidents to serve in his wake, and during his roughly six years as *jefe máximo* seems largely to have succeeded. Beginning with the election of Lázaro Cárdenas del Río in 1934, however, a rapid succession of changes in the capital brought a swift end to the Maximato and began a new chapter for the country and the city.

Unlike his predecessors, Cárdenas took great care to forge relationships with even the lowliest of his national patrimony. He began by taking an extended cross-country trek which brought him to every state and territory of Mexico in late 1933 and early 1934.<sup>12</sup> As his victory was assured (with the backing of Calles), this national tour appeared an unnecessary maneuver, but in this gesture lay the earliest signs of Cárdenas's political brilliance. To do away with or at least mitigate the overbearing Calles and his already well-established political machinery in the capital's legislature and bureaucracy, Cárdenas required a massive base of reliable support. This he largely found in the country's peasants and laborers, to whom he made major concessions through his celebrated agrarian reforms and permissive treatment of labor strikes, respectively. It would still take Cárdenas two years to fully depose the *jefe máximo* and his cronies, but when a crucial public misstep (a miscalculated insult in the press regarding Cárdenas's treatment of labor strikes in the capital) provided him the pretext he required to remove Calles to exile in California (see Joseph and Buchenau, 2013), his already substantial support throughout the country insulated his regime from any potential threat of revolt and brought much of Calles's machinery under his control at the head of the party he

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<sup>12</sup> This tour is said to have created an affection for Cárdenas—who soon took on the nickname *Tata Lázaro* ('Papa Lázaro')—that would remain strong enough to enhance popular support for his son Cuauhtémoc as a presidential candidate nearly sixty years later (to be discussed in more detail below).

would re-christen the Party of the Mexican Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Mexicana*, hereafter PRM) in 1938. In this new guise, the party that had begun as the vehicle of the late Sonoran Dynasty and the personal fiefdom of the *jefe máximo* took on an entirely different arrangement. His popular bases of support, workers and peasants, had their mass organizations brought directly inside the party as distinct sectors, in addition to the military and state employees. These four sectors were expected to deal directly with the president and his representatives, a move which sought both to further curb the influence of local *caciques* and to enhance the power and control of the party's executive head. At the close of the *sexenio*<sup>13</sup> of Manuel Ávila Camacho, Cárdenas's hand-picked successor and longtime supporter (and subordinate), the party would again be renamed, achieving its final form as the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, hereafter PRI). In addition to his massive land redistributions (largely in the form of communally-held *ejido* grants to peasant and indigenous communities throughout the country) and his extensive nationalization program,<sup>14</sup> Cárdenas rearranged Mexican politics such that the country would no longer be dominated by one person, as it had been under de facto ruler Plutarco Elías Calles. Rather, Cárdenas's leadership would subordinate Mexican politics to a single party, the PRI, for the remainder of the twentieth century.

At the close of Cárdenas's presidency, Mexico at last knew an enduring peace after three decades of wars, revolts, coups, and assassinations that had begun in 1910. The country's ruling party had incorporated the major sectoral interests, and the capital city

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<sup>13</sup> Six-year term. The constitutional change from four to six-year terms was made in 1928 under President Calles.

<sup>14</sup> The most important piece of this program came in 1934, when Cárdenas nationalized Mexico's oil industry. Though this was an incredibly unpopular move in the US and elsewhere (especially in those countries, like the UK, whose investors had interests in Mexican oil), it remains one of the pillars of Cárdenas's incredibly durable legacy.

had been reorganized as the Federal District under the direct jurisdiction of the President of the Republic, as set forth in a 1928 amendment to the revolutionary Constitution of 1917. This constitution was authorized at the height of the Revolution, and remains in force a full century later (though it has been amended hundreds of times, a process to be discussed in Chapter Four). Ward (1989) argues that this legal reorganization—which changed Mexico City, a state within the union comprising sixteen *municipios*,<sup>15</sup> into a new Federal District of the same sixteen subunits, though now politically organized as *delegaciones*—came at the behest of President Álvaro Obregón, and was aimed at bringing political squabbling among the *municipios* under control. Davis (1994: 166) likewise explains that “national political leaders saw the elimination of democratic practices as the only way to control labor politics and urban development in the capital.” This move to subordinate the capital city under the national executive would have lingering implications for nearly a century at least, and paradoxically created a situation in which a revolution nominally based in an effort to establish democracy had done precisely the opposite in the capital city, such that some sixty years later Ward (1989: 308) would conclude that “Few places in the democratic world have less local democracy than Mexico City.” The President was required to nominate the city’s mayor,<sup>16</sup> in addition to most of the remainder of the city’s administrative structure, a subordination that would further contribute to the tension between the capital city and the national state. The city was also beginning to grow at previously unknown rates as Díaz’s modernization efforts (and those of the Sonorans and the “official party” in all three of its guises) drew rural populations to cities and burgeoning industrial centers. In 1900, the Federal District contained some 542,000 inhabitants. At the outbreak of the

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<sup>15</sup> Municipalities, the governmental subunit of all Mexican states.

<sup>16</sup> This position was formally that of Regent (*Regente*) until 1997.

Revolution ten years on, that number had grown to roughly 730,000, and by the end of Cárdenas's *sexenio* it had exploded to between 1.6 and 1.8 million, an increase of over three hundred percent.<sup>17</sup> The geographical footprint of its urbanized area, however, remained well within the bounds of the Federal District (see figures 1.1; 1.2), and the city's physical arrangement and layout remained largely that of its earlier stages of development, including especially the Zócalo (the city's central plaza), the city's administrative offices and the buildings that housed the legislature and other arms of the federal government, and significant relics from the Viceroyalty of New Spain and Tenochtitlán before it, such as the famed Metropolitan Cathedral and some of the ruins

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<sup>17</sup> Here it will be useful to distinguish what is sometimes called in English 'Greater Mexico City' from the Federal District, a distinction that will become increasingly important through the middle decades of the twentieth century. Greater Mexico City, also variously referred to as the Metropolitan Area, the Valley of Mexico (Valle de México), and the Valley of Mexico Metropolitan Zone, also currently includes several municipalities of the neighboring State of México, and one municipality in the neighboring state of Hidalgo, depending of course on which is used, and, in some cases, who is using the term (see Connelly (2003) for clarification). Davis (1994) reports the Federal District's population at 1.645 million as of 1940, and that of the Mexico City Metropolitan Area at 1.758 million. Making no distinction, Gilbert and Ward (1982) report the population of what they call "Mexico City" at 1.8 million in 1940. Davis (1994) also notes a third category in the national census data, that of "Mexico City" (presumably different from that employed by Gilbert and Ward, who likely refer to the Metropolitan Area, given the figure they posit), which is there reserved for only the inner areas of the old city, specifically the *delegaciones* of Miguel Hidalgo, Cuauhtémoc, Benito Juárez, and Venustiano Carranza, an area Ward (1990: 18) argues is also "loosely" affiliated with "occasional reference to the 'inner-city' or downtown area". Ward (1990: 17-18) concisely and correctly explains that despite a plethora of qualified attempts, "the definition of what constitutes Mexico City is not fixed." For the remainder of this chapter, 'Mexico City', unless otherwise specified, will be understood to include the areas commonly associated with the metropolitan area (following Connelly's (2003) usage). The issue will become slightly less confusing in Chapter Four, with the creation of the legal entity 'Mexico City' (Ciudad de México), which replaced the Federal District as of January, 2016.

of the Aztec Templo Mayor (though much of this last would not begin to be fully excavated until the 1970s).

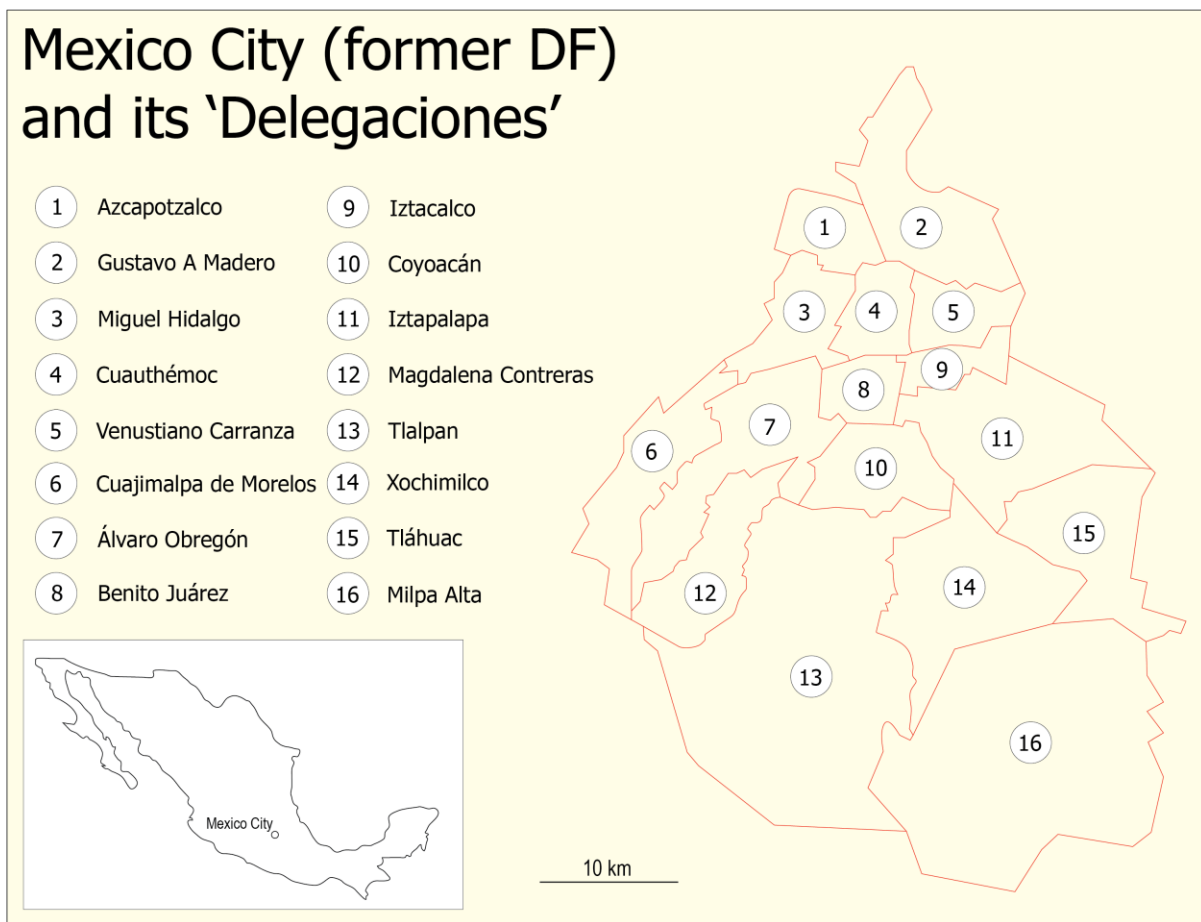


Figure 1.1: Mexico City (2016) or the Federal District (1928-2016) and its *delegaciones*. Cartography by author.

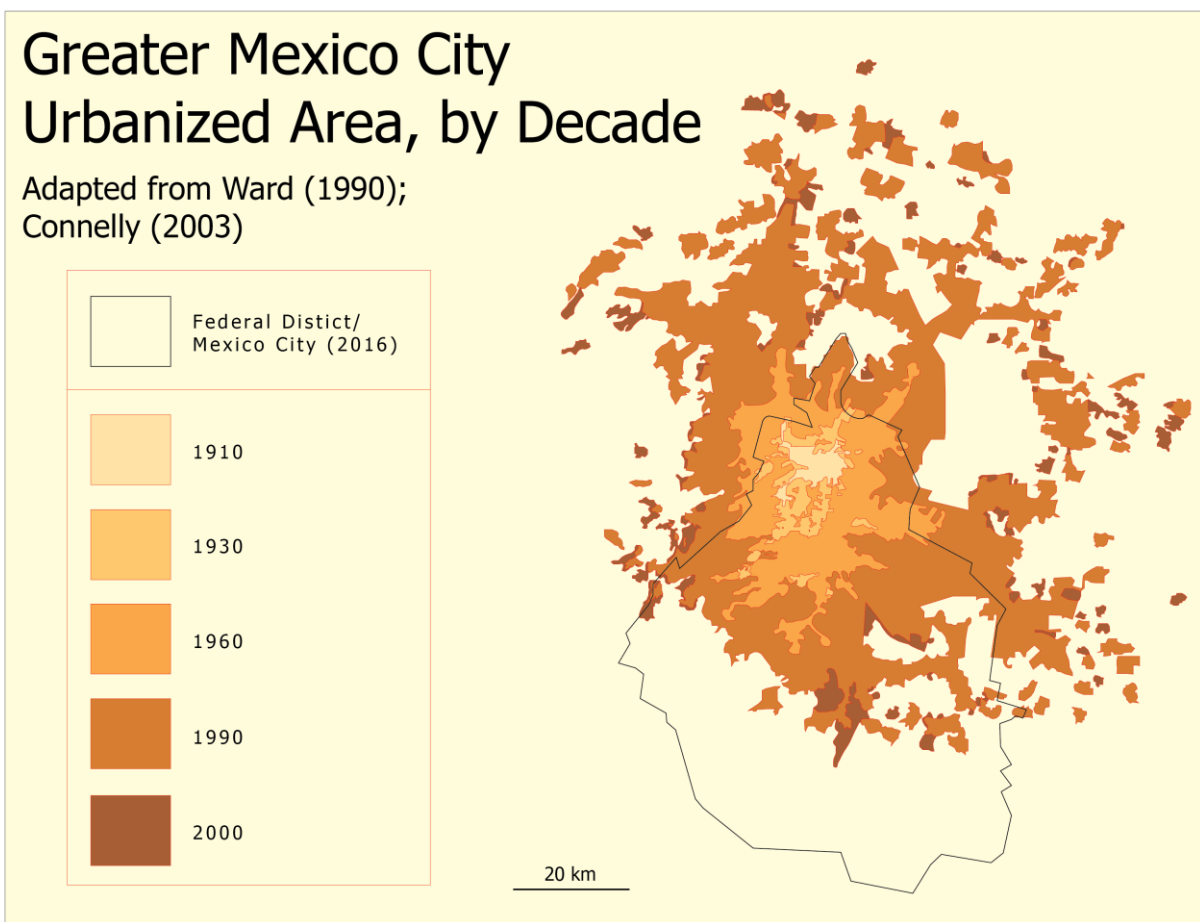


Figure 1.2: Greater Mexico City Urbanized Area, by Decade. Data adapted from Ward (1990) and Connelly (2003). Cartography by author.

Indeed, the city center's geography looked much like that of other Latin American capitals and major urban centers, and lent itself easily to the modeling that had become a mainstay of academic urban studies in the neighboring US.<sup>18</sup> Mexico City conformed more than most to general descriptions of urban spatial form, such as the following offered by Portes and Walton (1976: 19):

The ecology of the early colonial city reflected well the centralized character of its social structure. The characteristic grid pattern of streets and blocks emerged from the central plaza, which, left empty except for minor adornments, was usually a square no larger than other city blocks. The main plaza served the multiple functions of marketplace on certain days, recreational center on others,

<sup>18</sup> See Lewinnek (2010) for a critical review of the concentric zone models of the Chicago School of Urban Ecology in particular.



and point of military concentration in times of danger. Around the plaza were concentrated the most important buildings, such as those housing political authorities from viceroys and *audencias* to governors and municipalities. At the plaza was also located the cathedral or main church...The residences of the rich and powerful, the aristocracy formed by *vecinos* and political and religious authorities, were concentrated around the main plaza. The first concentric zone around the plaza contained the largest and best built houses and often had public lighting and street pavement...The next zone contained the homes of a rudimentary middle class of established artisans, government clerks, and small merchants and proprietors. Residences, which in the first zone were large one-story or even two-story buildings, became smaller and more primitive. The grid pattern persisted, but lighting and pavement disappeared. The third zone, the outskirts of the city, was a mixture of the poorest residences of artisans and menial workers with the beginnings of small farms. Beyond this area only an occasional chapel or country store at a crossroads could be found.

In the later "Model of Latin American City Structure" to which authors Griffin and Ford (1980) argued Mexico City also clearly conformed, the central city area (what is now called the Centro Histórico (historic center) or simply *el centro*) takes on the qualities of a CBD (central business district) organized around the central plaza (in this case Zócalo) and the religious, commercial, and political architecture that immediately surrounded it. But despite the already rapidly increasing size of the population during the Cárdenas years, the city had not yet reached the proportions or functions required to fundamentally alter this spatial structure. In the ensuing decades, however, the city's geography would be exponentially expanded and otherwise rearranged as PRI regimes worked to produce and sustain the period of sustained economic growth known as the 'Mexican Miracle'.

### Urban Explosion and the Mexican Miracle (1940-1980)<sup>19</sup>

Because of the immense changes wrought in and on the city during the four following decades, Mexico City continued to serve as a primary exemplar for social scientists seeking to contend with urban Latin America, though on completely different terms. The rapid population growth during the Sonoran Dynasty, the Maximato, and the Cárdenas years only accelerated for the next four decades, as the Federal District's population more than doubled to more than 9 million in 1980 (Davis, 1994). Far more dramatic changes, however, were seen at the scale of the metropolitan area. In 1940, the Federal District's population (roughly 1.65 million) constituted roughly ninety-four percent of the population of the metropolitan area (roughly 1.76 million). By 1980, however, the population of the metropolitan area had grown to over 14.4 million, only sixty-four percent (roughly 9.2 million) of whom lived in the Federal District. In other words, during these four decades Mexico City experienced incredible peripheral growth, far exceeding that of its central areas. In this, *el monstruo* figured as only the most populous example of a regional and even global trend, as urbanist scholars, policy-makers, philanthropists, and other interested observers turned their eyes to the plight of the peripheral poor in "exploding" cities in Latin America and Asia in particular. This peripheral settlement

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<sup>19</sup> Most economic and political texts place the break point for this history at around 1970, for two reasons. First, arguably the most significant event for the PRI came in 1968, when its forces murdered hundreds of protesting students in what came to be known as the "Tlatelolco Massacre" (discussed below) which many see as a turning point for the party's relationship with the public (and the city). Second, the years of the 'miracle' were largely (though not entirely) over by 1970, when economic growth began to stagnate and the contradictions and shortcomings of ISI policy (discussed below), and perhaps even more importantly widespread corruption and graft, hurt the party's ability to deliver on its promises. While both arguments are compelling, the aim of this chapter is to set the stage for later arguments about the city and its politics, rather than national economic policy and trends or the political crises of the PRI, *per se*. Though both of these figure prominently in this chapter, I selected the break point of 1980 (as opposed to the more common 1970, or even 1982, which would also be compelling both as a beginning of a new presidential *sexenio* and the onset of a significant debt crisis) for its more compelling illustration of the city's population and spatial growth, both of which remained rapid through the 1970s even as the national economy began, however haltingly, to descend from the sustained highs of the previous three decades. This will be discussed in more detail below.

came in many forms across distinct geographies, from the slopes and hillsides at the edges of Iztapalapa (see Figures 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5) and the infamous Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl to the flatter northern areas around Azcapotzalco (see Figure 1.6), and the varied terrain of swamps and rolling hills that surround the colonial village of Texcoco (see Figures 1.7, 1.8, and 1.9), near the site of the city's new airport (scheduled for completion in 2020). Often, these new areas were settled informally, through means that could include anything from unauthorized squatting or invasive occupation to shaky purchase or rental agreements that may or may not find the protection of law should proverbial push come to shove.<sup>20</sup> The resultant slums and shantytowns—properly referred to as *colonias populares* in this context—are “characterised by cheaply acquired land, inadequate infrastructure, and self-help dwelling construction...often developed on agricultural land” (Lombard, 2014: 19). Within the space of a few decades, in other words, the City of Palaces had sprawled out in rapid fashion, and was now ringed by a tumultuous patchwork of peripheral settlements that spread well into the hills and mountains that border the Valley of Mexico.

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<sup>20</sup> See Holston (2008) for a thorough treatment of such issues in Brazil. See also Goldstein's (2004) work in Colombia, and Ward's (1990) in Mexico.



Figure 1.3: A street in Iztapalapa, Mexico City, 3/25/2016. The streets are crowded for the 'Good Friday' celebration. Photography by author.



Figure 1.4: Another street in Iztapalapa, Mexico City, 3/26/2016, near the 'Hill of the Star' (*Cerro de la Estrella*), site of one of the world's largest displays of the 'passion play'. Photography by author.





Figure 1.5: Looking roughly east from the *Cerro de la Estrella* in Iztapalapa, 3/26/2016. Photography by author.



Figure 1.6: The corner of *Avenida 5 de Mayo* and *Avenida Ferrocarriles Nacionales*, outside of metro refinera, Azcapotzalco, looking northeast, 10/6/2015. Photography by author.





Figure 1.7: The village of Texcoco at the edge of Mexico City, looking roughly east down Nezahualcoyótl Street from the second floor of Cantina Las Palomas, 2/13/2016. In the background, the Hill of Promises (*Cerro de las Promesas*) can be seen. Photography by author.





Figure 1.8: Behind a market in Texcoco, 2/13/2016. Photography by author.



Figure 1.9: Texcoco, seen from atop the ruins of the *Los Melones* archaeological site, with Ignacio in the foreground, 2/13/2016. Photography by author.

This peripheral settlement, and the changes to the social and economic structures that came with it, prompted a series of yet ongoing academic and popular conversations about the nature of what came to be called ‘marginality’ in the study of contemporary cities in general, and Latin American cities in particular. Not only were the new settlements—whether the *pueblos jóvenes* surrounding Lima, the *favelas* of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, or the *colonias populares* of Mexico City—situated on the spatial margins of traditional urban cores, but their economic and social patterns were said to indicate deeper and more significant relations of marginality as well. That is, the populations that inhabited these physically marginal spaces were also marginal in the sense of being separate from the economic, political, and social life of the city. As

introduced by Park (1928), the condition of “marginal man” chiefly afflicted the immigrant, whose spatial settlement patterns in the second half of the twentieth century were more commonly found in the central city areas of US cities than in Latin America, where the ringed configuration of peripheral settlement predominated. For Park, the urban immigrant of Jewish heritage best exemplified the condition of “marginal man”, though any individual could potentially find themselves in this curious position of permanent cultural exile (Park, 1928: 893):

There are no doubt periods of transition and crisis in the lives of most of us that are comparable with those which the immigrant experiences when he leaves home to seek his fortunes in a strange country. But in the case of the marginal man the period of crisis is relatively permanent. The result is that he tends to become a personality type. Ordinarily the marginal man is a mixed blood, like the Mulatto in the United States or the Eurasian in Asia, but that is apparently because the man of mixed blood is one who lives in two worlds, in both of which he is more or less of a stranger.

A major break in such treatments came when Perlman (1975) responded to the idea that those living on the margins of society are themselves ‘marginal’—which had become a complex pejorative that fed off of the negative energy of theories of dependency,<sup>21</sup> traditionalism/indigeneity as the antitheses of modernity/progress, and the popular “culture of poverty” (see Lewis, 1959)—by claiming that such populations were not “marginal” but rather “marginalized”. Perlman thus insisted on focusing attention on the ways in which groups were pushed to the urban margins, both spatially and socially. Perlman effectively debunked what she labeled “the myth of marginality” by demonstrating the organizational capacity, community cohesion, and socioeconomic aspirations of those living in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro. Life in Mexico City’s

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Dependency theory’ also played a major role in studies of Latin America in the social sciences during the latter half of the twentieth century, not least in appraisals of Mexico (see Cardoso and Faletto, 1979).

expanding *colonias populares* unfolded in conditions and along patterns that fit with many approaches to marginality. Autoconstruction dominated the housing options in the settlements that sprung up in this period, and they were (and in some cases are) chronically underserved by public utilities such as potable water, waste removal, and electricity, to say nothing of reliable and affordable transportation to and from other parts of the city. But as Griffin and Ford argue (both for Mexico City particularly and the Latin American city generally), these newly developed areas served as sites of semi-permanent or permanent settlement and community-building, unlike the common zones of immigrant settlement of Park and Burgess's (1925) models which were home to and unwitting incubator of the schizophrenic "marginal man". By some indications,<sup>22</sup> these spatially marginal areas were in fact always deeply imbricated within the broader economic and social development of the city, moving along with and taking their place in the production of its daily rhythms, to a greater or lesser degree as the case may be. The seminally significant work of Lewis (1959), along with my own anecdotal observations in and conversations regarding only a few of these peripheral areas, however, adequately demonstrate in Mexico City what others have found in the peripheral zones of Chicago, Paris (Wacquant, 2008) and Buenos Aires (Auyero, 1999), that life chances and patterns of isolation and exclusion palpably and unavoidably extant in these contexts continue to provide compelling narratives of "marginality", perhaps even in an "advanced" form (Wacquant, 2008).

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<sup>22</sup> See Ward (1978: 48), for instance, who found that while "Squatter settlements by themselves do not provide a means for upward socio-economic mobility", a range of potential opportunities for the improvement of life chances did exist in the Mexico City squatter settlements of this period, depending on the varying quality and perhaps durability of the connections residents are able to make to "the wider economy and social structure", such as "educational facilities, productive well paid employment and so on."

The city's densities grew and shrank unevenly during this period of immense growth, but in patterns that display several interrelated trends when viewed at finer scales. Densities increased rapidly in the poorest areas of the metro region, especially in the irregular settlements and *colonias populares* at the northern and eastern edges of the Federal District and several municipalities of the neighboring *Estado*, and decreased pronouncedly<sup>23</sup> in the core neighborhoods of the central city, especially in the *centro historico* centered on the Zócalo (see Connelly, 1988; Ward, 1990). But as Ward (1990) convincingly illustrates, the pronounced dip in densities around the city center—which in Connelly's (1988) two-dimensional graphic depiction ironically yields an image not unlike that of a volcano, as densities first balloon throughout the city then suddenly drop just in

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<sup>23</sup> It would be misleading, however, to gloss over the pockets of extreme density that continued to exist in and around the historic center and in neighboring areas of the old city core, such as the infamous Tepito, long known for its black markets and second hand or counterfeit goods. The most common type of housing in such areas is the *vecindad*, a tenement style structure in which families typically inhabit one windowless room and share common toilets and other basic facilities. Surveying those of the historic center, Eckstein (1988: 45) explains that "vecindades are densely populated, unsanitary, and poorly ventilated. Plumbing facilities frequently do not function properly, and buildings at times are so run down that sections occasionally collapse, leaving survivors injured and homeless." Portraits of life in such conditions can also be found in Lewis's (1959) *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* and *The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (1961), the latter of which is set entirely in Tepito. Lewis (1961: xiii) describes Tepito as "a poor area with few small factories and warehouses, public baths, run-down third-class movie theaters, over-crowded schools, saloons, *pulquerías* (taverns where *pulque*, a native alcoholic drink, is sold), and many small shops." As for the *vecindades* themselves, Lewis (1961: xiv) provides this introduction to that occupied by the Sánchez family: "Spread out over an entire square block and housing seven hundred people, the Casa Grande is a little world of its own, enclosed by high cement walls on the north and south and by rows of shops on the other two sides. These shops—food stores, a dry cleaner, a glazier, a carpenter, a beauty parlor, together with the neighborhood market and public baths—supply the basic needs of the *vecindad*, so that many of the tenants seldom leave the immediate neighborhood and are almost strangers to the rest of Mexico City...Two narrow, inconspicuous entrances, each with a high gate, open during the day but locked every night at ten o'clock, lead into the *vecindad* on the east and west sides. Anyone coming or going after hours must ring for the janitor and play to have the gate opened...Within the *vecindad* stretch four long, concrete-paved patios or courtyards, about fifteen feet wide. Opening on to the courtyards at regular intervals of about twelve feet, are 157 one-room windowless apartments, each with a barn-red door. In the daytime, besides most of the doors, stand rough wooden ladders leading to low flat roofs over the kitchen portion of each apartment. These roofs serve many uses and are crowded with lines of laundry, chicken coops, doves, pots of flowers or medicinal herbs, tanks of gas for cooking, and occasional TV antenna [sic]."

the center beginning just before 1960, only to then rapidly rise and slowly taper off toward the edges of the metropolitan area—and the rise in densities from there outwards illustrate two distinctly classed movements. On the one hand, rural-to-urban migration was fueling incredible growth and densification at the peripheries, while on the other hand the historic center was being abandoned by wealthy families who had already begun to move out and settle along the historic *Paseo de la Reforma* (to be discussed in Chapter Three), or the prototypical example of what Griffin and Ford (1980: 407) describe as “a commercial spine surrounded by an elite residential sector”, and the neighborhoods beyond, including the area of highly elite residences tucked into the hills west of the *Bosque Chapultepec*<sup>24</sup> known collectively as *las Lomas*<sup>25</sup> and the *colonias* of Polanco, and also areas in the south of the Federal District that had formerly been the location of the summer homes of elite families, as in the neighborhoods of San Ángel,

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<sup>24</sup> The mammoth, three-section Chapultepec Park, which contains Chapultepec Castle (*Castillo Chapultepec*), the imperial and later presidential residence until the sexenio of Lázaro Cárdenas, who moved to the symbolically less palatial residence known as *Los Pinos* (which remains the presidential residence to this day), also within the park.

<sup>25</sup> In the common lexical cultural geography of contemporary Mexico City, *Lomas* is a bit of a loaded catch-all term, but should be understood to include at least the eight sections of *Lomas de Chapultepec* in the *delegación* of Miguel Hidalgo, and the areas known as *Lomas de Reforma*, and *Bosques de las Lomas*. At the very least, this area is known for its ostentatious wealth and a certain social, economic, and especially legal insularity. For instance, *Lomas* is where Ignacio attended a party that lasted several days, where he reported some of the guests had arrived by private helicopter to a helipad on the grounds of the home where the party was held. Incidentally, after making passing reference to the quality of the knife set he saw while wandering through a kitchen near the end of his stay, he was invited by the host to take home the whole set. He accepted them gladly, but reportedly forgot them in the uber they sent him home in or otherwise lost them in transit some hours later (field notes, 2/20/2016). These are the sorts of parties that have been referred to by friends of mine as ‘tiger parties’, as they are thought to be thrown by people who might actually own pet tigers. Claire, for instance, reported having been invited on several occasions to meet this or that person’s pet tiger. These are the kinds of references made to the wealth of the area, and they form part of the general attitude toward this part of the city, at least among those who don’t reside there. An introduction to a similar portrait of the disconnectedness commonly associated with the wealthy residents of the area is perhaps best provided by an episode of the popular television series “*Chicas VIP*” (“VIP girls”, available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGrSTe1QU8g>), wherein an upper class girl caps her condescending explanation of her hesitance to “formalize” her relationship with her “*naco*” (a pejorative in the extreme that incorporates classist and racist elements) boyfriend with what she views as the self-evident contradiction of his residence in *Colonia Navarte* (a reasonably middle-class neighborhood south of the city center) and hers in “*Lomas*”.

Jardines del Pedregal, and Coyoacán. These two logics of growth produced distinct spatial patterns, with the wealthy tending to push the city's expansion through exclusive residences toward the west and the south, and poorer residents and informal settlements driving densely-packed expansion toward the north and east (Ward, 1990). In 1954, a city measure aimed at curbing rapid density increase, what Ward (1990: 40) describes as “a ban imposed...upon the authorisation of low-income sub-divisions in the DF” was, Ward claims, a failure on two fronts. Ward argues that not only was the ban not effective in curbing density in the Federal District—owing both to its timing, which came far too late for some of the neighborhoods where it would have been most effective, and lax enforcement by city officials and outright disregard by landlords and tenants and fueled by intense competition for space—but also and moreover the ban fueled rapid growth in the neighboring municipalities of the *Estado de México*, especially Nucaclpan and Nezahualcóyotl, grossly exacerbating metropolitan expansion and effectively pushing the problem of irregular and high-density settlement out of the Federal District's jurisdiction.

This enormous growth was accompanied by and to a large degree enabled and encouraged by concomitant national and local economic growth, sustained over a period of roughly three decades (until around 1970) in what came to be called the “Mexican Miracle”. Prompted initially by the nationalizations of Cárdenas—who finally put into practice some of the radically liberal provisions for appropriation in the 1917 constitution—the next several PRI regimes continued to nationalize or ensure majority-Mexican ownership (“Mexicanization”) of selected industries<sup>26</sup> and otherwise follow a

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<sup>26</sup> See Story (1986) for a discussion of the “Mexicanization”, policy of requiring majority Mexican ownership first enforced in 1944 to curb the influence of foreign capital and what was perceived as ‘dependence’ on foreign ‘developed’ economies, pursued under successive PRI



protectionist path, in line with the regional trend of economic thought and practice known broadly as import-substitution industrialization (hereafter ISI). Most influentially developed as a comprehensive theory by Raúl Prebisch, second Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (hereafter ECLAC, though known in Spanish as CEPAL), and heavily influenced by dependency theory, ISI policy was a popular program in Mexico during the ‘miracle’ decades, as it was throughout the region. In addition to the aforementioned nationalizations and policies aimed at majority-Mexican ownership, the PRI state engaged in broad interventionist policies including through the important national development bank *Nacional Financiera*,<sup>27</sup> which served to heavily capitalize selected industries, and the imposition of prohibitive tariffs on most consumer goods (see Moreno-Brid and Ros, 2009).<sup>28</sup> As the title ‘miracle’ would suggest, Mexican ISI policies produced three decades of sustained economic expansion, as Moreno-Brid and Ros (2009: 93) explain:

For the next thirty years, Mexico’s economy grew at a sustained annual pace of 6.4% in real terms and per capita gross domestic product (GDP) grew at a rate of 3.2% per year (INEGI, 1999a). Manufacturing was the engine of growth, with rates of growth of production of 8.2% per year (INEGI, 1999a) and, for most of the period, the dynamic domestic market was its major source of demand. The country was transformed from an agrarian society into an urban, semi-industrial one.

This growth in the national economy was disproportionately advantageous to Mexico City, which, as the seat of government and the primary locus of early industrialization in this period, was in a position to garner major investment and the fruits of patronage

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administrations during the ‘miracle’, especially notable in the production of steel, cement, glass, fertilizer, cellulose, and aluminum, among other inputs for building and construction and commodity production. See also Martínez (2016).

<sup>27</sup> Created under Cárdenas in 1934 but of increasing importance during this period.

<sup>28</sup> There are of course important caveats to these general national trends, including especially the establishment of the industrialization program for the US-Mexico border region resulting in incredible growth of the *maquiladora* manufacturing industry beginning in the early 1960s.



(Ward, 1990; Davis, 1994). The ‘public’ or ‘state sector’ of the economy expanded with the national economy, as state expenditures ballooned with state ownership and backing of industry, an expansion that chiefly benefitted the growing middle classes housed in the metropolitan area. As Alexander (2016) argues, this middle class professionalization of the city was an intentional pursuit of the PRI, and was quickly reflected in the growth in influence of the CNOP<sup>29</sup> within the party (at the expense of both the CNC and the CTM, the industrial labor and peasant organizations within the party, respectively). Importantly, the benefits of growth also accrued unequally across class lines more broadly, both in the city and at the national level. While the middle classes expanded and gained a larger share of the national income (see Ward, 1990), inequality also rose markedly overall, affecting the poorest Mexicans most especially (see Eckstein, 1988: 19), and, according to Ward (1990: 7) “Income distribution remained one of the most unequal of all Latin American nations”. As in the rapid economic growth and urban development under Porfirio Díaz, then, that of the ‘miracle’ decades came at a cost and sewed afresh the seeds of class contradiction in the rapidly growing metropolis. Other contradictions of ISI policies viewed at the macro scale also came into focus as the 1960s wound down, including the paradoxical imbalance of trade that resulted from the need to import capital-intensive inputs for primary commodity production in particular, such as in the vast oil industry now under the control of the behemoth national petroleum company PEMEX (*Petróleos Mexicanos*), and the troubling levels of debt required to sustain the PRI’s course of development and pursuit of a sustainable domestic consumer market (Ward, 1990; Alexander, 2016). But while the tools of macroeconomics could be readily employed to combat these financial contradictions

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<sup>29</sup> The National Confederation of Popular Organizations (*Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares*, hereafter CNOP) was founded in 1942, and while its structure was extremely broadly articulated, it largely represented the interests of the growing middle class and state sector employees (see Davis, 1994; Alexander, 2016).

(such as currency devaluations in the late 1940s, mid-1950s, and mid-1970s, or later neoliberal reforms to social spending and national enterprise in the 1980s and 1990s), the urban spatial contradictions of the miracle decades were more far more resilient and, for the party, ultimately more dangerous.

To tend the city's growth, promote social and political stability, and ensure predictable electoral support, PRI presidents carefully selected their mayoral subordinates (see del Carmen Moreno Carranco, 2008). Perhaps the most interesting of these mayors was so-called "Iron Regent" Ernesto Uruchurtu Peralta who occupied the office from 1952 through 1965 and whose regime exemplifies many of the complex problems already beginning to confront the ruling party from within its most prized domain. Though known for his ability to effectively carry out the wishes of the presidents he served, Davis (2009) argues that Uruchurtu also attempted to cut a middle path between contradictory PRI impulses during the 'miracle' decades, especially during the administration of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz Bolaños (1964-1970). Though he fostered growth through redevelopment and beautification projects in the city, Uruchurtu attempted to limit the scope of the damage to the properties and broader spatial arrangements of the city's growing middle classes and government employees, overseeing impressive new middle class housing developments such as the Tlatelolco-Nonoalco Housing Estate, and even protecting the massive city landmark and market known as *La Lagunilla* (Davis, 2009). He also publicly opposed plans for the city's first metro system and the havoc they promised to wreak on the historic center in particular. The metro system—begun in 1956 only after Uruchurtu's removal based, according to Davis (1994; 2009), on his stubborn opposition—would ultimately only further exacerbate the city's peripheral growth patterns as publicly subsidized and speedy transit spread to far-flung neighborhoods in the ensuing decades. The subsequent three mayoral administrations, none of whom served a full

*sexenio*, were each plagued by their own issues, the most glaring and significant of which will be discussed below. The administration of Carlos Hank González<sup>30</sup> brought a return to rapacious redevelopment with little regard for affected communities or political repercussions.<sup>31</sup> While no overall pattern explains the governance style nor the particular political choices of the *regente* regimes of this period, Uruchurtu's dilemma of managing the on-the-ground contradictions of the PRI's national economic and political agenda is instructive. Indeed, as Davis's (1994) thorough analysis of PRI dynamics at the interface of national and local regimes clearly illustrates, the PRI was never quite the leviathan it has often been made out to be,<sup>32</sup> as mayoral and presidential regimes and the competing vertically-integrated sectors of the PRI frequently came into intense conflict, pulling at the very fabric of the party's corporatist structure and making its hold on power ever-more tenuous, especially as its decades of co-optation continued to bring new constituencies into the fold. Especially as the 'popular' sector of the party grew and benefitted from ISI policy, and as the city's peripheral development swelled the unincorporated ranks of the urban poor, the PRI's leadership began to lose the ability to effectively generate consensus, and its executives were forced to find new and, in some

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<sup>30</sup> A prominent political figure for decades known as 'the professor', Hank González and his sons Carlos Hank Rhon and Jorge Hank Rhon have been widely accused of various financial, political, and narcotics-related crimes over the last several decades (see Bergman, 1999-2000; Farah, 1999; *The New York Times*, 2001). The elder Hank was a powerful political operator for several decades in the PRI, and, as a long time figure in the State of Mexico's PRI machinery (and former Governor of the State of Mexico), was influential (through his prominent role in the shadowy *Grupo Atlacomulco*) in the party's return to presidential power in 2012, in the person of Enrique Peña Nieto, then the outgoing Governor of the State of Mexico. The patriarch of one of Mexico's wealthiest families, Hank was a tragic embodiment of the phrase 'political economy', and was perhaps most widely known for his summation of Mexican politics in the infamous statement, "A politician who is poor is a poor politician" (Tuckman, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> See del Carmen Moreno Carranco's (2008) discussion of the development of the *ejes viales* (downtown thoroughfares constructed through aggressive street-widening projects and property expropriations).

<sup>32</sup> Joseph and Buchenau (2013) make a similar argument about the party's hold on power as far back as its earliest years, as they claim the party was always required to make concessions and to work to a large extent within the confines of existing political realities in across the country's many regions.

cases, disturbing ways to bend the state and the populace to their will. These tensions were nowhere more apparent than in the gathering conflict between the national state and its sometimes unruly subordinates in the Federal District.

An additional demographic factor that came to play a major political role in this developing tension was the massive and rapid bottom-end growth of the city's population pyramid. Ward (1990) argues that though the main driver of metropolitan growth during the early part of the 'miracle' was undoubtedly rural-to-urban migration, it was soon displaced by natural increase.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately for PRI leaders, a generation of children born during the first decades of ISI were reaching the age of political participation just as the magic of the 'miracle' began to peter, especially at the city's periphery. From among these youths, whose complaints ranged from a growing competition for scarce jobs to the unsatisfactory provision of urban infrastructures in peripheral developments, and, perhaps above all, the PRI state's lack of genuine democracy and what they viewed as its unjustified detainment of 'political prisoners', a movement of sorts was born in 1968. Near the outset of the extended addendum to his *Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz (1985: 231-232, original emphasis) describes the development of this 'student movement' thusly:

The student movement began as a street brawl between rival groups of adolescents. Police brutality united them. Later, as the repression became more

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<sup>33</sup> Ward (1990: 33) states: "During the early decades of the city's growth, when the demand from industry for labor was high, migration flows accounted for around 60 per cent of population expansion, with the remainder the result of natural increase (Unikel, 1972). But, in the absence of a sharp decline in the birth rate achieved nationally or locally, natural increase quickly took over as the principal component of city growth." While empirically verifiable, these statements may serve to slightly misrepresent the dynamics of metropolitan growth. While natural increase indeed seems to have displaced rural-to-urban migration as proportionally the largest year-to-year factor during the early part of the 'miracle' period, his discussion of the demographic character of migrants (especially young people likely to start new families relatively soon after arriving in the city) suggests that it plays a considerably larger ongoing role than a simple rate calculation can illustrate. This is simply to say that it is reasonable to expect the expanding peripheries of the city continued to be heavily influenced by the experiences of rural-to-urban migration for a longer period than crude figures may suggest.

severe and the hostility of the press, radio, and television—almost all pro-government—increased, the movement strengthened, expanded, and grew aware of itself. In the course of a few weeks it became clear that the young students, without having expressly intended it, were the spokesmen of the people. Let me emphasize that they were not the spokesmen of this or that class but of the collective conscience...

...The students' demands were genuinely moderate: derogation of one article of the Penal Code, an article that is completely unconstitutional and that contains the affront to human rights called "crime of opinion"; the freeing of various political prisoners; the dismissal of the chief of police; et cetera. All of their petitions could be summed up in a single word that was both the crux of the movement and the key to its magnetic influence on the conscience of the people: *democratization*.

Accounts from social scientists make similar claims about the nature of the student movement and its broad and representative character, though there are differences of emphasis placed on the origins of the movement's concerns<sup>34</sup> and the relative weight they receive in the movement's lasting meanings. Gutmann (2002: 71) argues:

"Objecting to Mexico's assertion that it was a modern, democratic society, and to the claim that Mexico was no longer really a third-rate power, the students of 1968 were determined to reveal the realities of poverty and misery and corruption in their country."

In a similar vein, Crane (2015: 4) sees the student movement as arising from several decades of activism among such groups as urban industrial workers and women seeking the national franchise, conditions "set by dispersed acts, demands, and justice claims in the decades before." Taking a firmer position, Eckstein (1988: 218) places distance between the student movement protestors of 1968 and those seeking more radical

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<sup>34</sup> The movement's genesis is also a matter of some dispute. In contrast to Paz's description of "a street brawl", Bruhn (2008) states that the movement "started with a march in support of the Cuban Revolution by high school and college students in July 1968." "Police entered the campus of several high schools and the National Autonomous University", she continues, "to break up the demonstrations. Faculty and students considered the police actions a violation of the university's legal autonomy. They organized a series of protests, adding to their original complains about price repression a growing list of demands for democratization, better living conditions for the urban poor, and postgraduation [sic] career opportunities. The government—usually tolerant of student marches—grew concerned about the increasing size, aggressiveness, and external support for student protests."

changes in the realm of political economy, such as those in Mexico City who openly sympathized with Cuban Revolutionaries or the Chinese Communist Party of Mao Zedong: “Many of those who participated in the 1968 protests were not Marxists but critics of specific government policies. They focused on the lack of civil liberties, not economic inequalities.” The specifics are difficult to parse, as evidence exists for a variety of claims.<sup>35</sup> Whatever the specific weight of grievances voiced in the student movement, however, it is clear that the group that came to be called the student movement included economic and political claims, though neither were of a radical nature, and therefore merit Paz’s (1985) characterization of their demands as “reformist”. “They were not expecting a radical change,” Paz (1985: 233) wrote a year later, in 1969, “but they did expect greater flexibility and a return to the tradition of the Mexican Revolution, a tradition that was never dogmatic and that was very sensitive to changes in popular feeling.” What the student movement therefore exemplifies is a change in common perceptions regarding the PRI state and its hardening since the Revolution and its consolidation under the Sonoran Dynasty and the early experiments of the PNR and PRM. If the conflict between *Regente* Uruchurtu and President Díaz Ordaz had demonstrated a certain dangerous factionalism within the ‘leviathan’, the student movement was an attempt to peacefully protest the party’s increasingly authoritarian

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<sup>35</sup> Ward’s (1990) demonstration of the growth of inequality and its impact on the lower classes in particular, along with his suggestion of the growth of political opposition in the most peripheral areas of the city, for example, buttress Gutmann’s claims about the protestors’ demands for a redress of economic inequalities, while the specific demands voiced by the leadership of the movement, such as the release of political prisoners and the dismissal of the notoriously brutal Chief of Police, make plain the clearly foregrounded political element in the student movement’s agenda.

practices, the legitimacy of its *dedazo*,<sup>36</sup> *presidencialismo*,<sup>37</sup> and other elements of its approach to political rule, as well as its ability to continue to deliver on the promises of revolution, and by extension the party's legitimacy in claiming its name.

The movement came to a head on the afternoon of October 2nd. Ten days before the opening ceremony of the 1968 Olympic Games held in Mexico City, the movement gathered in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas*,<sup>38</sup> which is bordered by the Tlatelolco housing projects. Though this history continues to be disputed by the Mexican government in particular and many of the details remain somewhat murky, it is abundantly clear that several factions of the Mexican military were sent by President Díaz Ordaz to surround the plaza in the late afternoon. Though conflicting accounts exist, a general scholarly consensus (which follows a popular consensus established within days of the events) now exists that places the blame for what transpired next at the feet of the president and some subordinates, likely including Luis Echeverría Álvarez, then serving as Secretary of the Interior, who would follow Díaz Ordaz in the presidency some two years later. Probably on the order of the president, a small group of specially-trained sharpshooters opened fire on the crowd, prompting a chaotic outbreak and the onset of a more generalized violence on the part of the military surrounding the plaza.<sup>39</sup> Though

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<sup>36</sup> The *dedazo* (roughly, 'the finger tap' or 'the big finger') is the process by which the PRI has historically chosen its presidential candidates (see Davis, 1994; Joseph and Buchenau, 2013). This process evokes images of back-room, closed-door decision making and speculations of graft and nepotism, not least because of the major scandals in which high-ranking PRI officials, including several presidents and their families, were caught up in the 1990s (see Chapter Four), to say nothing of the previous six decades.

<sup>37</sup> The tendency to hoard the powers of the state in the executive branch and the person of the president (to be discussed in some detail in Chapter Four). See also Davis (1994) for a discussion of the role *presidencialismo* has played in scholarship on Mexico.

<sup>38</sup> The Plaza of Three Cultures is so named for its architectural environs, comprising the ruins of a pre-columbian Aztec temple, an early Christian church, and the aforementioned Tlatelolco housing estate constructed under *Regente* Uruchurtu.

<sup>39</sup> See Gutmann (2002) for a compelling account of how these events unfolded, following Aguayo Quezada (1998).

government officials initially grossly underreported the number of victims (and, according to Gutmann (2002) have continued to do so in the ensuing decades, to the detriment of the legitimacy of the Mexican state and the PRI), careful reporting places the number of dead persons around 300,<sup>40</sup> with some hundreds or perhaps thousands more injured. The episode came to be known as the 'Tlatelolco Massacre', and the violence and chaos unleashed that day put an effective end to the student movement as it had been.

The lingering effects of the killings at Tlatelolco continue to be felt in Mexico City (and indeed across the country), on several fronts. Ironically, the massacre brought forth from the state the very thing the student movement had sought, at its core, to expose and roll back, the PRI government's authoritarian practices and its suppression of grassroots political mobilization. This event created a legitimacy crisis for the PRI and the PRI state, though it would take some years for this to find an oppositionary expression with any real force. In its wake, as Crane (2015) argues, generations of Mexican activists would come to view the state as a statically repressive entity, virtually unchanged by the march of time and the course of politics, at least so long as the PRI was at the helm. As Paz (1985) argued, Tlatelolco demonstrated the party's betrayal of the Mexican Revolution, in so far as it was threatened by demands for fairly minor reforms and demonstrated a violent opposition to change, an intransigence that many considered anathema to the identity it claimed as the institutionalization and perpetuation of the revolution's goals

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<sup>40</sup> This number has been highly disputed since the event. While government officials were quick to publicize low figures (between thirty and forty, the president stated in the days following (Gutmann, 2002)), contemporary activists dispute even the figure of 300, claiming that the real number was much higher. I have heard the figure placed as high as 2,000 dead in casual conversations, though such estimates are extreme and should be taken to illustrate the significance of the ideological role the memory of these events hold in current political imaginings (see Crane, 2015), rather than a realistic assessment, though the obvious nature of the PRI government's attempts to cover up these events and dampen their effects make other figures above the consensus 300 difficult to precisely dispute.



and principles. And though the timing of the student movement's demonstrations were intended to garner international support for their claims—or at least to offer a highly public critique of the PRI state's own claims about Mexico's progress and modernity—the Olympic Games took place without incident (ensured by a heavy military presence), and the world hardly seemed to take notice of the murder of several hundred students and sympathizers at the hands of a government simultaneously touting its democratic legitimacy (see Paz, 1985; Gutmann, 2002).

Tlatelolco thus represents a watershed moment in the relationship between the PRI and the Mexican populace, especially in the capital city. A shockingly similar mass killing of students, would take place less than three years later on June 10, 1971. Known as the *Halconazo* ('the hawk strike') because of its perpetration by the shadowy elite military group known as *los Halcones*, this incident served to further galvanize both the growing anti-PRI sentiments and seemingly the party's own resolve to stay in control of the capital. Together, these events irreparably tarnished the name of President Echeverría, who also conducted a large-scale 'dirty war' campaign against rebellious elements in the city and the countryside through his *sexenio* (1970-1976) and the PRI, as successive regimes continued in the use of torture, extrajudicial executions, and 'disappearances' over the next several decades (see Forero, 2006). In 2015, public records offering some details of this campaign were put beyond the reach of the public, locked in a secure collection housed (within the National Archives) in the infamous "Black Palace", the former Lucumberri Prison—where dissidents are rumored to have been tortured during the last decade of the Porfiriato—in the city's historic center. Few of the likely grossly under-representative number of crimes the Mexican state has since acknowledged took place during this 'dirty war' have ever been punished (see Forero, 2006; Gorbea and Noel, 2015).

Despite these troubles, the PRI continued to win elections unchallenged throughout the 1970s and well into the 1980s, even as increasing numbers of Mexicans lost faith in the party and its leadership, and even as the party's internal tensions began to blossom into their own crises. Economic growth, the party's lone salvation beyond its growing repression, continued at acceptably high rates through most of the decade, though fluctuations became more pronounced as the above-noted contradictions of Mexican ISI policy began pushing through the seams of the economic veneer. Inflation continued to be a problem, born largely of the ironic trade imbalances brought about through rapid industrialization, which brought further currency devaluations and sharpened the pains of the city's growing inequality (see Ward, 1990). To keep the 'miracle' going, Presidents Echeverría and his successor José Guillermo Abel López Portillo y Pacheco were forced to borrow ever larger sums, pumping cash into the inflated state sector and the many heavily capitalized industries now dependent on state support. From 1970 to 1983, total foreign debt increased nine-fold, from just under US\$10 billion to over US\$90 billion, also an increase of over sixty percent as a share of GDP (up to over eighty percent from around twenty percent in 1970) (Moreno-Brid and Ros, 2009). The following decade would, so to speak, bring these fiscal chickens home to roost.

Thus the four decades from 1940 to 1980 brought incredible changes to Mexico City and to the party that controlled the national capital. The PRI found its final form after its consolidation under Cárdenas in the 1930s, and pursued yet further nationalizations of industry and intensified and sustained a suite of import-substitution industrialization that produced a fantastic rate of economic growth, which came to be known as the "Mexican miracle". The growth of industry and state-sector employment drew millions of migrants to the city's edges, which were largely developed through organized land invasions,

piecemeal squatting, and other ‘informal’ processes. While these populations remained deeply intertwined within the circuits of the urban and national economies, their conditions of life mirrored those of other “marginalized” populations on the peripheries of the many other exploding cities of Latin America, where ISI policy also favored cities at the expense of the provinces. The exacerbation of inequality in Mexico City was only the most obvious of the costs of this development program, however, and it became clear through the PRI state’s treatment of the generally reformist student movement of 1968, its recurrence in 1971, and the intensification of its ongoing ‘dirty war’ against dissidents and rebellious elements throughout the country during this period, that the increasingly authoritarian party faced a significant legitimacy crisis as well. This was matched, if not exceeded, by the pressures on the party and the state emanating from its exploding foreign debt, itself an attempt to conjure the means to keep the ‘miracle’ in effect and to service the state’s still-growing commitments to a city whose growth was finally starting to slow and a national economy whose contradictions had almost caught up to the magicians.

### **The Turbulent 1980s: The Embattled Leviathan and the Emergent Urban Left**

As of 1980, the city’s spatial and demographic explosion had begun to quell (see Figure 1.2). This was reflective of several factors whose influence can be difficult to disentangle. The physical geography of the metropolitan area certainly presented some limits, as there is only so much available and inhabitable space in the Central Valley. This is further complicated by the relative spatial configuration of employment opportunities, accessible and affordable transit options, and fluctuations in the metropolitan areas land markets, themselves influenced by idiosyncratic tenure and title regularization and the regulation of plot and building subdivisions, among many other factors. Thus the state is also implicated in what otherwise appears a passive condition,

and in a variety of ways. Economic factors also played a considerable role. While the Echeverría and López Portillo administrations had been able to maintain reasonably high rates of economic growth (albeit with increased volatility), the costs of this growth required a new course to be charted in 1982, one less favorable to urban industrialization and metropolitan expansion. The city's 'demographic transition' followed a fairly standard 'modernization' trajectory,<sup>41</sup> as birth rates eventually fell dramatically in the years following rapid industrialization. By 1980, the metropolitan area's overall rate of growth was less than half of what it had been a decade earlier (Ward, 1990), bringing an end to the period of unrestrained and rapid urbanization.

López Portillo's debt spending in particular had been buoyed by the discovery of large new oil reserves during the early part of his tenure, though the revenues they ultimately produced failed to match the administration's early predictions, (Eckstein, 1988; Davis, 1994), at least partly due to fluctuations in global oil markets and a consequent drop in price at a crucial time in 1981 (Ward, 1990). The next PRI president to receive the *dedazo* was Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado, whose background and approach to economic policy represent both a transformation of the party's economic orientation and a growing tension within the party regarding precisely this change and its implications. De la Madrid came from the growing faction of the PRI known as the *técnicos* (technocrats), usually trained abroad at prestigious universities (de la Madrid held a graduate degree from Harvard's Kennedy School) in such disciplines as economics or public policy, who increasingly found themselves at odds with the orientation of the so-called *políticos* (career politicians who continued to find advancement through the traditional channels

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<sup>41</sup> As did the country at large during this period, though the expected rate changes seem most starkly on display in the country's urbanized areas, perhaps especially Mexico City (see Turian et al., 2002; Haber et al., 2008).

within the party and its organizations, also sometimes called 'dinosaurs'). Among other differences in their trajectories and political philosophies, the *técnicos* followed other contemporary Latin American leaders in finding great appeal and policy inspiration in neoliberal economic theory. As O'Toole (2003: 270, following Erfani, 1995) puts it, "such an intellectual climate had by the late 1970s contributed to a polarisation of perspectives on the country's economic future between advocates of neo-keynesian expansionism, legitimised by nationalism, and monetarist orthodoxy, the legitimation for which derived above all from a more positivist belief in progress resulting from the application of technical economic expertise". In de la Madrid's case, some of the far-reaching reforms that flowed from this general orientation happened also to be imposed from without, as his government required assistance from the IMF in particular to pull its way out of its billowing fiscal catastrophe, an embarrassment deeply felt by the party whose economic 'miracle' had been the envy of the region. As Eckstein (1988: 221) explains the situation as of late summer 1982, "By international standards, Mexico was bankrupt and technically in default, a circumstance unknown internationally since the 1920s. Until Mexico's crisis, international creditors had assumed that a petroleum exporter was immune to such problems." To fix the disaster he had inherited, de la Madrid turned to the twin pillars of Mexican neoliberal reform, deregulation and privatization. Under his watch, the protectionist infrastructure and ISI heritage of the PRI for the previous forty years and more was cut to ribbons. In two years alone (between 1985 and 1987), the number of imports subject to licensure requirements was cut by over ninety percent, and rates that had been as high as one-hundred percent were capped at a maximum of forty percent (Eckstein, 1988). Also under de la Madrid, Mexico joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986, and would continue to pursue free trade agreements and the expansion of production in the special economic zone along the US-Mexico border, where *maquiladora* manufacturing intensified through the 1980s

and into the 1990s. Social spending was slashed<sup>42</sup> as austerity measures were instituted in the name of restoring the nation's credibility, and the bloated state bureaucracy was chopped down to a fraction of its pre-crisis size (see Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha, 1995; Centeno, 1997). State-owned enterprises were also sold off, though the state retained an interest in what it designated “strategic” areas, namely “petroleum and basic petro-chemicals, telecommunications, electrical power generation, nuclear energy, railroads, and banking” (Haber et al., 2008: 69). According to Haber et al. (2008: 69, following Valdés Uganda, 1994), “There were 1,155 state-owned firms, public trusts, and decentralized agencies at the beginning of the de la Madrid administration; there were just 412 by its end.” De la Madrid’s government also engaged in widespread wage suppression through the manipulation of the minimum wage, which only further served to decrease the already falling purchasing power of the poor and increase inequality measures generally (see Alarcón and McKinley, 1998).

Carlos Salinas de Gortari, another prominent *técnico* then serving as de la Madrid’s Secretary of Budget and Programming, sought to position the austerity measures within the PRI’s claim to the principles of the Mexican Revolution. In a public ceremony on the November 20 Revolution Day of 1983, Sheppard (2011: 513) reports, “Salinas differentiated between what he called ‘reactionary austerity’ and the revolutionary variety, arguing that revolutionary austerity seeks the reordering of the economy, creates the conditions for Mexico to overcome structural difficulties and deficiencies, and prepares the country for the future.” Thus the timing of the 1982 debt crisis was highly opportune for one group, as it presented a critical juncture through which the burgeoning *técnico* faction of the PRI was able to forcefully assert itself (see Álvarez Bejar, 2016).

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<sup>42</sup> Spending on education, for example, was more than cut in half between 1981 and 1987 (Haber et al., 2008).

Though there were many who preferred to view the crisis as the result of blunders on the part of López Portillo (whose nationalization of Mexico's banks just before leaving office in 1982—amidst the gathering crisis—was accompanied by massive rallies in the name of a renewed nationalism and a reassertion of the PRI's commitment to 'revolutionary' social and economic policy, though this nationalist fervor did little to insulate him from criticism in the ensuing years), de la Madrid and his advisors used the onset of the crisis to propagate what Soederberg (2001) identifies as a "passive revolution" to neoliberal economic policy. A passive revolution entails, for Soederberg (2001: 105, following Gramsci, 1992), "a change in forms of political and ideological domination by the ruling classes that is rooted in the wider restructuring of social relations of capitalist production, or civil society." As Soederberg explains, PRI leadership followed a logic she refers to as "debt as discipline", whereby the state's far-reaching austerity measures and privatization programs would ultimately serve to draw from the Mexican economy the efficiencies thought to reside in the mysterious mechanisms of the market, and further used the arms of the "extended state"—such as educational institutions and media platforms, in addition to the sectors and organizations of the PRI itself—to propagate this logic and elicit the popular consent that forms the necessary complement to coercion. Soederberg's account of this process of reform and ideological reorganization, however, misrepresents the degree to which the neoliberal "passive revolution" she identifies took hold within the PRI itself. Davis (1994) argues that de la Madrid pushed for a broader set of democratic reforms both within the PRI (some of which would later take hold) and, more significantly, within the confines of the Federal District. Notably, Davis argues that de la Madrid intended to pass constitutional reforms that would have allowed for the direct election of the Federal District's *regente*. That this provision was never made, even after several years of behind-the-scenes debate, provides evidence of the degree to which the rifts between party factions had grown untenable. As de la Madrid's

administration dragged on, these rifts would become dangerously large, alienating many of the party's leaders and the rank-and-file left behind by the technocrats' tectonic realignments.

This "passive revolution" in economic policy, which would only further intensify under the administration of Carlos Salinas (1988-1994), failed to duplicate the successes of the miracle, and only served to intensify several contradictions that the debt crisis had allowed to surface. First, social and economic inequality in Mexico only intensified through the 1980s, spurred on by the massive cuts in social spending and state sector employment. Noting the difficulty of making robust longitudinal comparisons as a result of unreliable data, Haber et al. (2008: 197) nevertheless note "a broad consensus...that the distribution of income improved significantly between the early 1960s and the early 1980s and then deteriorated over the next two decades."<sup>43</sup> Private sector employment that replaced jobs in now-privatized industries seems to have offered less stability and economic security, and purchasing power declined steadily through the 1980s and into the 1990s, even among those employed in manufacturing, which showed promising growth in nominal wages (Haber et al., 2008). And as de la Madrid sought to pivot resources away from the capital through 'decentralization'—in an effort to both democratize *estados* and *municipios* throughout the country by devolving certain budgetary and financial authority from the central state, and to some degree to spread

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<sup>43</sup> Much of this growth and decline is directly attributable to the middle classes of Mexico City, whose overall economic fortunes improved markedly during the 'miracle' decades and plummeted thereafter, especially during periods of marked austerity. As noted above, Ward (1990) demonstrates that though aggregate numbers therefore demonstrate a more equal share of income overall during the height of the ISI boom, some of the prosperity enjoyed by middle classes came at the expense of the lower classes (as well as those above). This arguably (and paradoxically) exacerbated the lived experience of inequality in parts of the city and further degraded the economic realities of the urban poor. See also Alarcón and McKinley (1998) and Angeles-Castro (2011).



the frustrations and embarrassments of the debt crisis and subsequent reforms across these entities—the city’s poor and marginalized residents were left further behind. The so-called ‘informal sector’<sup>44</sup> of the city’s economy absorbed many of the unemployed and underemployed as it continued to expand during this period, though by definition such activity eludes reliable calculation. The generally lackluster growth of the economy,<sup>45</sup> the continuing debt problems, and the ravages of neoliberal austerity programs conspired to see the 1980s later described as ‘the lost decade’.

While the timing of the 1982 debt crisis had been fairly opportune with respect to the machinations of the PRI’s *técnicos*, it could not have been worse for the city’s poorest residents, especially those living in the *vecindades* of the historic center and surrounding

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<sup>44</sup> As Roberts (2005:114) argues, there has long been a “high degree of informality of the Mexico City labor market”, which, as in other Latin American cities, decreased to some degree during the height of ISI policy, but expanded dramatically again in its wake. Rakowski (1994: 4) offers a usefully thorough definition of informality, which includes: “small-scale firms, workshops, and microenterprises with low capital inputs where production levels depend on intensive use of labor; nonprofessional self-employed, subcontracted put-out workers, disguised wage workers; unprotected or only partially protected work; illegal contractual arrangements, not fully regulated or registered or extralegal activities; activities that escape standard fiscal and accounting mechanisms; domestic service; cooperatives and associated activities with little or no separation between labor and ownership of the means of production; casual trade, street vendors, and market sellers, regardless of the source of goods; direct subsistence production.” “*Informalization*”, she continues, “refers to the circumventing of regulations, benefits, payment of taxes, and so on by employers and the unequal and selective application of such by the state.” The prevalence of informality—thusly defined—in Mexico City’s economy is beyond dispute, though its precise share is practically impossible to estimate. But whether in the wealthiest of households or the most desperately poor of *vecindades*, informal transactions are so commonplace as to be entirely inconspicuous. This would include such service activities as cleaning and childcare, ‘valet’ parking (often illegal), and ‘petty commodity production’, and also the upscale businesses in gentrified neighborhoods that nevertheless must maintain budget lines for monthly or yearly bribes to local officials (in addition to those extra-legal expenses reserved for required licenses and permits), and quotidian business transactions that include casual reference to well known avenues for avoiding legal tax requirements—sometimes to the extent of preparing several invoices—all of which is largely considered entirely mundane in my experience. I make use of the term here not in an effort to enter the debates on the functional utility of this sector vis-a-vis other categories of productive activity (see Rakowski (1994) for an informative survey of the ‘informality debates’), but rather simply to highlight the difficulty of working with aggregate economic data under conditions where distinctions between formal and informal, legal and illegal, (etc.) are so difficult to parse in the course of daily economic and social life.

<sup>45</sup> See Alarcón and McKinley (1998); Haber et al. (2008).

neighborhoods. Three years later, at 7:19am on September 19, 1985, an 8.1 magnitude earthquake rocked the city, killing some 10,000 people,<sup>46</sup> mostly in and around the historic center. Given the city's geological conditions, earthquakes are both common and potentially disastrous. The valley shakes with some frequency,<sup>47</sup> and earthquake alarms are a common auditory assault in many neighborhoods. The earthquake of 1985, however, was singular both in its destructive force and more importantly in its social and political implications. Coming as it did at the tail-end of decades of rapid population growth and geographical expansion, and in the midst of de la Madrid's neoliberal reorganization of the PRI state, the quake struck the city at its most vulnerable. Makeshift construction fueled by decades of self-help housing practices folded and collapsed without resistance, as did many of the historic center's centuries-old structures, *palacios* and *vecindades* alike. Though accounts again vary, the quake certainly completely destroyed some 400 buildings, many of them crowded apartment buildings and subdivided structures home to poor families. Gilbert (1998: 139) claims that some 90,000 homes were damaged, 30,000 of which had to be demolished in the aftermath. The PRI response to this catastrophe was perceived by many victims and residents generally as confused, slow, and ineffective.<sup>48</sup> Though at the national level there were emergency plans in place for such an event, de la Madrid was reportedly hesitant to use them because they were not specifically designed for the capital, and more importantly because they relied on the military, which de la Madrid feared could swell popular support for a military long held in check by the PRI (and whose dedicated

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<sup>46</sup> A highly disputed figure.

<sup>47</sup> According to Camacho de Schmidt and Schmidt (1995: xv, following Manzanilla 1986), "More than 340 earthquakes have been recorded in the area of the capital since Aztec times in the mid-fifteenth century", making metropolitan Mexico City "a highly dangerous seismic zone."

<sup>48</sup> Though some authors would claim in the ensuing years that criticism of the PRI state's response was overblown, and that it did make considerable effort in the aftermath, at least at the level of policy (see Gilbert 1998).

vertical sector within the party had been dissolved decades earlier) (Camacho de Schmidt and Schmidt, 1995). Instead, the official response was slow and inadequate, with significant delays even on time-sensitive issues such as the search for survivors and the restoration of basic services (see Davis, 1994; Poniatowska, 1995; Gutmann, 2002; Bruhn, 2008). As many have argued, the PRI state's response to the 1985 earthquake represented another damning piece of evidence for many of the city's residents that their government simply could not be trusted, and that the party had betrayed the Revolution and its constituents. Residents of many central neighborhoods refused to wait for an inattentive and ineffectual state, however. Groups formed across the affected areas to perform necessary functions, such as search and rescue, medical assistance, coordination of shelter, and protection from opportunistic looting and other threats to person and property. In the ensuing months and years, many of these groups, feeling betrayed by the PRI, transformed into robust social movements and alternative political forces. According to Smith (1989: 397), some viewed this as "the birth of 'civil society' in Mexico, a spontaneous means by which informed citizens would assert their own destinies and place popular demands upon the state". Notable among these groups were several of the constituent groups that together make up the Urban Popular Movement (*Movimiento Urbano Popular*, hereafter MUP, to be discussed in later chapters), and the *Asamblea de Barrios*, whose comical mascot Superbarrio<sup>49</sup> and the zany public feats he performed in no way diminish the seriousness of the group's

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<sup>49</sup> Superbarrio dresses in the style of a *lucha libre* wrestler, and has appeared in this guise at many of the group's demonstrations. According to Gilbert (1998: 140, following Sayer, 1991), Superbarrio offered the following description of himself in 1991: "Of course, comparisons have been made with Superman. But he derives his power from supernatural, non-intellectual sources. My power comes from Mexican popular culture and the popular imagination. Superbarrio doesn't face vampires or wolf-men; he faces flesh-and-blood landlords, politicians and bureaucrats, and he has no kryptonite to protect him." His Facebook page can be seen here: <https://www.facebook.com/superbarrio.gomez>

political influence. As Davis (1994) points out, many such neighborhood groups had already begun to organize for a variety of reasons prior to 1985, encouraged by the limited measures implemented to maintain the middle and lower class character of some neighborhoods close to the historic center in particular<sup>50</sup> and responding to “the evident neglect of popular demands” even before the earthquake. For many, their attachments to and emergence within particular neighborhoods would remain at the core of their political identities, guiding their politics for decades to come in some cases.

These and other groups faced a choice in the aftermath of the earthquake: continue to organize locally and avoid the uncertain and potentially dangerous world of party politics, or join with opposition parties in an attempt to oust the PRI through the standard procedures of Mexico’s nominal electoral democracy (see Bruhn, 2008).<sup>51</sup> Some of those that chose the latter course found an ally in PRI leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano, son of beloved General and President Lázaro Cárdenas. Along with other PRI leaders deeply unsatisfied with the party’s turn toward neoliberal policy (including Porfirio Muñoz Ledo and Rodolfo Gonzalez Guevara), which they viewed as a desertion of the party’s and the Revolution’s social and economic principles, Cárdenas founded the *Corriente Democrática* (Democratic Current) in 1986. The intent of this group, Bruhn (1997) argues, was to apply pressure within the PRI, steering it back toward its earlier economic and social policies and influencing the selection of the party’s next presidential candidate. They argued, writes Bruhn (1997: 83) that “shrinking the public sector as a

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<sup>50</sup> Such as rent regulations, density requirements, and various other favorable planning decisions and programs, such as the aforementioned pro-middle class policies of *Regente* Uruchurtu (see Davis, 1994; 2009), including the Tlatelolco housing projects.

<sup>51</sup> The broader question of total or partial independence from the state and political parties continues to be a seriously debated issue among Mexico City’s activists and civil society organizations. Many remain deeply distrustful of the state and of formal party structures, having witnessed the effects of cooptation strategies in particular that often result from cooperation with either.

solution to our financial woes amounts to cutting off the head of a man suffering from a headache.” When the *Corriente* failed to effect significant change to either the economic trajectory of the party or its internal democratization—owing in large part to the party being largely controlled by the new generation of technocrats who lined up behind Carlos Salinas de Gortari as their nominee for the 1988 presidential elections and sought to isolate and discredit members of the *Corriente*—Cárdenas and other lifetime *priistas* broke away from the party entirely and mounted an impressive opposition campaign. Cárdenas’s support was organized through a *frente*, a coalition of forces that offer formal support and official representation to a single candidate, in this case the *Frente Democrática Nacional* (National Democratic Front, hereafter FDN). This coalition included a variety of voices representing, broadly speaking, the Mexican left, and came from an equally wide spectrum of organizational backgrounds. “Twelve separate organizations signed the Common Platform of the National Democratic Front”, Bruhn (1997: 136) reports, “three political parties with legal registry, five parties without legal registry, and four popular/civic movements.” The inclusion of each of these groups held distinct advantages. Cárdenas required a legally-registered party (most of which had checkered histories with the PRI) to support his electoral admission for the 1988 elections, for example, and urban social movements in Mexico City bolstered his image and ultimately his overwhelming support in the capital. His campaign also did well in certain rural areas (such as his home state of Michoacán), and the legendary status of his father ensured that rural and urban communities alike greeted the younger Cárdenas with an affection and respect that impressed even those skeptics who doubted his ability to raise an electoral army large enough to slay the embattled leviathan.<sup>52</sup> And despite

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<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the PRI would attempt to hold its grip on presidential power by seemingly any means required, as the violent murder of several important FDN organizers in the days leading up to the election testify (see Bruhn, 1997).

the disadvantages that came with a dispersed coalition taking on a powerful political machine, his support swelled in the months that led up to the election, and a nervous tension gripped the capital city and the country as international observers prepared the onlooking world for the arrival of 'real' democracy in what was in 1988 the world's eleventh most-populous country<sup>53</sup> and, despite the downturn of the preceding years, still its sixteenth-largest economy.<sup>54</sup>

Election day came on July 6, and early indications showed strong support for Cárdenas and the FDN. As the votes were being counted, however, a "breakdown" of the system was announced, allegedly a problem with the electronic vote-counting machines employed for the first time during this election. All counts were immediately halted. Three days later, the mysterious malfunction was declared fixed, and the final announced tally gave the PRI's Salinas a narrow victory. Many were outraged at what seemed an obvious fraud,<sup>55</sup> especially in the capital, where support for Cárdenas was strongest. Through a brilliant maneuver, however, the PRI was able to elicit a measure of cooperation from the new congress in legitimizing the election results. Each Mexican Congress must undertake an initial process of 'self-qualification' (*autocalificación*) of their own election (and therefore that of the president, as well) before they can be formally seated. Therefore, as the smaller parties that officially or unofficially supported

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<sup>53</sup> According to the UN (2017b).

<sup>54</sup> According to the UN (2017a).

<sup>55</sup> General agreement exists on this point. As Bruhn (1997: 140) puts it: "Nearly all observers agree that fraud marred the July 6 presidential election. Although it is impossible to prove that fraud changed the outcome, the evidence clearly shows that substantial electoral fraud benefitted Salinas and that Cárdenas was the chief victim." This evidence includes descriptions of armed robbery of ballot boxes, packets of ballots that did not match the numbers noted by poll watchers, partially burned ballots marked for Cárdenas found in rivers and alleyways, and voter registry irregularities and inaccuracies as high as 49 percent in some areas (Bruhn, 1997). Gutmann (2002: 8) likewise characterizes this election as "What some have termed the most fraudulent presidential vote in Mexico's long history of corrupt electoral politics". Some sixteen years later, former president de la Madrid openly admitted that the 1988 elections were fraudulent, in his 2004 autobiography (see Thompson, 2004).

the FDN sought to solidify their own gains in congress, they sacrificed their last best chance to prevent the seating of Salinas. As Bruhn (1997: 149) explains:

On September 8, 1988, the new Congress became the presidential Electoral College, which certifies the presidential election. Once this was in session, the opposition reversed course and tried to keep Salinas from becoming president. The same elections they had just declared valid in their own case, they now declared invalid in the case of the president. But in ratifying the Congress, they had given the PRI majority control over the constitutional tool with which to ratify the presidential election. In the final vote the PAN delegation remained in the chamber and voted against the PRI; the FDN walked out. The declaration ratifying Carlos Salinas as president-elect passed by 263 votes to 83, and was signed only by the *priista* members of Congress.

Thus with control of the Congress, the PRI was able to legitimize its fraud and retain the presidency. Over the next six years, Salinas would deepen the PRI's commitment to the new course it had set under de la Madrid, privatizing state interests, cutting social expenditures, and encouraging foreign direct investment and free trade. His administration's crowning achievement was the trilateral *North American Free Trade Agreement* (hereafter NAFTA), a bargain that set off the so-called Zapatista rebellion in the south of the country (see also Chapter Four). The pro-growth policies of the Salinas administration, however, failed to yield the promised returns, and his last years in office were also deeply marred by major scandals and high profile crimes, some involving his own family (see Chapter Four), along with intensifying inequality throughout the country, increasing urban and rural poverty as state subsidies disappeared, as what remained of the country's social infrastructures continued to be dismantled, and as NAFTA fully opened Mexico's markets to US consumer and agricultural products. Meanwhile, Cárdenas set about attempting to consolidate the loose remnants of the FDN into a major opposition party. Though these efforts were undoubtedly frustrating,<sup>56</sup> the remaining elements of the *Cárdenista* coalition eventually coalesced into the Party of the

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<sup>56</sup> See Bruhn (1997) for a thorough analysis of the difficulties FDN leaders had in transitioning from the stage of 'emergence' to that of 'consolidation' in the wake of the elections.

Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrático*, hereafter PRD) the following year. Always strong in the capital, where its social movement elements had been trained in the horrors of the PRI's repression of the student movement and its seeming disregard for the victims of the 1985 earthquake, the new PRD would gain an increasing presence in the local state as the process of 'political reform' (to be discussed in Chapter Four) gradually opened up space for local autonomy and returned some semblance of democracy to the city over the next several decades.

The PRD would fail to remain competitive at the national level, however. The challenge that the FDN had presented to the PRI in 1988 was never repeated by the PRD, which received less than seventeen percent of the national vote in 1994, again with Cárdenas as its candidate, despite increasing dissatisfaction with the PRI under Salinas and the economy and social difficulties brought about by the party's increasingly neoliberal orientation. Instead, opposition support began to flow more easily to the right-wing National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, hereafter PAN), whose candidate Diego Fernández de Cevallos Ramos won just under twenty-six percent of the vote. Interestingly, the PRI's rightward drift pushed electoral opposition toward an even more conservative option through the 1990s. Responding to a series of pressures emanating from such diverse sources as the political scandals, assassinations, and intrigues of the capital city in 1994 (see Chapter Four), blatant electoral manipulation, open rebellion in the State of Chiapas, and increasingly vocal and popular dissent in the capital city, President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994-2000) oversaw the passage of constitutional reforms in 1996 some of which would have serious implications for the process known as 'political reform' in Mexico City (see Chapter Four), and some of which had lasting repercussions for the national political sphere. In particular, these reforms saw the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) established as an independent and



unaffiliated body, theoretically making it more difficult for PRI leaders to manipulate national elections. As the 1990s drew to a close, the Mexican electorate was finally allowed to express its dissatisfaction with the PRI through the vote. In 2000, PAN candidate and longtime Coca Cola executive Vicente Fox Quesada handily defeated PRI candidate Francisco Labastida Ochoa (who is widely rumored to have significant ties to powerful narco cartels in his home state of Sinaloa) and PRD candidate Cárdenas (who again received just under seventeen percent of the vote), bringing the PRI's roughly seventy-year reign to a close and heralding the arrival of 'real' democracy in Mexico at long last.

### **Conclusion: Reconsidering Monstrosity**

Twelve years later, on the eve of the 2012 elections that would bring the PRI back to presidential power, *The Guardian* published Alan Knight's highly critical review of *Guardian* journalist Jo Tuckman's (2012a) *Mexico: Democracy Interrupted*. Knight (2012) concludes his review by arguing, "even if the PRI returns to power, Mexican democracy—with all its many and familiar imperfections—will probably survive, uninterrupted; but so will the country's intractable social, economic and security problems." This assessment, which applies perhaps even more to Mexico City than to the country at large, concisely conveys several interrelated arguments that emerge from this chapter's selective treatment of Mexico City and its twentieth-century governance. First, as Knight's rather hopeful assessment of the state of democracy after the 2000 'transition' suggests, many of the hard-won changes to the political system, including at least nominally viable political plurality in local and national elections, the return of local democracy to the capital city (to be discussed in detail in Chapter Four), and reforms that promise, if nothing else, an end to the blatant electoral manipulation with impunity, are unlikely to retire from the scene, even in the face of a resurgent PRI. The lasting

impact of these changes on Mexican governance whether at the local or national level, however, is less clear, and is a theme to be taken up in later chapters. Second, the disappointment in a post-transition return to power by the PRI that Knight's argument seeks to temper seems to take for granted a static and monolithic understanding of the PRI state that is wholly unwarranted. Though there are compelling reasons for considering the PRI and the state (writ-large) coterminous for much of the twentieth century, the slow but steady transition to meaningful plurality begun at least as far back as the 1980s, the internal ruptures and antagonisms within the PRI (especially, as Davis thoroughly demonstrates, between national PRI regimes and their Mexico City subordinates), and compelling arguments about the nature of the PRI's always locally negotiated control in various parts of the country all point to the analytical shortcomings of positioning the PRI as an unqualified leviathan. As ensuing years would demonstrate after the 'transition', Mexican democracy is riddled with issues that cannot easily be lain solely at the feet of the 'ruling party'. Opposition parties have offered ample evidence of their own dangerous ills, whether inherited from the PRI or cultivated afresh.

The third insight I wish to highlight from Knight's response to Tuckman has received less attention than political developments in this chapter, but is nevertheless of considerable significance. In reminding readers of Mexico's "intractable social, economic and security problems", Knight broadens the focus of arguments that again place undue weight on nominal political plurality, and indicates the position party politics find among the country's many other pressing concerns, again a critique which applies even more in the capital city. Explosive growth in the twentieth century brought to Mexico City a host of incredible ecological, economic, and social calamities, quite aside from those conventionally associated with electoral politics. Even if the 'ruling party' was never quite the monster it was made out to be, this critique suggests, the city most certainly is.

Sprawling over 3,700 square kilometers, parts of *el monstruo* are now (as of 2017) governed by at least three different states, each with its own political priorities and problems. In the summer, seasonal rains (which come like clockwork on summer afternoons in parts of the city) cause flooding that threatens the lives and livelihoods of many residents annually, and inevitably collects in those portions of the city that tend to be both the poorest and least well serviced by the state, such as the many destitute neighborhoods of Iztapalapa (see Baverstock, 2014; Kimmelman, 2017). Ironically, the city also suffers from a lack of potable water, to such an extent that so-called ‘water blackouts’ (wherein the water is shut off to portions of the city for a given period of time, usually several days) are a normal part of daily life for many. Many poor residents rely on dangerous illegal and/or unreliable connections—to aging city water pipes or to well-positioned local *caciques*—or simply pay what amounts to exorbitant rates to have it biked or trucked to their homes in *garrafones* (water cooler jugs), probably the most common practice for rich and poor alike across the city. Climate change, many argue, only exacerbates these water troubles on both fronts (see Kimmelman, 2017). In the winter, thermal inversions intensify already insufferable air pollution to dangerous levels, despite efforts aimed at curbing automotive and industrial emissions by several decades of PRI and PRD politicians. These efforts include industrial regulation, continued investment in public transportation (though the prevalence of decades-old *camiones*, *peseros*, and other smog-belching small buses throughout the city—especially the farther one travels from the neighborhoods home to the ‘*gente decente*’—is suggestive of a certain degree of intransigence), and the incredibly unpopular selective restrictions on automotive traffic collectively known by the name ‘*hoy no circula*’ (‘non-circulation day’), which limits the days a given car can legally operate, based on the assignment of license plates. In recent years, winter months have seen PRD mayors double-down on this strategy, compounding the number of cars to be kept off the streets but also posing

dangerous risks associated with overcrowding to users of an already strained public transit system. Earthquakes and landslides continue to pose significant danger to many, again despite the implementation of stricter building codes designed to mitigate the potential effects of precisely these events. Whether in the 'informal' and autoconstructed peripheral zones of the city where the regulation of generations of shoddy cinderblock and corrugated metal housing was and is lax at best, or in the luxury towers of *el monstruo's* premier 'edge city' (Santa Fe)—where bribes and kickbacks are rumored to have ensured government permits even for those residential towers built atop unstable cliffs on the edges of a defunct sand mine, some of which began to collapse in late 2015—unstable geology continues to present an existential risk to what may even be a majority of the city's residents. The sum of these environmental risks are approached by an appraisal published in the *Journal of Alpine Research* (Mancebo, 2007: 110):

Floods, landslides, subsidence, volcanism, earthquakes—it would be difficult to find a more dangerous site. Mexico City is one of the most unbearable and most vulnerable cities on earth, exposed to a combination of so-called natural hazards, poorly controlled technological hazards stemming from heavy industry, pollution, including an accumulation of air pollutants, and diminishing local resources, particularly water. These different components interact in series to create specific disasters. The dangers to which the city is exposed are euphemistically called "complex hazards". This concept covers a wide spectrum of risks since the urban problems resulting from the breakdown in the social fabric after any kind of catastrophe are part of these "complex hazards".

Violence also continues to plague greater Mexico City. While the city escaped much of the violence of President Felipe Calderon Hinojosa's disastrous drug wars (which hit the northern states of the country particularly hard), murder, kidnapping, and other forms of violent crime continue to be a significant problem. Violence against women, though not perhaps reaching the proportions of that in Ciudad Juárez along the US-Mexico border (see Wright, 1999), recent years have seen horrifying crimes of a similar fashion perpetrated on the outskirts of Mexico City. *Reuters* reported in 2014 that the murder rate for women in the State of Mexico doubled during the second half of current

President Enrique Peña Nieto's tenure as governor of that state, reaching a level that merits the label of "pandemic" (Rama and Diaz, 2014). They describe the site of some such murders as follows:

So many teenage girls turned up dead in a vacant field on the outskirts of Mexico City that people nicknamed it the "women's dumping ground." They began showing up in 2006, usually left among piles of garbage. Some were victims of domestic violence, others of drug gangs that have seized control of entire neighborhoods in the gritty town of Ecatepec, northeast of the capital. The lot has been cleared and declared an ecological reserve. But its grisly past is not forgotten and the killings have only accelerated.

These dangers and the wounds they cause together form only some of the geological, ecological, social, and political substrata upon which everyday citizens attempt to construct a life in contemporary Mexico City.

This chapter has presented a selective history of Mexico City and the party that ruled it for the majority of the twentieth century. Beginning with the immense changes wrought on the landscape and in the halls of state by liberal modernizer and dictatorial *caudillo* Porfirio Díaz, the capital city became a favored site for investment, especially in industry and international commerce. The city's population began to grow as Don Porfirio sought to centralize state authority, quash regional rebelliousness, and project an image of economic and social modernity that would show the western world that Mexico was ready to join the ranks of its sister republic to the north and its ancestors in western Europe. When the contradictions unleashed by his economic plans—most notably both the rampant inequality at work in the modernizing Mexican economy and the political repression by which this economic growth was ensured—conspired with personal blunders and gathering regional unrest to force his ouster in 1911, a chaotic era characterized by the promulgation of reforms and reorganizations accompanied by frequent political intrigues and assassinations set in for the capital city and would not be

completely quelled until the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas in the mid-1930s. At the close of this presidency, the capital and the country over which its authority extended had been completely reorganized. The capital city had entirely lost its local democracy, having been remade into a Federal District under the jurisdiction of the President of the Republic. In the ensuing decades, the country's single 'ruling party' would embark on a period of import-substitution industrialization that would swell the population of the capital to an enormous size, which pushed its spatial frontiers well beyond the bounds of the Federal District as its newest inhabitants gobbled up any available space, often at great personal risk. As the party struggled to maintain the economic 'miracle' their ISI policy promised, it faced crises on several fronts, and its troubling responses to these challenges opened up yet further issues and stoked gathering popular unrest in the city. A party whose power was based in a national electorate was increasingly finding itself at odds, sometimes violently so, with an urban populace refusing to live with its dictates and calling with increasing volume for the restoration of democracy to the capital. In the 1980s, as the party shifted toward neoliberal economic policy under the direction of a new generation of internationally-trained technocrats, a group of party leaders bent on a return to the revolutionary socialist principles of the party's past formed a powerful opposition, only to have their dreams dashed by a stolen election. The party they formed, the PRD, would come to rule the capital city in opposition for the next several decades, and its relationship to urban social movements, democracy, and revolution form much of what follows in subsequent chapters. The city that resulted from this violent century remains a rapidly changing place, riddled with fascinating and dangerous divisions and not a few areas of intense, ongoing conflict. The chapters that follow will continue to explore the ongoing tension between Mexico City and the national state, the political parties that vie for control of the city as it emerges from federal management, and the grassroots movements and alliances that form to make claims on the local and

federal state, to disrupt manipulative political machinery, and to demand adequate responses to the frightening problems the monster seems uniquely capable of presenting to its inhabitants.

## Chapter Two

### Dreaming Dialectically: The Death and Life of the Right to the City in Mexico City

#### Introduction

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, enormous political changes were afoot in the city of palaces. The fragile coalition that nearly carried Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas to the presidency in 1988 was splintering, and staggered to find new footing as some factions joined Cárdenas' emerging PRD and others established or reestablished linkages with the PRI.<sup>57</sup> The PRI's patronage networks in the city were beginning to disintegrate in some areas, and were lost to the new PRD in others. As discussed in the previous chapter, the PRI's loss of control of the city was made possible by the convergence of several interrelated developments. One such factor was the struggle over the PRI itself between the rising technocratic wing (*técnicos*) increasingly oriented toward international economic integration and other neoliberal reforms, and the old guard *políticos*, many of whom still clung to the party's longstanding clientelistic practices and ISI policies. Such old guard policies had contributed heavily to a related factor of the disintegration of PRI control, the fiscal crisis of the early 1980s, fueled as it was by massive state spending, the last gasp of Mexican ISI made possible by the promise of oil revenues that never materialized in the proportions expected. Another factor was the devastating earthquake of 1985, and even more the PRI response to this tragedy. Many of the city's poorest neighborhoods were severely damaged in the quake, and the ruling party's efforts to rescue residents and make their neighborhoods livable again were heavily criticized for

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<sup>57</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, and as Bruhn (1997) convincingly demonstrates, the congressional procedures for ratifying the 1988 election presented a tragically artful opportunity for co-optation of some of the smaller parties that had supported Cárdenas, as newly elected congressional representatives of these parties (some of which had never previously achieved such national representation) were forced to certify as legitimate the plainly fraudulent election results if they wished to solidify and protect their own parties' gains.



being slow, uneven, and politically motivated. As these frustrations with the PRI grew, so too did political pluralism and resident demands for ever-greater democratization.

The disaffected neighborhood groups of the city developed in the 1980s into robust social movements, the most significant of which remains the Urban Popular Movement (*Movimiento Urbano Popular*, hereafter MUP). The MUP has its origins in the unrest of the late 1960s, but its numbers and energy swelled in the wake of the '85 earthquake. A conglomerate entity, the MUP is made up of some twenty-eight incorporated movements whose activities span the city-region and whose leaders do not always see eye-to-eye.<sup>58</sup> MUP factions sometimes cooperate and participate in joint actions, but in other instances do not. Often, MUP factions join other civil society groups to jointly pursue common goals, or enroll such groups in their own actions. In the early 1990s, one such collaboration saw members of the National Democratic Convention of the Urban Popular Movement (hereafter MUP-CND) and like-minded colleagues from Habitat International Coalition-Latin America (hereafter HIC-AL) participate in a series of meetings with NGO and civil society leaders from Brazil in preparation for the 1996 UN Habitat II conference in Istanbul. It was at these meeting that the language of the right to the city first entered the lexicon of Mexican civil society in a major way.<sup>59</sup> Though both Brazilians and Mexicans would subsequently pursue an agenda they explicitly named 'the right to the city', they took starkly different paths. In Brazil, the right to the city took on the status, if not always the force, of constitutional law. In Mexico, the concept spread slowly through civil society networks, quietly weaving together the demands and desires of a far-flung

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<sup>58</sup> Though this history is somewhat murky, some claim that some MUP leaders used their influence in the post-earthquake years to enrich themselves and/or develop their own patronage networks, channeling and directing government assistance according to their own agendas. Such actions are understandably said to have created conflict among leaders of different factions of the MUP.

<sup>59</sup> Though with at least one important caveat, to be discussed below.

collection of interests and steadily accruing political capital through the careful and persistent advocacy of a small group of deeply revered figures and organizations.

Though it did not become law as such,<sup>60</sup> ‘the right to the city’ became one of the most salient and powerful organizing principles for civil society groups in Mexico City over the next several decades.

In July of 2010, nearly twenty years of energy and activism around the right to the city reached a crescendo with the mayoral endorsement of the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City (*La Carta de la Ciudad de México por el Derecho a la Ciudad*, hereafter Charter). The product of several years of concentrated organizing, caucusing, and debate among diverse groups and individual participants across the city, the Charter joined other similar declarations and elaborations of group demands collected under the banner of the right to the city in other cities across the globe, and currently represents the political high-water mark of the strategies expressly pursued under this name in Mexico City. Despite lacking the formality of legislation, the Charter has had a significant impact on the city’s politics, and continues to be a reference point for claims-making and policy critique, and even, in a more limited way, local jurisprudence and legislative debate. Important though this moment remains in the capital’s recent political history, however, the achievement of the Charter also marks the point of tidal retreat from what had been an important political strategy. In the immediately ensuing years, civil society energies shifted to strategies with other christenings as official posts were shuffled, allegiances realigned to keep in step with the unstable political substrata, and, most

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<sup>60</sup> There is some confusion on this point evident in the international discussion of the *Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City*, discussed below. Adler (2015a; 2015b), for instance, incorrectly ascribes the force of law to the Charter and describes its character as that of legislation. Its actual status as a legal entity will be discussed in detail below, but it should be noted that it holds no formal place in law, despite the public endorsement of Mayor Marcelo Ebrard and other members of the municipal state in the summer of 2010 and subsequently.

significantly of all, the city itself entered more deeply into a period of incredible political-economic and aesthetic alteration. As Undersecretary of Government Juan José García Ochoa (personal communication, 11/29/2015) explained to me in 2015, the twin dynamics of shifting priorities among government administrations and civil society groups and the changing face and economic ‘attractiveness’ of the city conspired to “change the equilibrium” as one mayoral regime gave way to the next and the “consensus” built around a PRD-led vision of urban development collapsed.

This transition away from a politics explicitly labeled ‘right to the city’ in Mexico City coincides all-too-conveniently with a growing academic disinterest in the right to the city, even among those who were once the concept’s most ardent supporters. To allow these trends anything beyond coincidence, however, would be a grave but unfortunately common misconceptualization of the right to the city, one that conflates the dissipation or reconfiguration of movements with failure and reduces the radically—and at times frustratingly—malleable, invasive, shape-shifting insurgency of the right to the city to a flat, static, and easily-digestible political program. A deeper engagement with the right to the city in Mexico City, however, one that explores the inconvenient complexities of its recent history, reveals a set of actors whose constructions and activities militate against simplification and categorization, sometimes to the detriment of their immediate objectives or those pursued by the differently situated members tenuously held in their tumultuous web of collaborators. Exploring this recent history will be the focus of this chapter, with particular attention paid to the groups, persons, events, and processes surrounding the Charter. I will argue that to approach a full understanding of the right to the city as it has been developed Mexico City, the concept and its history must be assessed according to the dialectical principles by which it was originally conceived and subsequently re-envisioned. Properly contextualized both theoretically and materially,

the full reach and import of the right to the city become clear, and, somewhat ironically, the ‘the right to the city’ label takes on a different kind of significance as the flexibility of its usage—with all its political and ideological capital *and* baggage—allows it to be understood as simply one among many tools employed in contemporary urban struggles.

This chapter will proceed in three additional sections. In the first of these, I will elaborate a particular reading of the right to the city from Lefebvre to the present, arguing that this concept must be understood according to Lefebvre’s own practice of dialectics. The following section focuses these insights on the right to the city in Mexico City from its conceptual beginnings in the late 1980s, following the politics pursued in its name through the present day. The concluding section synthesizes the lessons to be gleaned from this history, ultimately distilling several decades of complex events and processes into two simple propositions, that fixing a dialectical idea like the right to the city does significant violence to its potential, and that the right to the city—by virtue of its dialectical character—need not always travel under its own name.

### **Recovering the Right to the City**

The right to the city appears to have achieved a kind of market saturation among academics, at least in anglophone geography. Its lines of debate are now well-trodden, and while a select group remains enamored of the idea, many others find its conceptual grooves overly worn and tired, and the luster of its practical promise severely tarnished. Yet, when the concept is examined, the proffered definitions and resultant prescriptions are often entirely incommensurable. Theory seems to have advanced precious little beyond Attoh’s (2011) and Marcuse’s (2009) basic recognition that conceptualizations and instantiations of the right to the city inevitably involve choices and trade-offs, and

practice has run aground on legal or quasi-legal instruments the limits of which often leave much to be desired.<sup>61</sup> Worse, the concept's ease of use leaves it open to appropriations by hegemonic interests<sup>62</sup> in a tragic choreography of the prophecies of generations of 'rights talk' nay-sayers (Rorty, 1996; Tushnet, 1984; Zizek, 2005; and see Merrifield, 2011; Uitermark et al., 2012). Among these confusions, there now seems a general exhaustion with attempts to define and operationalize the right to the city. The history of the right to the city in Mexico City and the literature on other actually existing right to the city struggles suggest that this frustration is also deeply felt—if unevenly—in the world of practical politics.

For his part, Lefebvre bequeathed the world a concept bound to produce such aggravations. His right to the city, more than his arguments about the production of space or the urban revolution, is a concept imbued with the sweetest of siren songs. Birthed in the gathering energy and tumult of Paris' 1968, on the centennial of Marx's first volume of *Capital*, Lefebvre's *The Right to the City* introduces a somewhat inscrutable ideal, though the text is suggestive in the extreme and contains moments of penetrating insight into the processes of urban capitalism then pertaining in Paris. "The right to the city", Lefebvre famously intoned, "is like a cry and a demand" (Lefebvre, 1996: 158). It "manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit...to the *oeuvre*, to participation and *appropriation* (clearly distinct from the right to property)" (Lefebvre, 1996: 173-174, original emphasis). Speaking with a voice that finds its register in a language of rights then in the process of becoming globally ascendant (Moyn, 2010) and simultaneously in

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<sup>61</sup> See Brown and Kristiansen (2009); Fernandes (2007).

<sup>62</sup> See Holston (2009) and Vradis (2012) for examples of the unexpected use of 'rights talk' by organized criminal gangs in Brazil and a resurgent political right orienting itself toward the city in Greece, respectively.

an unmelodic anti-harmony that viciously mocks and undermines at every turn this bourgeois program of hardened legal norms as the desiccated, hollow promises of the state beholden to capital and the expansion of the spatial sway of its crucial abstractions (man and citizen), Lefebvre's mystifying rejection/assertion of rights beckons all comers. In the face of and in brazen contradistinction to the grandiloquent declarations of nations and emerging supranations, *The Right to the City* and its central concept were touchstones meant to serve as a cross-cutting incision into a world of analysis in which 'the urban' did not figure nearly enough, as grist for his later (and more fully developed) work on urbanization under a shifting capitalism, and as a breadcrumb or trail marker for those who would pursue this struggle in his wake, or, as Buckley and Strauss (2016: 632) describe Lefebvre's works on 'the urban', "invitations to revolutionize the day-to-day practice of intellectual knowledge production about it". At once a frank dismissal of rights and a bold claim for them, the right to the city abides in a space of contradiction.

Such an idea can only find its full expression and import by way of an approach capable of appreciating the complex web of material and virtual connections it inherently seeks to inhabit and its state of perpetual internal motion driven by the (often contradictory) forces that stretch, twist, sever, and bind these ever-proliferating ties. The approach most appropriate to this task is that by which the concept was conceived and delivered, the peculiar Lefebvrian variant of dialectics. This origin is, I will argue, precisely why the right to the city holds such tragic and unrealizable promise in the eyes of so many observers, academic and otherwise. Lefebvre's right to the city is multivalent, slicing through space and time synchro-spatially in its analysis of urbanization and the gestures and demands it throws out toward an un-alienated urban future. Viewed as a solid, finished abstraction as presented by Lefebvre and others to follow, the concept presents no particular problems for even a casual observer, and, as recent academic and popular trends have

demonstrated, continues to draw a large audience. Once it is taken outside the context of its conceptual development, however, and asked to function in fashions other than dialectical, the right to the city begins to appear wholly unsuited to most attempts to promote emancipatory change, as its seemingly endless efforts to evade fixity and forge new connections, even at the expense of old ones, frustrate the most sincere attempts to imbue the concept with the force and duty of law.

To indicate the dialectical origins of the right to the city, however, is hardly to assign it a predictable form or function, given the schismatic role dialectical reasoning has played and continues to play in Marxist and non-Marxist thought alike.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, as many have now pointed out, it is entirely erroneous to speak of a singular dialectics, as a unitary body of thought, let alone still common attacks mounted on the straw figure of 'the dialectic' as a conceptual instrument or (im)material force. Arguing against all-too-common misconceptions, Ollman (2003: 15) positions dialectics thusly:

Dialectics is not a rock-ribbed triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis that serves as an all-purpose explanation; nor does it provide a formula that enables us to prove or predict anything; nor is it the motor force of history. The dialectic, as such, explains nothing, proves nothing, predicts nothing, and causes nothing to happen. Rather, dialectics is a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occur in the world.

Changes and interactions are both key to Ollman's explication of dialectics à la Marx, and here name two major pillars of dialectical investigations in this variation. For Ollman, whose corpus on dialectics spans several decades and provides the most thoroughgoing and sustained methodological engagement with the subject, dialectics is first and

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<sup>63</sup> See Castree (1996) for a useful conceptual review, and Jameson (2009), whose discussion includes the appearance of dialectics in the work of social theorists typically categorized as non-Marxist or even anti-Marxist. Dixon et al. (2008) also indicate both unexpected instances of dialectical reasoning and areas of potentially productive overlap between dialectical thought and other bodies of theory often taken to be in competition.

foremost a science of movement and change.<sup>64</sup> This approach treats mutability, contingency, and inconstancy as axiomatic, and thus constitutes what Dixon et al. (2008: 2549) call a “process philosophy”, a consideration of a world perpetually in a state of “continuous becoming”. Ollman (2003: 66) roots this “epistemological priority” of movement over stability in Marx, “so that stability—whenever it is found—is viewed as temporary and/or only apparent, or, as he says on one occasion, as a ‘paralysis’ of movement”. Established on a fundamental rejection of ontological stasis in the Aristotelean logical lineage, dialectics addresses itself instead to morphosis. Engels (1940), in a conceptualization of dialectical materialism Jameson (2009: 13) calls “far from outmoded”, identified three “laws” of dialectical movement: 1) “the law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa”; 2) “the law of the interpenetration of opposites”; and 3) “the law of the negation of the negation”. To these, which he affirms at length, Ollman (1993; 2003) adds several other types of dialectical movement, or ways of understanding such movement, including “metamorphosis”, “contradiction”, “mediation”, “precondition and result”, and “unity and separation”. Across types, however, dialectical movement is considered essentially synchronic and nonlinear (Castree, 1996), which is to say that it requires the ability to immanently transcend linear time, looking and assessing in more than one direction, even doing so simultaneously. By way of illustration, this is an ability requiring the aid of a memory like that possessed by the Queen of Hearts in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, a memory that “works both ways”.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps even more aptly, dialectics can here be likened to the

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<sup>64</sup> My usage of ‘dialectics’ and ‘the dialectic’ follows Ollman (2003). Formative guides to my approach to dialectics (see also Chapter 1, above) are also provided by Ollman (1971; 1993), Jameson (2009), and, to a lesser extent, Walker (1977).

<sup>65</sup> An exchange between protagonist Alice and the Queen in which this ‘queer’ sort of memory is elaborated by the latter is said to have been a favorite episode of Carl Jung, progenitor of ‘synchronicity’ in the field of psychoanalysis.



fictional language “Heptapod” depicted in Denis Villeneuve’s 2016 film *Arrival*, the translation of which allows the protagonist to access a globally universal set of past and future knowledges belonging to the human race, perhaps best approximated by psychoanalyst Carl Jung’s controversial “collective unconscious”. Such a synchronic perspective is essential not only to Marx’s analysis of the mode of production,<sup>66</sup> for example, but also to his mode of presentation, wherein the reader must be able to follow conceptual developments that unfold in more than one direction through a text and change through interaction with an expanding and often shifting conceptual universe (Castree, 1996; Henderson, 2013).

Forms of change/movement/interaction find varying emphasis in dialectical expositions of disparate contexts and phenomena,<sup>67</sup> a situation Ollman (2003: 60) insists is deeply rooted in Marx’s method of abstraction, or “the intellectual activity of breaking this whole down into the mental units with which we think about it”. Ollman insists (via the construction, or exegesis, of a methodological schematic) that casting such abstractions properly necessitates such differences, as environmental, social, spatial, temporal, and other factors, not least of which is the problem or set of problems under examination amongst these contextual variables, must alter the processes of abstraction to a boundless degree. The process of abstraction, crucial to dialectical investigation, illustrates that in addition to a science of movement and change, dialectics is equally and relatedly a study not of ‘things’, but of ‘relations’.<sup>68</sup> Again, unlike formal Aristotelean or

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<sup>66</sup> See Harvey (2006).

<sup>67</sup> Noting only high points of this landscape, Ollman (1993: 26-27) writes: “for Lukács, it was the concept of totality that played this role; for Mao, it was ‘contradiction’; for Raya Dunayevskaya, it was the ‘negation of the negation’; for Scott Meikle, it was ‘essence’; for the Ollman of *Alienation* it was ‘internal relations,’ and so on.”

<sup>68</sup> Ollman (2003) uses the term relation, following Marx, to designate what more ‘common-sense’ approaches consider both ‘things’ and ‘relationships’, using the initial capital term “Relation” to distinguish the former from the latter. McCormack (2012: 77) uses a dual notion of ‘abstraction’ in

Boolean logic, dialectical reasoning entails a refusal of internally consistent and/or discreet entities, instead focusing attention on the co-constitutive development of identities in a relative material universe. This is to say that from a dialectical vantage, entities are inherently relational “totalities”, or constellations of myriad relationships whose meanings, positions, and values are forever changing as the poles that make up these constellations exert pressures on the whole set. Such totalities are also constitutive of larger totalities upon which they exert pressures in concert and contradiction with a yet broader set of constitutive elements.<sup>69</sup> These units are, as Ollman argues, internally-related, in the double sense that their values are intrinsically based on their constitutive relationships with other units and that they internalize the relationships (in microcosmic form) that make up the totalities of which they are constitutive parts. Ollman charts a path for proper abstractions through a thorough consideration of what he calls their potential “extension” (how broad their relational orbits are said to reach, which depends less on what can be shown to exist and more on what

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similar fashion, emphasizing the important differences between “as a process” and abstraction “as a noun”. “Abstraction”, he writes, “is the process by which simplification takes place, and abstractions are taken to be those representational forms through which this process is stabilized and through which its results circulate.”

<sup>69</sup> Lest this discussion devolve into pure abstraction, it will be useful here to designate some examples of how this method works in practice. Capitalism as a “mode of production”, for example, is a totality made up of a collection of internally-related elements, such as the many forms of capital (money, credit, labor, etc.), the commodity, and the state. Each of these internally-related totalities, when carefully interrogated, can be seen to not only reflect but also internally contain the relations that constitute the whole of the mode of production itself. This is precisely why Marx begins Volume I of *Capital* with the commodity, building outward and upward (but also, in a sense, inward) to broader sets of relations within which the commodity form is situated and into which it figures simultaneously as part and whole. As *Capital* progresses and larger sets of relations come into focus, the commodity as first described begins to shift and transform as it becomes implicated in the functioning of the circuits of capital, as it is seen to embody the contradiction between use and exchange values, and as it internalizes and crystalizes the struggle between differently positioned human actors, such as the wage worker and the capitalist. In this way, the commodity form itself displays an ever-expanding cartography of the mode of production, its own constitutive relations expressing in microcosm the flows, tensions, and transformations in which it becomes enrolled and implicated at ‘higher’ conceptual levels.

sets of relationships will be most germane to a given investigation), “level of generality”<sup>70</sup> (he names seven levels of human relations that exist in Marx, from the individual person fully-contextualized in her/his time and space (level one) to humans as materially existent beings (level seven)), and “vantage point” (the perspective from which a given abstraction is viewed). Taking a common example, a commodity can be abstracted any number of ways through these three modes, whether viewed as a potential use-value in tension with its potential as an exchange-value (bringing into focus its relations with market processes and human needs and desires), or as the product of labor and the container of surplus-value (bringing into focus the labor process, including everything from class struggle to the tendency toward a falling rate of profit with the decreasing organic composition of capital<sup>71</sup>). It would be wholly unsuited, however, to abstract the commodity as something belonging to human nature as such (Ollman’s ‘level five’), as no such commodity form can compelling be shown to belong at this level of abstraction.

Marxian dialectics is thus the study of a world composed of internally-related elements themselves constituted by sets of contradictory forces constantly altering one another in a complex improvisation forever reshaping the whole by way of the parts and the parts by way of the whole, dispassionately disregarding all conventions of space and time. Even in Ollman’s (2003: 17) hands, however, dialectics has yet to find its full expression as a methodology appropriate to the domain of the future, despite his insistence that “the future finds its way into this focus as the likely and possible outcomes of the interaction of...opposing tendencies in the present, as their real potential.” For Ollman, it is the “likely” rather than the “possible” outcomes of such processes that receive the bulk of the

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<sup>70</sup> This mode of abstraction has been taken up at length in anglophone geography, notably through the so-called ‘scale debates’ (see Cox and Mair, 1989; Brenner, 2000 for useful summaries).

<sup>71</sup> See Harvey (2006), Henderson (2013).

attention. Though perhaps an understandable tendency, this methodological choice runs the risk of casting overly anaemic abstractions by virtue of overly static projections of their futures, and resigning the future itself to the approaches of Carroll's Queen of Hearts or *Arrival* protagonist Louise Banks, for whom it is a domain only of *memories*. A critique of casting the future by way of such predetermined possibilities finds good company in debates over Marxism, not least in academic geography.<sup>72</sup> In the infamous preface to *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1970: 21) states: "Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation." Read simply, this statement captures dialectical synchronicity in its most mechanistic, nomothetic expression, wherein forecasting focuses on the 'probable' solutions to only those problems already extant, if not always entirely so, in a given spatio-temporal context, and for which likely resolutions are already in the process of emergence. As McCormick (2012: 729) argues, however, "[t]o experiment with abstraction is not to move thinking away from the material: it is to do something with material effects". Abstraction, as a process that "has as its object the unknown unknowns of potential futures" (McCormack, 2012: 728), can and does play a significant role in shaping present and future realities by not only illustrating but also—and more importantly—by *creating* virtual realities. Indeed, in Marx's likewise infamous statement on the fundamental distinction between the "worst architect" and the "best of bees",<sup>73</sup> such creative abstraction is highly prized. The dialectical imagination is thus a powerful tool

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<sup>72</sup> On the notion of 'natural limits', for example, see Harvey (1974).

<sup>73</sup> "A spider constructs operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement" (Marx (1967: 174).

not only for speculation on the future but also for the production of the future, as a generative agent constantly populating the realm of the possible and urging select possibilities toward the preferential status of the probable.

This is precisely the terrain upon which Lefebvre builds a great many of his intellectual projects. Shifting modes within texts—sometimes in ways that readers continue to find frustrating—he moves from incisive critiques of past and present realities to virtual abstractions of negated-negations, whether un-alienated urban *œuvres* or re-ordered centralities of un-segregated encounter. This makes the Lefebvrian strand of dialectics a peculiarly creative variation, deviating from the Marxian mean in its assertion of a third dialectical energy, a creative actant forever disrupting any presupposed bipolarities and forging new paths in virtual and material spaces alike. It is tempting to read in Lefebvre's triadic movement a restatement or re-articulation of what he viewed as Marx's problematic, as he himself sometimes explained his approach.<sup>74</sup> As Kofman and Lebas (1996: 9-10) argue, however, "Lefebvre's dialectic is not that of Hegel, thesis-antithesis-synthesis, nor one of affirmation-negation-negation found in Marx, but a much more open, ended [sic] movement, bringing together the conflictual and contradictory, and linking theory and practice." For Lefebvre, they write, "[t]he dialectical is not chaotic, rather it highlights the relationship between form and contents and dissolves stable morphologies to such an extent that stability becomes a problem" (Kofman and Lebas, 1996: 10). Through such a dialectical rendering of the world, Lefebvre sought to destabilize common understandings and create space for the production of other

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<sup>74</sup> In "Becoming and the Historical", for example, Lefebvre (2003b: 66) explains his methodological quest for "becoming" thusly: "...ternary or triadic analysis grasps becoming (or at least comes nearer to it than the rest)...The Marxist triad 'statement-negation-negation of the negation' aims to produce becoming, but so far that high ambition has not been fulfilled, in particular as far as the State and the community (which was negated by history and re-established under communism) are concerned."

possibilities. His was a world of “becoming” (Lefebvre, 2003b) which was best approached through a dialectics of “praxis” afforded by the continuous blending of theory and practice.

It is through this unique dialectical process that Lefebvre developed his right to the city. Born of the creative force he uniquely emphasized, the right to the city should be read as a special kind of abstraction. It appears as a materialization or ‘moment’ of the third energy of Lefebvre’s dialectical triad, his own three-headed methodological hydra. It is in one sense an abstraction cast from the patterns and processes of capitalist urbanization he investigated. In this valence, it functions as both explanation and critique. In another valence, however, it functions in “abstract virtuality” (McCormack, 2012), a mode in which it can be used not only to develop and test new potentials and powers, but also to work toward their realization. In his usage, the phrase morphs and slides between these modes, blending the work of critique, explication, creation, and political practice, and refusing any clean separation between them. This is how and why the right to the city is both “a cry and a demand”, both screamed into the virtual void and fought for or practiced in the realm of the possible/present. Examining some salient features of Lefebvre’s right to the city as it moves through these modes of operation will help put contemporary instantiations of the concept in proper perspective.

A useful entry point into Lefebvre’s right to the city is the important—if familiar—provocation that Lefebvre was explicitly not interested in the city. Rather, the target and object of his theorizing was ‘the urban’. The city he knew best and which served as the basis of his investigations was a product of twentieth-century capitalist urbanization, and developed according to the contradictory impulses of the profit imperative by way of the exploitation of labor expanded to mass-scale. It was Paris of the 1960s, a city with an

historic center increasingly scrubbed of its underclasses and an emerging *banlieue* to which they were actively being expelled. The ‘exploding’ cities of Latin America, Mexico City perhaps most of all, were beginning to exhibit similar spatial arrangements according to similar logics, though by very different means (Beyer, 1967; Connelly, 2003). This geography, for Lefebvre, bore out the domination of urban use values by exchange value, in a familiar logic of spatial exploitation. Moreover, his exploration of the dynamics of industrial capital’s ravaging and renovation of traditional urban cores and the associated spatial effects (twin processes described variously as “explosion-implosion”, “condensation-dispersion” or “de-urbanized urbanization” (Lefebvre, 1996: 77; 123)) prefigured what he would two years later term *The Urban Revolution*, whose dark coronation of urbanization as the primary driver of accumulation over and above industrialization would so provoke a young David Harvey, then himself in the throes of his Damascus Road to Marxism (see Harvey, 1973). This industrialization-urbanization tore through old spatial centralities to create new arrangements more suited to a changing political economy, such that while old central city districts were becoming caricatured sites for the collection of consumption revenues, the expulsion of the poor and working classes acts as a safety valve in the process of the exploitation of labor by removing to a safe distance the potential for organizing and activism among these problematic ‘elements’. Thus spatially segregated, Lefebvre’s city was also built upon a multivalent alienation. Its uses largely ordered and prescribed and its users and makers categorized and collated, the modern capitalist city was trending away from its potential as a space of generative encounter with difference. This is the city that Lefebvre’s right to the city explicitly rejects, the capitalist city, the result of a bloodless urbanization for and by expanded and expanding accumulation. But more than this, Lefebvre also rejects the old Paris, the specter of which even then had begun to haunt the prettified districts as “only an object of cultural consumption for tourists, for aestheticism, avid for

spectacles and the picturesque” (Lefebvre 1996: 148). Though the particular contents of this trend find expression from within the “structures of feeling” (Williams, 1977) pertaining in distinct geographies (whether Mexican and Chicano art in Chicago’s Pilsen (Wilson et al., 2004), the aesthetic cult of ‘exposed brick’ in Brooklyn (see Clark, 2015), or the overtly seductive hints at the magical properties of indigenous ingredients worked into artful, delicious, and expensive cocktails in Mexico City (see Ayrelan Iuvino, 2017), it seems not only to have held but indeed accelerated across the gentrifying urban world. As a critique of such investment patterns and associated (cultural) appropriations, Lefebvre’s the right to the city “cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed *right to urban life*” (Lefebvre, 1996: 158, original emphasis).

Still, ‘the urban’ remains an elusive target for Lefebvre, as for those in his wake. Part of this difficulty is rooted in the duality of this particular abstraction. For Lefebvre, ‘the urban’ refers to both the processes of capitalist urbanization and also the latent possibilities of this ‘totality’. That is, the urban here is cast with both actual and virtual contents. The majority of *The Right to the City* is devoted to an examination of the former, while the tantalizingly suggestive quotes isolated by most contemporary academics interested in this concept illustrate those few moments in the text when Lefebvre allows the future to push through the tired seams of the present. Mitchell (2011) illustrates this tension well by way of the so-called ‘tent cities’ of the US, in claiming that “what must be fought for, in other words, is not only the production of tent cities, but especially the destruction of a system that has made them an inevitable part of the urban landscape”, a struggle that would at once insist not only on their right to exist but also and more importantly on a different kind of urbanization, on processes of urban development that would “make them superfluous, rather than necessary”. In the first



instance, then, Lefebvre is after that sense of 'the urban' in which cities are made according to the dictates of exchange value and the accumulation of capital, along the lines proposed by Harvey (2008: 37), who proposes the right to the city as "greater democratic control over the production and utilization of the surplus." To exercise the right to the urban from this angle would necessitate a fundamental reorganization of political economy beyond a given locality, though this would seem an obvious place to start.

In a second sense, 'the urban' refers to a largely undefined field of virtual possibility often specified only in the negative, or as the negation of 'the urban' in the former sense. The two are thus internally related, inextricably linked, and co-constitutive, as the exercise of the right to the urban in the second, virtual, and future sense is impossible without its first, material, and present expression. This is precisely why Lefebvre's rejection of 'the city' was only partial, despite his seeming insistence to the contrary. His call for "a renewed right to urban life" over and against 'the city' is a rejection only of the city as then constituted, and a demand for a city that can be radically other. To borrow from his own context, Paris was for Lefebvre a material city worth desiring based on its potential to be radically remade according to practices not subject to the logic of capital accumulation. In this second register, the right to the city entails the collective ability of the city's producers and residents to craft the city, as Harvey (2012: xvi, following Park, 1967) puts it, "after their heart's desire". Lefebvre's few statements about this virtual terrain suggest that this urban future would retain many of the material qualities of the modernist city, albeit in unalienated manifestations. Notable among these are notions of

mediation, difference, and centrality,<sup>75</sup> which run through Lefebvre's analysis in both their alienated material forms and, occasionally, in their virtual guises.

A first cut at urban mediation brings into focus the privileged position of cities as spaces of concentration for increasingly global flows of information, money, goods, and people (Sasson, 2001; 2012). As Blokland et al. (2015: 655) concisely explain, 'the urban' is "a specific sociopolitical and institutional setting, in which various scales—from the local to the transnational—are layered, condensed, and materialized." That is, contemporary cities draw to themselves immense material and virtual resources, which in turn pull on webs of connections to the realms of production, exchange, and consumption, themselves subject to any number of geopolitical, financial, and other entanglements. Cities thus become the point of interface among these worlds, the places where the virtual becomes real and the real becomes virtual,<sup>76</sup> where the global and the local converge and collide, and where time and space are expanded and collapsed at ever-increasing rates<sup>77</sup> as value chases after its momentary realization or ultimate destruction. This positions the city, first, as mediator between scales of economic authority and processes of production. Lefebvre carried this point further, arguing that this quantitative phenomenon had achieved such a degree of significance as to constitute a qualitative change. He argued that the urban now figures, *per se*, as a factor in the global production process: "...by grouping centres of decision-making, the modern city intensifies by organizing the *exploitation* of the whole society (not only the working

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<sup>75</sup> This triadic exploration of mediation, centrality, and difference in Lefebvre's right to the city follows a similar treatment by Schmid (2012).

<sup>76</sup> For instance, through the realization of military and police operations or financial geopolitics conceived in urban "centres of decision-making" (Lefebvre, 1996) or the production of tradable 'futures' and the rapid centrifugal spiraling of related credit instruments exponentially-distanced from actual commodities, respectively.

<sup>77</sup> See Moreno (2014).

classes, but also other non-dominant social classes). This is not the passive place of production or the concentration of capitals, but that of the *urban* intervening as such in production (in the *means* of production)” (1996: 109-110, original emphasis). Indeed, beyond the command functions of global financial capital arguably long-concentrated in cities, urban space itself has in recent years become a preferred investment target and safe haven for capital of various origins, including so-called ‘dark money’ (see Story and Saul, 2015; Wainwright, 2014). Concomitant reorganization of state processes and spaces constitutes an important correlate to this mediation of economic and social activity. As Brenner (2000: 366) argues, “the urban scale is not only a localized arena for global capital accumulation, but a strategic regulatory coordinate in which a multiscalar reterritorialization of state institutions is currently unfolding.” Not least in Latin America, the realization of such reterritorialization of urban state space has encouraged academics, activists, and policy-makers to use the language of the right to the city as a way to productively engage the ‘metropolitan question’,<sup>78</sup> especially as sprawling megacities outgrow their political boundaries in waves of expansive settlement.

Their concentrations also enable the production of ‘centrality’ in cities, another multivalent term in Lefebvrian analysis. Aside from these already noted agglomeration effects long under the purview of the most disinterested scientific approaches of economic and urban geography, Lefebvrian centralities entail the full expression of urban use values. Notable among these is Lefebvre’s notion of the *oeuvre*, an amorphous concept whose literal translation is ‘work’. From this vantage, both the urban itself, writ large, and the city in particular, are not only products but works, as in the

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<sup>78</sup> See Parnell and Pieterse (2010), and Fernandes (2007) for a discussion of this issue in Brazil and throughout Latin America. See also Purcell (2002) for a nearly *ad nauseum* hypothetical extension of the right to the city as the right to participation in urban governance. This question also finds significant relevance in Mexico City, to be discussed below and later in Chapter Four.

sense of works of art (Mitchell, 2003; Purcell, 2013). Such works are the collective expressions of urban residents and urban workers, comprised of everything from the architectural and artistic feats of its highest-order artisans to the quotidian secretions and enactments of 'ordinary' culture<sup>79</sup> and the all-important 'rhythms' of everyday life.<sup>80</sup>

Foregrounding the role of common activities in the production of the *oeuvre*, Lefebvre's notion of centrality is shaped by an approach to the city quite different from that of other prominent Marxist urbanists, such as Castells (1983), whose interest centered on collective consumption, or Harvey (2006), whose focus was the role of urban space in production crises (Kipfer et al., 2014). It is in this way that the right to the city becomes, according to Purcell (2013: 561), "a conjoint claim by the users of urban space to take greater control over its production." Just any role in this production of the *oeuvre* will not do, however. Lefebvre's insistence on centrality, heavily influenced by the expulsion of the working classes from central Paris, entails a claim both to significant influence in the production of urban life and to the physical spaces of cities. As Mitchell (2003) argues, access to the latter conditions access to the former of these claims. Taking exemplary material from the urban United States, especially with regard to the plight of homeless populations, Mitchell convincingly demonstrates that the bundle of citizenship rights often taken to be part and parcel of the right to the city mean little if their bearers can simply be expelled from the city legally beholden to them.

In ascribing such importance to centrality, Lefebvre's right to the city also affirms the role cities have long played as the stage of encounters with difference. In this instance, the right to the city operates not only as an investigative and explanatory vehicle for demonstrating how cities have historically facilitated such encounters, however, but also

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<sup>79</sup> See Williams (2002).

<sup>80</sup> See Merrifield (2006).

as an explicit critique of the erasure of difference in the city of his day. As he would later argue more fully and forcefully in *The Production of Space*, this critique is addressed in part to the proliferation of “abstract space”. “Abstract space”, Lefebvre (1991: 49) explains, “functions ‘objectally’, as a set of things/signs and their formal relationships... Formal and quantitative, it erases distinctions, as much those which derive from nature and (historical) time as those which originate in the body (age, sex, ethnicity).” This is the space of defined uses and settled meanings, where “consensus” all but guarantees adherence to a set of rules that govern spatial practice. Though his abstract space was that of capitalism, of urban planning, and of the capitalist state, it nevertheless remained for him a “complex” category which “has nothing simple about it: it is not transparent and cannot be reduced either to a logic or to a strategy” (Lefebvre, 1991: 49). Perhaps its most salient feature is its dialectical tension with the “differential space” it is forever attempting to erase or suppress. In its proliferation, abstract space ‘papers over’ different interpretations, meanings, and uses of space in much the same way that Lefebvre’s “urban fabric” is said to spread urban relations to an ever-greater share of the earth’s surface (Lefebvre, 1991; 1996; 2003a), and, once instantiated, attempts to suppress ‘moments’ of differential space, “which it carries within itself and which [seek] to emerge from it” (Lefebvre, 1991: 50). Conflicts of abstract and differential space find countless material expressions, from anti-homeless measures in U.S. cities (Mitchell, 2003) and the clearing of the Occupy protesters from New York’s Zucatti Park (Moynihan, 2012), to the disappearance of traditional ‘informal’ services performed by neighborhood figures in increasingly ‘desirable’ areas of Mexico City (Morse, 2015). In its virtual guise, the right to the city is a valorization of differential space and the potential its expressions may hold. Elsewhere<sup>81</sup> articulated as “a right to difference”, Lefebvre is

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<sup>81</sup> See Merrifield (2006: 113), who argues that for Lefebvre, “[t]he right to difference cried out as loud as the right to the city.”

here interested in the possibility of a variety of expressions of difference, from those corporally embodied to those realized in alternative practices in and of space, “of the prioritization of the lived over the conceived” (Merrifield, 2006: 115), and of “representational spaces” over and above “representations of space” (Lefebvre, 1991).

This irrepressible right to difference has had a notable impact on the organization and orientation of struggles for and articulations of the right to the city in practice. Most importantly, the valorization of heterogeneity has encouraged the formation of coalitions of interests that often vary considerably. The Brooklyn-based Right to the City Alliance, for example, boasts some forty-nine member organizations and twenty-three “allies” across the U.S., whose nominal purviews include such wide-ranging issues as racial and ethnic justice, tenants’ rights and anti-eviction organizing, environmental justice, education, and neighborhood and community empowerment (Fisher et al., 2013; The Right to the City Alliance, 2016). Marcuse (2009: 191) lauds the special potential of the right to the city to bring together interests often considered divergent in the extreme, even suggesting that “it is a combination of the deprived and the discontented who will lead the push for the right to the city”.<sup>82</sup> In advocating for such broad coalitions as a way to propel the right to the city forward in disparate contexts, Brown and Kristiansen (2009: 37) emphasize the need to collect, unite, and strengthen existing social and political resources and groups, as they put it, “drawing together existing strands.” Purcell (2013: 566) likewise sees such potential in the right to the city, but as a “conjoint claim” rather than a collective one, a conceptualization which “emphasize[s] that the mobilized entity,

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<sup>82</sup> The categories of “the deprived” and “the discontented” include respectively: the “excluded”, the “working class”, and the “directly oppressed”; and the “small business people”, the “gentry”, the “capitalists”, the “establishment intelligentsia”, the “politically powerful”, the “alienated”, the “insecure”, the “hapless lackeys of power”, and the “underwriters and beneficiaries of the established cultural and ideological hegemonic attitudes and beliefs” (Marcuse, 2009: 190-191).

the claimant of rights, consists of multiple bodies joined together (conjoint), rather than as a single, unified body (collective).” For Purcell (2013: 572), such claimants can and should establish “networks of equivalence” in pursuit of a right to the city conceived of as a process rather than an end. Purcell’s equivalence (following Laclau and Mouffe, 2001) would thus allow movements to steer toward relations with difference resembling those of a dialectical right to the city, in which the theoretical notion of identity/difference is realized through a union of interests that refuses both interest-driven hierarchies and the sublimation of identities.

This triadic understanding of the urban as a level of mediation between nested or interwoven scales, as the seat and site of centrality, and as “the place where difference lives” (Mitchell, 2003: 18) again, owes much to Lefebvre’s experience of Paris, and, as Merrifield (2006) convincingly argues, to his experience of Navarreanx, the medieval town of his birth on the northwestern edge of the French Pyrenees. But while the Parisian expulsion of the underclasses propelled his insistence on the right to centrality and the primacy of what the great modelers of the ‘second city’ were already calling the ‘CBD’ (Central Business District)<sup>83</sup> as the center of power and the privileged place of encounter, haunting memories of the provincial harvest festival of the medieval village surreptitiously waged a campaign of conceptual insurgence under the banner of free play, experimentation, and, perhaps most of all, unproductive consumption. ‘Meandering’ along both currents, the right he speaks of makes demands in the register of a legal and political order that it simultaneously criticizes as not only inadequate but inhumane and destructive to the human species and its environs. While obliged to work within the prevailing mode of production, the right to the city seeks to sew and tend the landscape

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<sup>83</sup> See Park and Burgess (1925). See also Ford (1996) for a treatment of Latin American cities in similar fashion.

for moments of urban emancipation from this very same political economy. In practice, this has led to the aforementioned difficulties in defining, instrumentalizing, and even assessing the utility of the concept. There are those who would see it more carefully specified and pushed further into the legal realm (Fernandes, 2007; Parnell and Pieterse, 2010), those for whom its “capaciousness” or ‘strategic fuzziness’ remains a strength (Attoh, 2011; Mitchell and Heynan, 2009), and those who consider its political or analytical potential thoroughly compromised (Merrifield, 2011; Uitermark et al., 2012; Vradis, 2012). Recognizing the right to the city as a dialectical concept, however, reveals both the legitimacy and the limitations of any and all such perspectives. Considering the right to the city as an analytical tool, debating its political utility, and seeking to implement it in practice will inevitably desiccate or crystallize what is otherwise an inherently fluid idea, “freezing” the motion of a dialectical process into what can most aptly be described as a “dialectical image” or “stilled life” (Wright, 2009). Attoh’s (2011) well-argued claim that scholarship on the right to the city ought to begin with the recognition of Waldron’s (1993: 33, cited in Attoh 2011: 679) proclamation that “the institutionalization of any right [particularly within a world characterized by scarcity and conflict] poses tradeoffs” thus slightly misrepresents the intentions of the right to the city in its dialectical, Lefebvrian valence, as does Mitchell’s (2003) emphasis on the formative attitude toward rights offered by Marx.<sup>84</sup> While this is certainly a valid argument, as Waldron states and Attoh affirms, “within a world characterized by scarcity and conflict”, to seek to put the right to the city to work in such a spatio-temporal context is already to have made a choice that imposes stark limits on the concept, something rarely recognized in the literature or in the history of the concept’s practical application.

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<sup>84</sup> “Between equal rights, force decides”, Marx (1967: 225) stated in his discussion on the working day. Mitchell (2003) argues (following Harvey) that this does not constitute a wholesale rejection of the language or institution of rights, per se, but merely an insistence on accompanying force.



That is, while the necessity of difficult choices in deploying the right to the city is a point well taken, this obligation is rooted not only in the concept's nature as a kind of right inevitably in conflict with other rights, but also and more importantly in its nature as a dialectical abstraction.

Hearne (2014: 15) insists that "Debate centres on defining the right to the city", and that "A central task for urban scholars and practitioners is to work out not only what the right to the city means, but also how it can be practically achieved (Marcuse, 2012). This is essential if the right to the city is to move beyond rhetoric and contribute to a real transformation of the lives of deprived and alienated urban inhabitants (Brown, 2013)." This thrust to 'figure out' what is really at the core of the right to the city, to unmask it or uncover its truest hard kernel and to milk it for all its narrow practical utility, is a common and unfortunate analytical misstep. Understanding the right to the city should not be an exercise in 'either/or' thinking, but rather 'both/and'. Properly—that is, dialectically—conceived, the right to the city conceivably connects everything at issue in urban life. This is not to say that all its inestimable antipodes pull with equal force on its meaning, nor that its relations are static or even stable. Any instantiation or conceptualization of the right to the city will by the nature of abstraction impose certain limits on its ability to morph and shift, on the ability of its users to forge, deepen, or sever relationships and develop or recover new, extant, or past horizons. It will emphasize certain connections and possibilities at the expense of others, creating or revealing opportunities even as it forecloses upon others. As the next section will elucidate, the proponents of the right to the city in Mexico City have made admirable attempts to leave their vision radically open, making liberal use of the expansive modifiers "complex and collective" to explain the persistence and value of ambiguity in their right to the city. But even this careful praxis has run afoul of the violences of abstraction, as the rapacious forces of urban

(re)development outstrip the material Mexico City to which they addressed their critiques and the institutions to and by means of which they made their demands.

### **Realizing the Right to Mexico City**

MUP and HIC leaders of the late 1980s and early 1990s found in the right to the city a concept more applicable than any other to the geographically boundless and practically unfathomable problems then confronting Mexico City. The idea presented them with the opportunity to elaborate connections they had long seen between burgeoning crises conventionally considered in isolation within the atomistic ambits of the Federal District's already enormous bureaucracy. Like the MUP itself, the right to the city promised the possibility of bringing together disparate issues and voices, to illustrate the links between, to choose just one example, two decades of turbulence in the regional political economy and the ravages wrought on the city's air quality, transit system, and water and waste infrastructures. As HIC ex-President Enrique Ortiz Flores (2008: 1) would later explain:

The right to the city is located at the center of great contradictions and the highly dynamic interactions generated in contemporary society. From the positioning assumed and the effectiveness of the paths followed to address these phenomena will emerge the possible organization of the city as space of collective co-existence and of viable and sustainable good life for all of its inhabitants.

In a similar vein, HIC President Lorena Zárate (2011: 269) would also add:

As a complex right focused on a highly populated territory of multiple relevance for the country and with severe pressures on environmental conditions, the right to the city must propose a vision that surpasses the specialized approaches of distinct disciplines, professional practices, and the structure of public administration, as well as the individualistic and consumerist attitude prevailing among a large proportion of inhabitants.

Its capaciousness, however, was far from the only thing that attracted early proponents to this language. As it was taken up in Mexico City, the right to the city created harmonic resonance with other demands and struggles then finding their form in the language of

rights, in a political climate that was in the early stages of radical realignment. Indeed, as Zárte (2011: 269) continues: “Human rights and democracy are not abstract phenomena; they are attributions and processes of specific people in specific places. As we conceive it, the right to the city can and should also be a tool through which to territorialize the former and deepen the latter.” As calls for democratization gained momentum, including especially pleas for the political autonomy for the capital city, for ridding the political process of fraud and corruption, and for ending the reign of the fracturing PRI, ‘rights talk’ gained considerable political purchase.

Though the common story in Mexico City civil society has the right to the city emerging from conversations, meetings, and forums convened between the 1992 Rio de Janeiro ‘Earth Summit’ (The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) and the 1996 ‘Habitat II’ conference (the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlement, or ‘City Summit’) in Istanbul,<sup>85</sup> the concept first began to emerge at HIC and related local organizations as early as 1989 (Ortiz Flores, 1990), especially in the writings and activities of Enrique Ortiz Flores. An architect by training and lifelong participant in and leader of Mexico City civil society organizations, Ortiz has amassed considerable credibility and political capital among diverse groups ranging from residents of the city’s peripheries to the mayor’s office and the Association of Engineers and Architects of Mexico (AIAM).<sup>86</sup> When I met him in 2014, Ortiz was serving as past

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<sup>85</sup> See Brown (2013) for a brief history of the right to the city in the context of these meetings, and the role played therein by HIC.

<sup>86</sup> In October of 2015, Ortiz was awarded the National Prize for Architecture in a grand ceremony at the Palace of Mining (Palacio de Minería) in the city’s historic center. Having been privileged to attend at the invitation of HIC, I witnessed Ortiz’s humble acceptance of this great honor, choking back tears as his life’s work was celebrated by his peers and collaborators, by political figures who had been allies and adversaries (including Mayor Miguel Ángel Mancera), and by the city’s most vulnerable residents whose conditions it had been his longtime ambition and cause to improve. Some of these last had brought handmade signs to the otherwise debonair affair, such as those depicted in Figure 2.1 which together read: “Enrique, thanks to your social struggle, I have a home” (“Enrique, gracias a su lucha social, tengo un hogar”).

president of HIC-AL, based in Mexico City's slowly gentrifying Roma Sur, just off of the crowded north-south arterial known as the *Avenida de los Insurgentes* (Avenue of the Insurgents). Though nearly 80 years old, Ortiz maintains a schedule packed with government and civil society meetings, interviews with press outlets, research activities on projects that span the gamut of local to global urban issues, phone calls, and writing. A prolific author, the research reports, position papers, editorials, essays, and other manuscripts he has penned over his many active decades can fill a small library (and do, as I can personally attest), and he works comfortably in English and Spanish. He has for decades been motivated by ideas of autoconstruction at the city's peripheries and "the social production of habitat", and by an expansive notion of rights. On the one hand, he has long advocated for the rights guaranteed to the city's residents by the various levels of the Mexican state. On the other hand, he has also pursued rights that are far more complex than any straightforward juridical sense the term 'right' may convey.<sup>87</sup> His advocacy of the right to the city spans and draws upon his time spent as the head or leading member of Habitat International Coalition and a number of local organizations,<sup>88</sup> his deep personal and working relationships with a wide web of civil society groups (especially the leadership of some segments of the MUP), his ongoing collaborations with the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the Autonomous University of Mexico (UAM), and other national and international universities, and his longstanding connections to various offices, personages, and arms of the local and federal state. In meetings with local civil society or government functionaries, with transnational funding

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<sup>87</sup> It is also worth noting that the Spanish word "derecho" has several meanings in Mexico (as elsewhere). It can mean "right" or "duty" in the juridico-legal sense, "right" in the moral sense (such as 'the right thing to do', or 'upright' or 'honest' when applied to a person, group, or institution), "law" (writ-large), "straight" in the sense of geographical direction or position (as in 'straight ahead' or 'straighten those chairs'), or "straight" in a mixological sense (as in a mezcal with no ice).

<sup>88</sup> Such as *Casa y Ciudad*, the Operational Center for Housing and Population, (*Centro Operacional de Vivienda y Poblamiento*, hereafter COPEVI), and others.

agencies or international non-governmental organizations, Ortiz's analysis and opinions carry significant weight, and his name alone can open a great many doors in Mexico City.



Figure 2.1: Signs reading “Enrique, thanks to your social struggle, I have a home” displayed at an event honoring Enrique Ortiz Flores, who was awarded the National Prize for Architecture, 10/23/2015. Photography by author.

An early proponent of the right to the city, Ortiz has long considered it a right both “complex” and “collective”, asserting at once a universality of application and belonging and a composition that requires negotiation in practice (Ortiz Flores, 2008). For Ortiz, the right to the city applies and properly belongs to all residents of the city, and moreover to all human beings by virtue of its consideration as a human right. Its complexity is related, in his formulations, both to its malleability and limitless connections and relations to and with other rights and issues, and to its status as a right which contains, covers, ensures,

and/or protects other rights and relations (Ortiz Flores, 2008). This complex nature goes a long way toward explaining the deep entanglement of the right to the city and other rights and principles to be found in his work, especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as “the right to housing” (*el derecho a la vivienda*) and “the right to habitat” (*el derecho al hábitat*), along with urban dwellers’ rights to “improve their quality of life” (*el derecho a mejorar la calidad de su vida*) and “participate in the planning and development of their habitat” (*el derecho a participar en la planificación y gestión del hábitat*). Moreover, contemporary instantiations of the right to the city such as that found in the Charter bear striking resemblance to his early formulations, whether called by the name of the right to the city or not. For example, the six “strategic areas” of the Charter thematically align fairly tightly with seven “rights” Ortiz outlined in a report concluding a June 1995 meeting of “more than 600 civil organizations”, including parts of the MUP, aimed at producing a “charter of citizen rights” (Ortiz Flores, 1995: 42), and later a “Charter of Rights to the City and to Housing” (*Carta por los Derechos a la Ciudad y la Vivienda*). Ortiz’s influence over the conceptual development and the political deployment of the right to the city in Mexico City can thus hardly be overstated. He has advocated for the concept’s inclusion in policy conversations and popular movements for nearly three decades, and is one of the primary vectors through which countless persons in the city have come to understand this notion. His political influence also ensures that the right to the city retains a perhaps unexpected relevance in contemporary politics.<sup>89</sup>

The bulk of the credit for advancing the right to the city politically, however, is usually given to the MUP, and to Jaime Rello Gómez, leader of the Revolutionary Popular Union of Emiliano Zapata (*Unión Popular Revolucionaria Emiliano Zapata*, UPREZ) and

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<sup>89</sup> This will be taken up explicitly in Chapter Four with respect to the influence of the right to the city in Mexico’s City’s 2017 Constitution.

National Democratic Congress of the Urban Popular Movement (*Congreso Nacional Democrático*, hereafter MUP-CND) in particular. A priest by training from a middle-class background, Rello has lived and worked in some the city's poorest areas, such as the infamous Nezahualcóyotl in the neighboring State of Mexico, and has taken a vow of poverty in solidarity with the communities he often represents. As with Ortiz, Rello's reputation is weighty, and the respect he and his opinions are shown have undoubtedly played a role in garnering support for the right to the city for several decades. In meetings with high-ranking government ministers, civil society leaders, academics, or angry residents, rooms go quiet and attention is paid when Rello speaks. Moreover, the political capital exercised by the MUP was important for bringing local government to the table in 2007 and 2008, and the MUP has been credited with much of the organizing work that lead to the Charter's development (Adler, 2015a; Adler, 2015b; Wigle and Zárate, 2010). Indeed, it is through the MUP that the right to the city took on force as a political entity in Mexico City. Speaking at the July 2010 public ceremony for the Charter, Rello (2010) called its signing "possibly the clearest instrument for continuing a long-awaited dream: converting this piece of land, with so much history, into an entity, a state with its own constitution. Our great city must receive that which corresponds to it. A city of rights for all. There is no going back." In this telling statement, Rello articulated two agendas for the right to the city.<sup>90</sup> The second is the familiar goal of "a city of rights for all" found throughout the academic and popular literature on the right to the city, and in

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<sup>90</sup> Adler (2015a) commits a grave analytical error in quoting Rello thusly: "The Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City, without a doubt, is the clearest instrument to continue our long-awaited dream...a city of rights for everyone. There is no turning back." Aside from some important differences of translation, Adler's omission of a crucial portion of Rello's sentiment is exemplary of a common problem in interpreting these events, that of glossing over or evading entirely the role of the impending "political reform" in the history of the right to the city in Mexico City. To miss or ignore this crucial factor is to leave little beyond coincidence to explain why the Charter was finally developed after some twenty years of advocacy, and why it gained such widespread and influential institutional and municipal support.

the body of work produced in Mexico City in conjunction with HIC and Enrique Ortiz Flores. The first pursuit, however, turned out to be the operative one in the context of the Charter's development, by linking the right to the city to demands for "political reform" that were reaching a fever pitch near the end of the new millennium's first decade.

The lynchpin for transforming the right to the city from simply a favorite concept of notable activists into a political agenda and instrument was the office of Mexico City's mayor, occupied from 2006 through 2012 by Marcelo Ebrard Casaubón. A leading member of the nominally-leftist PRD, Ebrard was the fifth consecutive mayor of the Federal District from his party. In interviews and casual conversations, I was repeatedly (and nearly unanimously) told that Ebrard had strong working relationships with Mexico City's civil society organizations. His willingness to attend meetings in the offices of NGOs (such as HIC-AL) rather than insisting that any and all meetings be held behind closed doors in the chambers of the local state was often cited as exemplary of his attitude toward cooperation and his openness to ideas and proposals originating outside his party or administration. Collegial cooperation and a genuine spirit of progressivism, however, were not the primary reasons (despite some claims to the contrary) that Ebrard became interested in the right to the city. As he explicitly stated at several public events (Ebrard Casaubón, 2008; 2010), his interest in the right to the city was primarily as a vehicle for realizing the Federal District's "political reform", a process that had then been under discussion for some years. The first step was the granting of the municipal franchise vis-a-vis the city's executive authority, granted by national constitutional amendment in 1996 and first exercised in 1997. Ten years later, Ebrard and other powerful voices demanded even more political autonomy for the city, including constitutional recognition as an autonomous, self-governing state within the Mexican Union (and thus an end to federal management), along with a constitution. In talks with



MUP-CND leaders and others in 2007, Ebrard began to consider the right to the city a viable means by which to pursue precisely these ends.

In January of 2008, the World Social Forum<sup>91</sup> convened in Mexico City's *Zocalo* (central plaza), supported by funding from Ebrard's government. One of the tents at this event was devoted to the idea of "the right to the city and to habitat" (Zárate, 2011). Ebrard, finally swayed by these activities, agreed that a Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City was warranted (Anonymous, personal communication, 6/24/2014). In participation with MUP-CND leaders, the Ebrard government formalized a "promotional committee" (the *Comité Promotor de la Carta de la Ciudad de México por el Derecho a la Ciudad*, hereafter CPCCMDC) for the development of the Charter in April of 2008, including both Jaime Rello Gómez and Enrique Ortiz Flores. Along with the MUP-CND (who is officially credited with its integration), the CPCCMDC also included the Federal District's Secretary of Government, HIC-AL, the Federal District's Human Rights Commission (*Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal*, hereafter CDHDF), the Coalition of Civil Society Organizations for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (*Espacio de Coordinación de Organizaciones Civiles sobre Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales*, or *Espacio DESC*), and the office of the Attorney General for Social Affairs (*la Procuraduría Social del Distrito Federal*). According to Lorena Zárate (2011: 264), then Regional Coordinator of HIC-AL, the CPCCMDC conducted over 35 meetings throughout 2008-2009, "to coordinate, discuss, systematize, and draft the contents of the charter and to monitor and evaluate the process." To promote the process and circulate ideas, the CPCCMDC created "pamphlets, a blog, leaflets, and a video specifically

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<sup>91</sup> In 2008, the World Social Forum was 'decentralized', and was held simultaneously in multiple cities across the globe, including Mexico City. This was a departure from previous years in which a single city (or, in the sole case of 2006, three cities) played host to the event.

oriented to animate the process”, and committee members also offered interviews to media outlets and participated in roundtables, workshops, and conferences (Zárate, 2011: 264). By January of 2010, CPCCMDC members reported that over 3,000 people had participated in some part of the Charter’s elaboration. These included laypersons solicited for interviews at public events, and academics, activists, and government officials who had spoken in meetings or offered written proposals, including at local events attended by Ebrard. The CPCCMDC also drew upon documents and ideas previously developed by other bodies, such as the inaugural World Assembly of Inhabitants held in Mexico City in 2000 (Zárate, 2011), the Global Charter for the Right to the City first elaborated at the inaugural World Social Forum in 2000 in Rio de Janeiro, the 2008 Program of City Education and Knowledge (*el Programa de Ciudad Educadora y del Conocimiento*), the 2009 Program of Human Rights of the Federal District, and the 2008 Diagnostic, a report on the state of human rights in the city produced by CPCCMDC member organization CDHDF (CPCCMDC, 2011).

The Charter, signed by Ebrard and other ministers in a public ceremony at the Municipal Theatre on July 13 of 2010, was the ultimate result of this process of consultation and debate. The main text of the document spans some fifty-seven pages in printed form, exclusive of its associated materials and list of signatories,<sup>92</sup> and is divided into four sections: a preamble which outlines the Charter’s objectives and places the document in historical and political context; Chapter One, which defines the right to the city and the

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<sup>92</sup> As of September 2011 the Charter boasted 257 organizational signatories (aside from individual signatories, which are not listed in the printed version), grouped together by the CPCCMDC (2011) as: CPCCMDC members (5); academic institutions (6); guild societies (3); indigenous and peasant organizations of indigenous villages and communities (38); ejidos and villages (21); cooperatives (11); small commerce organizations and public workers (13); unions (7); transit associations (11); civil organizations (72); women’s organizations (8); LGBTTI rights organizations (9); social organizations (41); and habitat unions (12).

entities involved in its pursuance in Mexico City;<sup>93</sup> Chapter Two, which lays out the six “strategic foundations” of the Charter and nine “guidelines for implementation”; and Chapter Three, which, among other things, posits standards by which violations and successful implementation of the right to the city may be judged. The bulk of the text is given over to the explication of the six foundations of the right to the city as elaborated in Chapter Two (CPCCMDC, 2011; Wigle and Zárate, 2010):

- 1) Full exercise of human rights in the city; for a city of human rights
- 2) The social function of the city, of land, and of property; for a city for all: inclusive, solidary, equitable
- 3) Democratic management of the city; for a politically active [participatory] and socially responsible city
- 4) Democratic production of the city and in the city; for a socially productive city
- 5) Sustainable and responsible management of environmental, cultural and energy resources as common goods in the city; for a viable and environmentally sustainable city
- 6) Democratic and equitable enjoyment of the city; for an open, free, critical, and enjoyable city

To be sure, the breadth of issues covered by these six areas of focus is reflective both of the particular makeup of the CPCCMDC and the collection of contributions it solicited from the public in the course of drafting the Charter and of the growing set of environmental, political, and other problems then confronting Mexico City. The fundamental role played by human rights in the document, for instance, can be traced to the important institutional participation of the CDHDF in the CPCCMDC, to the earliest writings of Enrique Ortiz Flores, and to the attention increasingly paid to human rights as the violence of President Felipe Calderón’s *sexenio* spread from the rural domains of the large drug cartels to the country’s major cities and the tally of missing persons soared to

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<sup>93</sup> Interestingly, section 1.3 (‘Territorial Ambit’) addresses the Charter to the “Delegations [boroughs] of the D.F. [Federal District] and their urban and rural areas”, and speaks of the need to increase powers of metropolitan coordination as part of the “political reform” process (CPCCMDC, 2011). Indeed, it is telling that the right to the city was never framed as the right to city in the Federal District, but rather always as the right to the city in Mexico City, a legal entity which did not then exist. This is yet another illustration of the deep entanglement of the Charter’s politics with those of the program of ‘political reform’.

over twenty-thousand, and those violently killed during his term to over one-hundred-thousand (Hernandez, 2012; see also Tuckman, 2012a). With demands so massive, the Charter reads like the wish list for an urban utopia. According at least to the civil society membership of the CPCCMDC, this is precisely how it is supposed to function, as the highest aspirations that can be imagined, the perfection of Mexico City as “the city we dream of” (see Zárata, 2011), as the first musings initially christened this vision.

As already mentioned, however, the Charter is no kind of law and carries within itself no possibility of realizing its demands. As soon as the public pomp and ceremonious circumstance subsided, the reason for the CPCCMDC and the political energy that birthed and animated it (emanating from the Mayor’s office) evaporated. Without a public mandate, in other words, the coalition<sup>94</sup> that had been the CPCCMDC transformed into

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<sup>94</sup> It is certainly tempting to call this organization of forces, institutions, groups, and persons a ‘movement’, especially in the wake of the Charter’s endorsement and the dissolution of the CPCCMDC. From an academic perspective, this grouping would easily fit most definitions of an urban social movement, from the narrow, as in Castells’s (1983) usage—wherein ‘urban social movement’ status is reserved for mobilizations that are successful in garnering some measure of their collective consumption demands—to the general, such as that of Nielson (2009:114), who defines a social movement as “the organisation of multiple forms of materially grounded and locally generated skilled activity around a rationality expressed and organised by (would-be) hegemonic actors, and against the hegemonic projects articulated by other such actors to change or maintain a dominant structure of entrenched needs and capacities and the social formation in which it inheres, in part or in whole.” Given its varied focus on issues not only of collective consumption, identity and community privileges, and other goals aimed directly at the state, the coalition falls uncomfortably among discussions of so-called ‘new social movements’ (see Habermas 1981, Young 1990, or see critical reviews of ‘new social movement theory’ by Beuchler, 1995, Pichardo, 1997) and the demand-less ‘political movements’ Swyngedouw (2012) identifies. Whether or not this coalition is reasonably considered a movement by academic standards, however, is in many ways the wrong question. In Mexico City it is simply not described in this way. In this context, the Spanish word *movimiento* (movement) invariably refers to the MUP, which is considered *the* movement. Other descriptors are sometimes used, especially *plataforma* (which can be translated as ‘movement’, but is in this case better translated as ‘platform’, which can refer to a position, a document, or a group pursuing something such as a position or document), though I found it necessary in interviews and casual conversations to be quite specific when asking questions about the right to the city. *Plataforma*, for instance, could mean the coalition that gave rise to the Charter, the Charter itself, the group that still meets on a semi-regular basis to discuss further action in the wake of the Charter, or more likely it could refer to efforts to improve the Global Charter for the Right to the City, in which many of these same local persons are involved. Because the aim of this chapter is to understand the right to the city in

an entirely different sort of political entity, one without any formal authority and with only the strength of their individual organizations and relationships to use as resources in pursuit of the right to the city. Indeed, in the wake of the Charter's endorsement the right to the city became, or at the very least was more fully recognized by its advocates as a relational program, and the Charter a relational device. That is, in line with the critiques of rights talk stretching back to Marx noted above, it became apparent in Mexico City almost immediately after the Charter's endorsement that it required the backing of significant force if it was to have any political purchase. Out of this realization came several arguments about how to proceed. Some coalition members posited the important reminder that the Charter, though important, was intended by many (including especially Ebrard) as a stepping stone on the path to a constitution. Others suggested that the Charter itself should be given the force of law, and that its legal recognition should be sought through the Legislative Assembly. Still others proposed similar charters be sought at the level of the delegation, with each sub-municipal unit defining and legally establishing its own right to the city priorities. Representing the Government of the Federal District (hereafter GDF), Undersecretary of Government Juan José García Ochoa synthesized several of these options into a three-pronged approach: the construction of "a culture of the right to the city", "the modification of the legal framework" within which it exists, and the development of a constitution to "integrate and substantiate this new right" (García Ochoa, 2014: 12). Seven years later, the city would indeed have a constitution, though this advance would travel a different path than many

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its geographical and temporal origins and the wealth of its political and other entanglements rather than to make a categorical assessment of its advocates, I have opted to use the term 'coalition' to describe their always fluctuating coherence as a set of social and political forces and personalities. Even this word presents some challenges, as the Spanish *coalición* can, and in some cases does, refer to HIC (Habitat International Coalition), though this organization is usually referred to simply as HIC (usually conveniently psuedo-anglicized and pronounced, 'heek').

in this coalition intended.<sup>95</sup> Some work was also done on creating borough-level charters, especially in Iztacalco.<sup>96</sup> In the main, however, pursuance of the right to the city after the Charter's public endorsement has drawn on relationships developed through the CPCCMDC and its activities, rather than through the development of more forceful legislation.

Two prominent examples will help illustrate this general trend. The first of these involved putting the Charter and its ideals to work by way of demand, drawing on a relationship between coalition members and one of the heads of the *delegaciones* that had signed their endorsement, Clara Brugada Molina. Then a member of the PRD and executive head of the expansive peripheral borough of Iztapalapa, Brugada had been an active participant in the MUP before pursuing a career in public service in what BBC World described as "one of the poorest and most marginal zones of the city" (Gómez Ayala, 2011). With the support of the Ebrard administration and civil society partners, in 2012 Brugada completed a massive rehabilitation effort in the languishing Parque Cuitláhuac, claiming the initiative as a way to extend the right to the city to Iztapalapa's residents. Known for decades as "the biggest garbage dump" in the area (Mora, 2012), the former Santa Cruz Meyehualco landfill and surrounding areas were completely reconstructed and reimagined, with new facilities and family friendly activities including leisure gardens, artificial lakes, go carts, and a zoo. The park's overhaul followed the ideals and principles established in the Charter with impressive breadth, incorporating public participation in the construction and maintenance of certain areas and pursuing such

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<sup>95</sup> Again, this process and the roles played by the Charter and the right to the city more generally will be taken up in Chapter Four.

<sup>96</sup> This initiative was pursued in large part by COPEVI, an organization also once headed by Enrique Ortiz Flores.

other ends as ‘enjoyment’, the ‘social function’ of the city and property, ‘sustainability’, and even the mitigation of environmental ‘crises’ ranging from global climate change to local air quality and the availability of foodstuffs, all while consuming “very little”<sup>97</sup> public funding, according to Brugada (*GreenTV Noticias*, 2012; see also Gómez Ayala, 2011; Páramo, 2012; Quintero Morales, 2012). The 2012 inauguration of the park garnered the attention of local and international news outlets, and city officials and local residents heralded the arrival of this badly needed public space, calling it the “Park of the Rights of the People” or the “Park of the People” (*Parque de los Derechos del Pueblo* or *Parque del Pueblo*). Unfortunately, a good portion of Parque Cuitláhuac’s gleam wore off fairly quickly. Within months of its opening the Legislative Assembly was publicly accusing borough officials of mismanagement of the park’s green spaces, which it was claimed were being left to die despite the city’s investment (ALDF, 2013), among other complaints.<sup>98</sup> Still, the undeniable success Brugada and her allies had in turning forty hectares of retired landfill in one of the city’s poorest and most dangerous areas into a public park funded by the city remains one of the examples cited by right to the city advocates as a successful instance of putting the Charter affirmatively to work.<sup>99</sup>

The public backing of the Ebrard government also offered a different sort of potential for putting the Charter to work negatively, by way of critique. This potential was most clearly

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<sup>97</sup> Brugada cited the public cost at 114 million pesos, a budget which was compared favorably to those of other city projects, such as Parque Bicentenario, a botanical garden inaugurated by the city in the distant northern borough of Azcopotzalco in 2010 and constructed at a public cost claimed to be in the “thousands of millions of pesos” (*GreenTV Noticias*, 2012).

<sup>98</sup> Accusations were later made against Brugada and her associates regarding the origins and possible mistreatment of the animals of the Cuitláhuac Zoo (Méndez, 2016), and some animals were removed due to “irregularities” in their treatment and legal status, on the orders of the Federal Attorney General for the Environment (*Excelsiór*, 2016).

<sup>99</sup> Though the *delegado* (head of borough government) to follow Brugada in Iztapalapa, Jesús Valencia Guzmán, reportedly had quite different priorities and commitments from those of his predecessor, he nevertheless continued to reference the right to the city in his praise of Parque Cuitláhuac.

on display in the saga surrounding what came to be called the “Western Superhighway” (*la Supervía Poniente*) on the city’s southwest side. Designed to connect the booming ‘edge city’ of Santa Fe, replete with immense hordes of international capital and glimmering new office and residential towers (some of them built atop another old garbage dump) with the existing ring road highway system known as the *Periférico*, the *Supervía Poniente* faced stern residential resistance from its first official announcement. As the process of expropriating land in the boroughs of Magdalena Contreras and Álvaro Obregón unfolded over the course of 2010, some residents found in the Charter what they hoped would be a crucial tool of critique in their desperate attempts to halt the project. Having signed the Charter in July of that year, local opponents attempted to hold Ebrard to account on precisely these grounds, pointing to the contradiction seemingly at play in the Mayor’s pursuit and public praise<sup>100</sup> of a project that residents and observers claimed violated nearly all of the Charter’s principles. On one front, opponents claimed the project would be destructive to the environment, principally by contaminating and/or depleting ground water resources and contributing to the city’s alarming levels of air pollution by encouraging car traffic (Hernández León, 2010). On another, they claimed the planning process had violated the democratic rights of the citizens of the areas in question and of the city more broadly. The project would use public resources to build a limited-access private<sup>101</sup> superhighway the profits of which would accrue to a private partnership that would manage the completed project and the benefits of which would likely be enjoyed by less than one half of one percent of the city’s daily auto commuters

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<sup>100</sup> Ebrard would call it “one of the most important works of engineering in the country and the world” during a tour of the highway in 2012, and claim that its soaring surface boasted a view “without equal in all the city” (Gómez Flores, 2012).

<sup>101</sup> The *Supervía Poniente* is often referred to as a “private highway”, which in the US would be called a tollway—a roadway with monitored access for which a toll must be paid—in this case based on how far a car travels. As of May, 2017 the toll for the four-exit length of road was \$MX63.



(Barros, 2010). Despite the obvious imbalance of affected parties and the scale of the project, city officials did not see fit to subject the project to the public scrutiny many felt was required by the Law of Citizen Participation.<sup>102</sup> Instead, the private partnership that controlled the project was allowed to conduct its own survey, which unsurprisingly reported a seventy-four percent rating of public favorability<sup>103</sup> that was laughably out of sync with the increasingly organized resistance of local residents, academics, and professionals (Hernández León, 2010; Salgado, 2010). Using Ebrard's endorsement of the Charter or the broader corpus of human rights as a mode of critique turned out to be a dangerous strategy, however. Acting on complaints it received from residents of the affected boroughs, the CDHDF conducted an extensive investigation into possible human rights violations associated with the project. Prior to its conclusion, it was rumored that Ebrard asked Commissioner Luis González Placencia to quash the report, which could be highly embarrassing to his administration and potentially to his presumed bid for the Mexican presidency in 2012. For its part, the CDHDF suggested a "process of reconciliation" take place between the Ebrard government and the formal opposition to the *Supervía*, the Broad Front against the Western Superhighway (*el Frente Amplio contra la Supervía Poniente*, hereafter FACSP), which the government refused (González Placencia, 2011). In the absence of a reconciliation process, the CDHDF concluded and published a lengthy report in January of 2011, which cited six human rights violations associated with the *Supervía* committed by the city government and the

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<sup>102</sup> To be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>103</sup> Mexico City daily *La Jornada* ran a story on the press conference announcing these results, to which a self-described "lone wolf" who supported the project and participated in the survey was the only resident attendee. When asked how many more local residents his presence should be understood to represent, he offered the following remarks, which *La Jornada* seems to suggest may also offer some insight into the survey's level of representativeness: "The quantity does not matter for me. We look for quality, more than quantity. Quality in what sense? Not in the economic sense, but that they are thoughtful people, who have an open mind, that are ready for change" (Salgado, 2010).

two relevant *delegaciones*, and addressed particularly to the heads of government in each respective case, including Ebrard, whose name appears first in the report. The Borough of Magdalena Contreras was cited for violation of “the right to information” and “the right to citizen participation”, the Borough of Álvaro Obregón for violation of “the right to legal certainty”, and the GDF for those three plus “the right to a clean environment”, “the right to water”, and “the right to adequate housing” (CDHDF, 2011). Allegedly perturbed by the publication of this report, Ebrard is said to have all but ensured that González Placencia would be relieved of his post by the incoming mayor (Anonymous, personal communication, 11/27/15). In 2012, Mayor Miguel Ángel Mancera Espinosa did indeed appoint a new Commissioner of the CDHDF, Perla Gómez Gallardo. As Commissioner, Gómez has reportedly not enjoyed the friendliest of relations with civil society groups, but has maintained a very close working relationship with the mayor’s office (Anonymous, personal communication, 11/27/15, see also Quintero Morales, 2017). And though its regular publication *Defensor* has published several articles and special sections on the idea of the right to the city in the past several years, the CDHDF has under her guidance been less active in pursuing the right to the city than it had been under González Placencia. This difference has been interpreted as the loss of a significant institutional partner by leading figures in the coalition.

The two cases of Parque Cuitláhuac and the *Supervía Poniente* represent two avenues for pursuing the right to the city in the wake of the Charter’s endorsement, one via demand and the other via critique. What the passage of time has illustrated in both cases is that the moment in which the right to the city enjoyed a privileged position as a discursive trump and the Charter a powerful political tool was all too fleeting, perhaps already fading even as it began to be realized by the coalition. The members of the CPCCMDC, after all, each had other institutional priorities that continue to draw their

attention to matters of consequence outside the coalition. These groups continued (and continue to this day) to meet and discuss right to the city issues, and the phrase continues to find relevance in NGO and occasionally CDHDF reports, academic and public seminars and roundtables, and, somewhat surprisingly, the public remarks of Mexico City politicians, though in this last case the phrase seems safely relegated to those without aspirations for higher office. And even if the transition of the headship of the CDHDF had happened for reasons wholly unrelated to the *Supervía Poniente* and the criticism of Ebrard, the prevailing political winds from the mayor's office would seem nevertheless to have shifted away from the right to the city, a change of which the new CDHDF seems to have taken due note. Though Mayor Mancera is not openly hostile to the idea, his administration has shown little to no interest in putting the right to the city explicitly on the agenda. As with Perla Gómez Gallardo, Mancera is frequently criticized for a seeming unwillingness to even take meetings with groups such as the MUP-CND or HIC-AL.<sup>104</sup> Each and all of these changes have had significant impacts on how the right to the city is pursued after the end of the political 'moment' enjoyed by the CPCCMDC through the Charter's endorsement.

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<sup>104</sup> I witnessed several such accusations in public and semi-public forums. It came up more than once at the second CONDUSE meeting in December of 2015, when several people remarked on the Mayor's conspicuous absence in such venues, and notably again in a meeting between the office of the city's Secretary of Government, in the person and staff of Undersecretary Juan Jose García Ochoa, and organized residents represented by members of the MUP. In this latter meeting, the Undersecretary was aggressively asked what civil society groups would have to do to get Mancera to meet with them, a question that echoes a common refrain about the difference between the Ebrard and Mancera regimes. Political commentary and cartoons also frequently remark on and poke fun at the Mayor's distance from his public, which stands in stark contrast to the image he sought to create in his mayoral campaign (an issue more fully addressed in Chapter Three). This is also seen as something of a departure from the image of the PRD more broadly, though even this association with the nominally leftist party has begun to fade as a result both of the rupture with presidential hopeful Andrés Manuel López Obrador (who founded Morena in 2012 and formally registered it as a political party in 2014, after splitting from the PRD) and the perceived rightward drift of recent PRD leadership.

Though Mancera's disinterested stance on the right to the city and the Charter can be interpreted in any number of ways, and often is, Undersecretary of Government Juan Jose García Ochoa, the lone member of the Ebrard administration to retain significant authority in that of Mancera, offered me what seems the simplest answer in late 2015. Disputing the common characterization of 'disinterested', García posited this sentiment (personal communication, 11/26/2015): "So it's not that it's less important, what happened is that the consensus that existed about instruments like this one...it collapsed." The Mancera government had also witnessed the Charter's use as simply a "banner against the city government" by certain groups, rather than an accord of mutual benefit, he further explained. Mancera was thus not opposed to the idea, but rather wished to build a new "consensus" around the right to the city if this idea was to find any relevance in his *sexenio*, which is precisely why, García explained, it was a theme to be explored at public forum to take place in December of 2015. "So the [Mancera] government *is* interested in discussing this, but it is clear to us that it cannot only be used as a rallying cry [against the government], but rather must return to being an instrument of the government, and of [civil] society." Rather than a deep ideological break or some other sort of fundamental disagreement, García's interpretation of Mancera's stance in one sense merely points out the obvious, the common executive practice of disassociation with previous administrations. Mancera on this view appears an executive eager to forge his own path and avoid the pitfalls and unforced errors of Ebrard's final months as mayor, which not only tarnished his reputation but reportedly destroyed his chances at national elected office (Anonymous, personal communication, 5/26/2017). At a deeper level, however, García's explanation identifies a fundamental problem with pursuing the right to the city through instruments like the Charter. Given the right to the city's dialectical nature, any and all attempts to stabilize it as an operational concept, to 'fix' its tentacles in place and secure from it a set of solid and dependable

meanings, is bound to do a certain violence to its web of possibilities. In this case, as García argues, the Charter addressed itself to a city that no longer exists, a city whose government has largely turned over since the Charter's endorsement, whose neighborhoods have in some cases witnessed incredible demographic, aesthetic, and other changes, whose daily rhythms no longer sync with the afternoon rains that come like clockwork in the summer months nor the sleepy tunes of the organ grinders once found on every corner of the city's historic center, and, as of 2017, whose place within the federation of Mexican states has been constitutionally realigned.

### **Conclusion: Rethinking the Right to Mexico City**

Wright (1999) argues that the Mexican woman in the border town of Ciudad Juárez is productively viewed as what she calls a “dialectical image”. Building on the work of Walter Benjamin, Wright presents the idea of a set of material processes in a state of suspension, frozen in place and captured in only a momentary expression, as in a still life painting. Though the image at the center of this case is incredibly different, the fetishization inherent to such a “stilled life” is nevertheless quite instructive. Despite the best efforts of CPCCDDC members to imbue their Charter with vast conceptual freedom of movement and to give it more than the two-dimensional life the law often compels, its crystallization in this form imposed certain limits on the creative process of ‘becoming’ by which it was originally conceived. More importantly, the document itself and the political process that gave rise to it cemented a certain history with which the concept of the right to the city is now burdened. The history the Charter now carries is not, of course, universally burdensome, however. Indeed, favorable citation in assessing human rights cases by the CDHDF, public affirmation by prominent political figures, and broad popularity among powerful social movements and the academic left in Mexico City endow this language with a certain amount of political capital. The point is not so much

that the Charter froze forever the amorphous and fluctuating capacities of the right to the city in Mexico City, but rather that its fixity created a set of conditions with which any set of users and makers must now inevitably contend.

Remaining coalition stalwarts continue to promote the concept of the right to the city, forging connections whenever possible between this language and other conceptual apparatuses or material circumstances that might present themselves. As new urban struggles emerge, I was told, those involved make their own decisions about whether or not to engage with the right to the city and the complex relational entanglements it now entails. While its use may connote uncomfortable alliances or evoke the scars of bygone campaigns the memory of which may provoke certain foreclosures, it may just as easily create institutional access points or useful legal footholds. As a leading coalition member put it in 2015, “We offer this idea of right to the city to all of them. Some of them, the *Supervía*, decide to use it sometimes...and other times they didn’t... If they like, the concept is there. But for sure it’s right to the city from our point of view” (Anonymous, personal communication, 11/27/2015). This attitude makes clear that even the formality of municipal participation cannot completely freeze an idea as unwieldy as the right to the city, whose ultimate potential resides in its dialectical relationality, flexibility, and conceptual and political fertility. In the conversation cited above, the issue then in question was that of the Corredor Cultural Chapultepec, the subject of the following chapter. Though never framed explicitly in the language of the right to the city, the opposition that formed against the Corredor project was informed and influenced by coalition members, many of whom shared the above sentiment that such politics belong to a struggle to achieve the right to the city whether or not their political advocates trade on this moniker. The matrix of conditions in which this choice must be made is in constant motion, as political figures and party factions move in and out of spotlights, as

alliances are forged, broken, and reforged, and as dynamics that unfold at scales ranging from the neighborhood to the global economy push and pull on the priorities of the citizens of Mexico City. Some of these conditions change slowly, as in the case of the uneven but steady spread of democratization in the capital city. Others happen at break-neck pace, as when the once-promising political star of Mayor Ebrard took an unexpected dive, and his seal of approval moved into an uncomfortable purgatory between blessing and curse. All of this makes the right to the city simply one among many rhetorical and political tools on offer for the citizens and militants of Mexico City, and ensures that the right to the city travels and labors incognito under any number of assumed names.

Choices as to whether, when, and how this language is taken up or taken on in Mexico City are therefore not academic or ideological so much as they are logistical and political. And in this respect the position of the right to the city in 2016-2017 was precisely where some leading members of the CPCCMDC intended that it should be, squarely—if understatedly—bolstering and perhaps enabling the push for the city’s first constitution. After all, Jaime Rello Gómez, Marcelo Ebrard Casaubón, and Juan José García Ochoa, among many others, all publicly extolled the virtue of the Charter is precisely this capacity, and *La Jornada* announced its mayoral endorsement not as a triumph of a local charter of rights but rather as “another step toward the Federal District having a constitution” (Romero and Cruz, 2010). In his speech on that fateful day, Ebrard made no attempt to hide his purpose in supporting the Charter, using the idea of the right to the city as a collective right—as developed by Ortiz and others—not to claim a set of rights for the city’s various communities, but rather to act as the claimant of collective rights that he argued ought properly to accrue to the city vis-a-vis the federal state. “The objective for this year,” Ebrard (2010) intoned, “is that the Federal District will

at last achieve its own constitution...Two hundred years is sufficient time for the restitution of the city's rights, and it can determine its own constitution." According not only to his own claims but to other CPCCMDC leaders, it was hoped that the Charter would form the basis of the city's new constitution, but the priority was always clearly understood in this line of thinking, that the Charter was merely a means to a constitutional end. Whether, when, and how the right to the city actually figures in Mexico City's 2017 constitution will be taken up in Chapter Four.



**Chapter Three**  
***Así No (Not Like This): Resisting Postpolitics on Mexico City's Avenida Chapultepec***

**Introduction**

On the afternoon of Sunday, December 13, 2016, a small public square in the heart of the Juárez neighborhood of Mexico City was taken over by jovial celebration. Friends, neighbors, community organizers, and activists came together to laugh and socialize, and to pound piñatas crafted in the image of two powerful political figures whose planned megaproject on the edge of the neighborhood had recently been defeated by their collective efforts. They gathered to celebrate the victory of their ‘no’ vote in the delegation-wide ‘consultation’ that had taken place one week previous, a vote the municipal government had unexpectedly decided to honor. Beyond the obvious joy of saving their neighborhood from the ravages of the project, many among the gathered also noted the symbolic and material significance of their victory to the future of local organizing and political power in the city. Before the vote, the prevailing sentiment—even among those activists and local leaders firmly committed to the defeat of the project—was overwhelming pessimistic about the role local voices could play in the political drama of the city’s planning processes. As one man asked me just days before the vote in response to a question about its significance, “But what does it matter? They’re just going to go ahead with it anyway” (Anonymous, personal communication, 12/4/2015). After Mayor Miguel Ángel Mancera’s unexpected public pronouncement following the vote that the project would not go forward, however, the smallest remaining hope in the promises of democracy began to grow, stoking the dwindling energy of *El Monstruo*’s oft-disheartened grassroots.

The planned redevelopment of *Avenida Chapultepec* (Chapultepec Avenue)<sup>105</sup> and its neighborhood-based opposition is part of a larger story of how the political climate in Mexico City came to appear so dismally overcast to its residents, and how the clouds were made to part again, if only for a moment. It exemplifies Mexico City's trend toward what has been called the "postpolitical condition" (Swyngedouw 2011), and the moment the advance of this condition was halted, even reversed. This moment was made possible by a specific collection of disparate elements that came together to allow the peculiar victory achieved by a coalition of anti-project forces. These forces, themselves equally products and productive of these temporally and geographically specific conditions, simply (and perhaps unwittingly) made use of their advantageous coalescence. In this corner of space-time, the 'suturing' processes that parse and divide the social world into a what Rancière (1994: 173) calls the "division of the perceptible" or the "partition of the sensible" (Rancière, 2010: 36) was made to rupture and split, and the frayed edges of its purposes were, for a time, made to serve unintended ends. More significant than the empirical reality of this potentially fleeting victory, however, is the primary means by which it was accomplished. The problem for the postpolitical condition then pertaining in Mexico City came from within, from the hegemonic discursive machine that had produced increasingly stable control of municipal politics and its most effective rhetorical tool, the idea of democracy. By shrouding their actions and purposes in the rhetoric of democratization and seeking the legitimacy it provides, a coalition of hegemonic actors also created the conditions for the undoing of their well-laid plans along *Avenida Chapultepec*. Coming in the midst of the sweeping changes gathered under the heading of 'political reform' (including the abolition of the Federal District as a legal entity and the election of a constitutional assembly for the city), many residents

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<sup>105</sup> The name *Chapultepec* comes from the indigenous Nahuatl word meaning 'grasshopper'.

now hope that the unexpected outcome of this struggle may hold a wider purchase for reworking democracy at the local level.

This chapter will examine the struggle over the *Corredor Cultural Chapultepec-Zona Rosa* (Chapultepec-Zona Rosa Cultural Corridor), beginning with a brief history of the political conditions pertaining in the city before the vote, seen through the lens of ‘the postpolitical’. Mexico City, I argue, provides the ideal material case for the exposition of this conceptual apparatus. Likewise, this provocative language comes closest to approximating the political situation in which local residents found themselves at the onset of the processes here examined. The third section will describe how an opposition to the project formed quickly on the heels of its public rollout, and the coincidence of factors that allowed for the success of this opposition. The concluding section will fill out a critique of the postpolitical “thesis” (Mitchell et al., 2015), in the hope that a tighter and more nimble treatment of the postpolitical condition as a temporally and spatially specific hegemonic project will enhance its utility as a theoretical and practical framework beyond the context of Mexico City.

### **Approaching Mexican Postpolitics**

To understand the political moment in question, it is once again necessary to trace lines of reference often made to the Mexican Revolution, most importantly to the party birthed in its latter stages, the PRI. From its formation in 1929, the party would win each and every presidential election (and nearly all other local and regional elections) until its presidential ouster in the infamous election of 2000, most by large margins (as discussed in Chapter One). Organized by sectors meant to incorporate such diverse segments of Mexico’s population as the peasantry, industrial workers, the military, and state bureaucrats and other middle classes, the ‘ruling party’ has a long history of

electoral manipulation, graft, intimidation, and violence (Bruhn 1997, Kohout, 2009; Tuckman, 2012a; and see Chapter One). In claiming to represent the interests of such a wide spectrum of society, the PRI often sought to quell dissensus through incorporation, and produced a measure of legitimacy through its continuous and unassailable electoral victories. This cloak of democratic legitimacy is the most compelling reason for taking seriously Peruvian poet and Nobel Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa's famed 1990 characterization of PRI Mexico as "the perfect dictatorship."<sup>106</sup> Though removed from the presidency in 2000 (in favor of the longstanding conservative PAN), disastrously bungled 'drug wars' and their associated widespread violence, among other factors, brought the PRI back to the presidency in 2012, in the person of Enrique Peña Nieto, a 46-year-old Governor of the *Estado de México* (State of Mexico) which borders the former Federal District and contains a large portion of the metropolitan area of Mexico City. Some feared that Peña Nieto's election would produce a return of the corruption and intimidation that many associated with former national PRI regimes, along with the reactivation of party machinery waiting dormant for the party's return to presidential power. Both possibilities portended a kind of death for the great hope of 'democratization' many commentators saw in the 2000 election (*The New York Times*, 2000; Tuckman, 2000).

The so-called 'transition to democracy' has been nowhere more profound than in the capital city. After the troubled election of 1988, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of the famed Revolutionary General and President Lázaro Cárdenas, broke from the 'ruling party' and eventually formed the leftist opposition party known as the PRD, an alternative to the

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<sup>106</sup> Vargas Llosa has praised Mexico in recent years, mirroring the optimistic language of a transition to democracy in 2000. He told CNN in 2013: "Today Mexico is a democracy, and for 70 years it wasn't. It was a country practically governed by a single party, though there were certain appearances of democracy. Today there's not appearances—it's a reality" (Iaconangelo, 2013).

PRI many had long hoped and organized for (see Chapter One). Cárdenas took with him a large chunk of the PRI, including many local party bosses and political operators and organizers (*militantes*) in the Federal District. With the knowledge, existing relationships, and political capital of many former *Priistas*, the new PRD built a stronghold of support in the capital, especially after winning the first mayoral elections in 1997 with Cárdenas as its candidate. The PRD has maintained its control of this office, winning each of the subsequent elections.<sup>107</sup> Several regimes following that of Cárdenas, however, have been plagued by allegations of corruption and a marked lack of transparency (see, for example, Dávalos, 2004), and numerous studies make clear that some of the PRD's manipulative and clientelist tactics bear a notable resemblance to those long employed by the PRI (Nelson 2003; Gugelberger, 2005). Commentators often attribute the continuation of graft, fraud, intimidation, and clientelism to the backgrounds of PRD membership, so many having received political training and established local patronage networks and other relationships as members of the PRI (Anonymous, personal communication, 6/19/2014). Whatever the reason, however, PRD leadership at the municipal level had until recently shown little evidence of making good on its promises of meaningful democratization (Moctezuma, 2001; Harbers, 2007). In a stinging critique of this widely-agreed-upon failure poetically drawn from the PRD's own hopeful nickname,<sup>108</sup> Gugelberger (2005: 107) reported in 2005: "We now safely speak of the setting of the *sol Azteca* (the PRD)."

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<sup>107</sup> Control of the Federal District/Mexico City remains an object of desire for all major parties, perhaps especially the PRI. Interestingly, Mancera is the only PRD mayor to have not left the party, as all five others have now formally renounced their membership for various reasons, some amid scandal (see Chapter Four).

<sup>108</sup> *Sol Azteca*, or 'Aztec Sun', the party's nickname and graphic symbol.

The *Ley de Participación Ciudadana* (Law of Citizen Participation, hereafter LPC) is the main measure through and by which the PRD and the government of the Federal District have promised and pursued democratization. First approved by the city's Legislative Assembly in 1995,<sup>109</sup> the law provides twelve<sup>110</sup> "instruments" for organizing citizen participation, including plebiscites, referendums, consultations, and citizen assemblies (Instituto Electoral del Distrito Federal, 2013; Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación, 2016). While some of these measures allow citizen participants to deliver results that carry the force of law<sup>111</sup> over various 'authorities' (such as the mayor's office or the Legislative Assembly), most do not. Despite the proliferation of such legal implements for enabling citizen participation, however, Harbers (2007) argues that such mechanisms serve the aims of regime/system legitimation and charismatic, neopopulist dramatics rather than meaningful participation, building leaders like "Mexican Messiah" (Grayson, 2007) Andrés Manuel López Obrador (hereafter AMLO), into seemingly infallible figures that hearken back to the *caudillos* of Mexican (and broader Latin American) history. This skepticism of Mexican participatory schemes also extends far beyond the LPC, through numerous local and national PRI regimes in which legitimacy and pacification were achieved through programs and projects that rarely extended beyond nominal citizen input (Davis, 1994; Gilbert and Ward, 1984; Jimenez, 1998). Still, democratization and ever-greater participation are the ideas by which the PRD has sought to establish its control of the city, especially in the 'post-transition' years. The

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<sup>109</sup> The law has seen several rounds of revision, the most sweeping coming in 1998 and 2010.

<sup>110</sup> Since reforms passed in May of 2010.

<sup>111</sup> Plebiscites result in binding decisions of this sort, for instance. Results of other processes, such as Referenda and Consultations, do not. In the case of the Referendum, the required action is stated thusly (translation by author): "The results of the referendum shall not be of binding character for the Legislative Assembly, its effects shall only serve as elements of evaluation for the convening authority. The results of the referendum shall be published in the Official Gazette of the Federal District and at least one of the daily newspapers of major circulation" (Instituto Electoral del Distrito Federal, 2013).

party of Cárdenas was in large part built through frustration with an authoritarian and undemocratic PRI in the 1980s and 1990s, and continues to trade on this 'opposition' and democratic identity. Even its manipulation of the planning process, exemplified by the LPC, is ironically couched in the language of democracy and participation.

Given this history, it is not difficult to understand why the city feels rife with political cynicism, a quotidian theme so recurrent in daily conversations as to be rivaled in my field notes only by feelings of political disappointment and apathy.<sup>112</sup> From this vantage, such disillusionment with government could easily slip analytically into the well-worn ruts still cutting through scholarship on Latin America, such as "the norm of illegitimacy" in government (Horowitz, 1969) and various other takes on everyday corruption, or side-eyed appraisals of the gaping distance observed between the peculiar pageantry of Mexican politics, with all its brazen pomp, and the actual, behind-the-scenes deals and dictates of its daily animation (cf. Johns, 1994). Rather, what this evidence suggests is the hegemony of a particular set of attitudes and practices often described as the onset of the "postpolitical condition" (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2009). That the roots of such a condition in Mexico City should be found in the PRI regimes previous to the 2000 'transition' is no surprise at all, given the open secret of the party's uses of 'democracy'. Indeed, quite aside from Vargas Llosa's infamously incendiary remarks, the realities of the Mexican state and its municipal counterpart have long betrayed the blurring of the "boundary" Rancière (2007: 18-19) notes between 'good democracy' and its tyrannical 'other':

Does not the best of democracies, indeed the good *politeia*, where the mass of citizens fulfil [sic] their preference for lucrative activity over the activity of

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<sup>112</sup> Ellingwood (2012) found these sentiments similarly pervasive in the city in the run-up to the 2012 elections, especially among "democracy babies", persons who grew up or came of age in the post-transition era.

citizenship, in short that good political regime which coincides with the satisfaction of citizens' apolitical needs, bring into play the very same mechanisms which serve the tyrannical annihilation of collective power: *microphronein*, the smallmindedness of individuals locked into pettiness, the idiocy of private interests; and *adunamia*, the impotence of those who have lost the resource of collective action? Smallmindedness, mistrust and the impotence of the citizens—these are the means of tyranny, all the more liable to resemble the means of good government...

Residents of Mexico City have long 'participated' in a political system—whether under the control of the PRI, PAN, or PRD—dancing on both sides of this boundary, with parties and presidents availing themselves of the weapons of tyranny while shrouded in the garb of democracy. The sobering reality daily reproduced by the mass of *chilangos* thus echoes the deceptively simple gauntlet thrown down by Cruikshank (1999: 2), building on the words of Foucault (1984), that “[e]verything is dangerous,’ even democracy.”

These developments in the political landscape of *chilangolandia* have coalesced into a state of affairs most productively viewed through the lens of 'postpolitics'. This “postpolitical condition” (Allmandinger and Haughton, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2009) describes a state of relations in which dissensus is viewed and treated as beyond unproductive, as something unreasonable. As in the related frame of post-democracy (Crouch 2004; MacLeod 2011; Rancière 1994; Swyngedouw 2011), this condition instead takes on the ethos of consensus, wherein the greatest good is achieved when parties (or ‘stakeholders’) work within a set of given norms toward an agreed-upon set of possible ends. The key to both situations is the removal of fundamental disagreement from the stage of politics, with all counted parties continually reaffirming the boundaries of acceptable discussion and eschewing as irrelevant, counterproductive, or dangerous any and all potentially system-destabilizing elements. Any radical potential, anything that could undermine or otherwise threaten the terms of debate, must be foreclosed. This



primitive accumulation of political discourse is what Rancière (2010) calls the “partition of the sensible”, the framework within which utterance is read as either ‘noise’ or ‘speech’, and action as acceptable or disruptive. The specific form this partitioning takes in a given society is known as “the police”, or the police order (Rancière, 1994; 2001; 2010). The police order, as Dikeç (2005: 174, original emphasis) explains, “refers to an established social order of governance with everyone in their ‘proper’ place in the seemingly natural order of things”, an order “achieved through the configuration of a perceptive field, through the symbolic constitution of the social, which becomes, from the viewpoint of the police, *the* basis for government.” Political discourse and action that take place according to the rules of such an established ‘perceptive field’ are not treated as ‘proper politics’, a valuation reserved in this literature for those actions deemed (ex post facto) disruptive to the police order (Dikeç, 2005; Rancière, 1994; Swyngedouw, 2011).

Politics, true dissensus, has already retired from the scene inside a given police order, hence the characterization of such orders as ‘postpolitical’. The available options within such a scenario are anemic ‘participation’ in the agreed-upon structures bound to the police order, which brings tacit complicity in that order and is anyway fundamentally incapable of remedying its perceived systemic ills, or similarly powerless outbursts of violence or indignant abstention from accepted political behavior. The rise of instances of the latter (such as the Occupy movement or any number of riots in the US and UK in recent years, along with high rates of electoral abstention), some argue, is a telltale sign of the onset of the postpolitical condition (Dikeç, 2007; Swyngedouw, 2011; Žižek, 2008).

Affixing the label of ‘postpolitical condition’ to a particular place and time, however, evokes a pathogenic and totalizing character that can be highly misleading. Even for Rancière, while the properly political act or sequence may be rare, it always remains an

imminent possibility, as the police order can never 'suture' or 'place' the social body in its entirety. "There is always a gap, a void, a lack, or excess that resists symbolization, a hard kernel that is not accounted for in the symbolic order", Swyngedouw (2011: 374) argues, a remainder that "stands as guarantee for the return of the political." Properly political gestures, instigated by the 'surplus' element of the police order as assertions of the 'part of those who have no part', however, do not come from some party or entity a priori deemed 'outside' the policed perceptive field, but rather "reject existing identifications through a process of political subjectification that generates identities outside of the existing police order" (Davidson and Iveson, 2016: 548). Such moments are both generative of alternative formations and destructive to those of an established perceptive field, a violent process "in which bodies are torn from their assigned places, and exhibit verbal competences and emotional capabilities they are not supposed to have by virtue of the space-time they occupy" (Corcoran, 2010). Indeed, the police order itself creates the basis for such identificatory transgression. As Dikeç (2005: 181) argues, "If politics puts the police ordering of space to an egalitarian test, then politics is possible not despite the police, but because of it."

Even given the omnipresent political potential of this radical remainder, the "postpolitical thesis" (Mitchell et al., 2015) has run afoul of critics on several grounds, not least in anglophone critical geography. McCarthy (2013) points to the important elements of seeming eurocentricity at work in the development of the very idea of postpolitics, countering Swyngedouw's (2009) argument that the non-politics of climate present a clear material example of the postpolitical condition by contrasting Swyngedouw's European observations with the white-hot reality of the US political 'debates' daily waged over climate, from the increasingly garish denials of presidential candidates to the hard-fought battles over lightbulb regulations. While the postpolitical thesis may hold in some

contexts, this critique suggests, its global reach even over its most comfortable thematic terrain is often overstated. Hannah (2015) extends this line of argument in characterizing postpolitics as a “distinction-collapsing discourse” that serves in practice to feed the specter of “state phobia” by too easily dismissing the state as a very real and significant relational field of contest. Mitchell et al. (2015) likewise argue that in following Rancière into a strict notion of ‘proper politics’, the postpolitical literature has been largely unwilling to recognize as political those many actions without which a given police order could not be sustained, or those by which it is initially and continuously (re)constituted. Similar to the insightful prod at the academic left contained in McCarthy’s (2002) exposition of the Wise Use Movement, Mitchell et al. (2015: 2645) caution that the postpolitical literature’s dismissal of such activities threatens to “equate politics that we do not appreciate for an absence of politics.” Davidson and Iveson (2015: 551) echo this caution in arguing that Rancière’s work “has sought not to define and/or identify a preferred political agent or place”, rejecting “any notion that particular places and/or people are the proper spaces and/or subjects of politics”. These critiques forcefully articulate that much of the postpolitical literature has been both too narrow and too broad in its appraisals. As the concept has been articulated, the postpolitical condition can neither be said to inhere across contexts at the global level in any easily identifiable and generalizable way, nor easily apprehend the many valences of quotidian politics in even those contexts where its application can be justified.

Still, the the postpolitical holds considerable analytical utility for focusing attention on the ways in which dissensus is actively foreclosed, consensus-producing participatory schemes are constructed and enacted, and distance is created between elite decision-makers and (dis)enfranchised publics, and to note the outlines of trends among these themes that can be said to transcend the locality of their instantiation. In order to more

adeptly navigate the pitfalls noted above and more effectively pull its expected analytical weight, however, the concept must be sharpened. First, postpolitics must be made to account for those actions which counter its privileged 'proper politics', widening the scope of considerable politics to include both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices. Second, as several of the critics noted above suggest, the postpolitical condition can be more productively conceived of as a hegemonic project (Davidson and Iveson, 2016; Mitchell et al. 2015). Put simply, the lens of hegemony encourages a view toward a given police order as an established "*hegemonic relation*" (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: xiii, emphasis in original), in which "a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it". That is, police orderings of the perceptive field are productively viewed as "attempts to impose a construction of unity on the real ground of difference, or a construction of agreement on the real ground of antagonism" (Purcell, 2013: 563). To understand these processes as hegemonic means to conceive of postpolitics not as a global condition that, once established, need only deal with occasional violent outbursts that only cause minor irritations to its equilibrium, but rather in its multiplicity as political projects always in need of reproduction and always susceptible to attacks that strike at their very foundations. Any postpolitical condition, this orientation suggests, is historically and geographically specific, a political victory achieved and contested in a particular "place-moment" (Swyngedouw, 2011). It is an inherently unstable political fix, the very terms of its construction and maintenance in constant danger of the subjective violence always lurking on the underside of its plane of immanence.

It is to this foundational terrain that researchers must look in seeking to 'recover the political' (Davidson and Iveson 2016; Swyngedouw, 2009; 2011). Each and every instantiation of postpolitics must be deeply rooted in its peculiar spatial and temporal

specificities, its suturing of the perceptive field anchored in the wounds left on the landscape by material and social forces alike. In Mexico City, the long night of the embattled PRI called forth the figure of the democratic transition, and democratization became the tool through and by which the PRD took control of the municipal—and the PAN the federal—state. When the promises of democratization lavishly lauded from within and without yielded only populist pageantry and the proliferation of participatory planning mechanisms, of the sort derisively regarded as cases in point by the postpolitical literature (MacLeod, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2015), fatigue, apathy, and cynicism took hold of a significant share of residents as the reality of a postpolitical and postdemocratic Mexico City came starkly into view. Rather than continue to accept the observed reality that democracy functions only as a tool of legitimation, as a rhetorical weapon cheekily brandished by political elites in their public dances of opposition but secretly wielded against a sleepwalking *demos*, opponents of the *Corredor Cultural Chapultepec* found in the concept of democratic participation a cornerstone of Mexico City's contemporary postpolitical reality, the lynchpin of its policed perceptive field. Attacking the police order at its most foundational organizing principle caused a tear so deep that ordinary citizens in some of the city's oldest neighborhoods exhibited genuine shock in the aftermath of the December 6 vote. Residents waded cautiously into their victory with wide eyes, spreading out to ask one another if it was real, or too good to be true. As caution gave way to joy at their victory, anger at what had been their powerlessness was forced to turn toward a generative outlet. "I always say," architect and Juárez neighborhood activist Sergio González announced at a public forum on April 26, 2016, "that Mexico City will never be the same after December 6." The following section explores how a postpolitical hegemony was contested in *Delegacion Cuauhtémoc* during the final quarter or so of 2015.

### **Contesting Mexican Postpolitics: the *Corredor Cultural Chapultepec***

The impetus for some type of ‘improvement’ on *Avenida Chapultepec* has been around for some time, and murmurings that the city was planning some kind of project there did not come as any great shock to many local residents. After all, the neighborhoods around the avenue had been slowly changing for several decades in a way that made the avenue stand out aesthetically, and not in a good way. The rationale the public/private development agency ProCDMX and its head and prominent public ambassador, Simón Levy, offered for the planned intervention, while multivalent, will likewise be no surprise to even the casual observer of such improvement projects across a wide variety of contexts. The avenue, the city said, is dangerous, run-down, both under- and over-utilized, an obstacle to progress. The avenue presented an opportunity to “rethink the city” for automobiles, cyclists, and pedestrians, Simón Levy mused via twitter, in the months leading up to the project’s unveiling, and later ethereally added: “*Avenida Chapultepec*<sup>113</sup> is not the renewal of an avenue, it is urban consciousness beginning with social vision” (Simón Levy, twitter, 7/24/15). Exploring the specificities of this terrain as then constituted will reveal much about precisely how the ‘social’ was here envisioned, which parts of the social this perspective was unable or unwilling to capture, and why the city needed such ‘rethinking’.

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<sup>113</sup> Levy should be understood to be speaking here of the planned project soon to be unveiled to the public, rather than about the avenue itself.

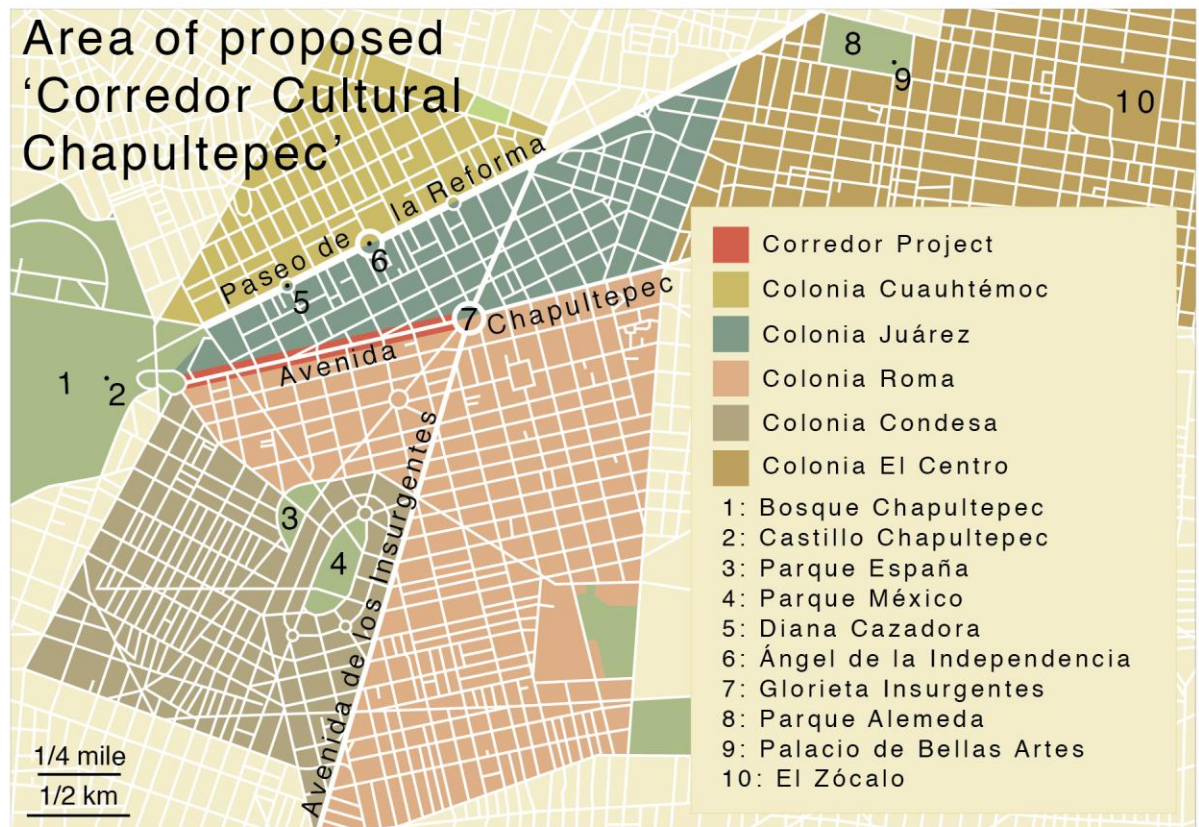


Figure 3.1: A map of Avenida Chapultepec and surrounding area, including the site of the proposed Corredor project. Cartography by author.

*Avenida Chapultepec* (see figure 3.1) runs east from the northeast corner of Chapultepec Park<sup>114</sup> to *Centro Histórico*, the city's historic center. Though they increasingly diverge as they move away from the park, the avenue runs roughly parallel to *Paseo de la Reforma*, the city's most historically significant boulevard, which also runs from the park to the historic center (see figures 3.1 and 3.2). Reforma, as it is often called, has a long and turbulent history extending farther back even than the Revolution.

<sup>114</sup> *Bosque de Chapultepec* (Chapultepec Forest) is one of the largest urban parks in the world at 1,655 acres.

Its name commemorates the reforms of (mostly) beloved Indian President Benito Juárez, the great liberal modernizer. Reforma was envisioned by Napoleonic Emperor Maximiliano of the Second Mexican Empire as a promenade<sup>115</sup> to rival those of the great European cities, and as a swift and visually acceptable route between the city's government buildings in the historic center and his preferred palatial residence atop the ramparts of Chapultepec Castle<sup>116</sup> (Ross 2009). Lined with trees and littered with small monuments and memorial busts of legendary figures, Reforma passes through several *glorietas* (traffic circles) encircling monuments and gardens, including a statue of Greek goddess Diana the Huntress and the "Angel of Independence"<sup>117</sup>, a site of national significance and a preferred locus of civic activity, especially social protest. In recent decades, rounds of development fueled in large part by foreign direct investment, have taken Reforma from a sleepy historic promenade to a thriving business corridor<sup>118</sup> catering to the dictates of the real estate sector and the desires of a transnational managerial class increasingly at home along its edges (Parnreiter, 2015). Visually, Reforma is now dominated by skyscrapers of heights unknown in Mexico until recent years, tattooed with the monikers of international finance and other transnational entities (see figure 3.2). *Avenida Chapultepec*, however, has lagged behind its famous neighbor.

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<sup>115</sup> It was originally christened *Paseo de la Emperatriz* (Promenade of the Empress) in honor of Maximiliano's wife Carlota (Charlotte), daughter of Belgian King Ferdinand II. It was renamed by Juárez after his government returned from exile in Veracruz after the collapse of the Second Empire and the execution of Maximiliano in 1867.

<sup>116</sup> The *Castillo*, shelled by the US army during the late stages of the Mexican American War, is now a popular tourist attraction offering excellent vantages of the city skyline and a window onto high society during various Mexican epochs.

<sup>117</sup> The monument, crowned by a golden figure of Nike, Greek goddess of victory, sits atop a column emanating from the center of a structure containing a mausoleum which houses the remains of several heroes of Mexican Independence.

<sup>118</sup> Parnreiter (2015: 27) describes the rapid development of the *Reforma* area through the Obrador and Ebrard mayoralities' use of planning instruments known as "Corridors of Investment and Development" and "Corridors of Integration and Development" (both abbreviated CID), by which the mayor's office was able to centrally control the planning of specific development sites, "flexibly created spatial entities which are defined by their economic potential."





Figure 3.2: *Paseo de la Reforma* looking roughly southwest from the *Ángel de la Independencia*. Photography by author.

Between Reforma and Chapultepec lies the *colonia*<sup>119</sup> of Juárez. The section of Juárez closest to *Bosque de Chapultepec* is known as the *Zona Rosa* (“pink zone”), an area infamously inhabited by tourists and also well known for its gay clubs, asian markets (especially Korean), and its youth and alternative cultures. It is a spectacular place, in other words, a tangle of groups and images uneasily swirling around each other, interspersed with bars, sex shops, US-based fast food chains, beggars, magicians, police, and ‘*godines*’. This last group, lightly pejoratively known by this term, is

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<sup>119</sup> A *colonia* is a neighborhood-like subdivision of the city, and is an official designation conferred by the city government. The name literally means “colony”. As of the 2010 elections, the Electoral Institute of the Federal District (IEDF) counted 3,480 *colonias* across the 16 *delegaciones* (Instituto Electoral del Distrito Federal, 2016).

comprised of low-level functionaries of corporate and governmental enterprise, unmistakable in dress and demeanor and forever found in the cantinas, bars and *loncherias* of Juárez, as well as the food carts and public benches that line Reforma and Chapultepec. They are the “sovereigns of sadness” Bolaño (2007) depicts in their zombie-like drudgery, working their days and drinking their evenings away in neighborhoods far too central for their meager wages. The rest of Juárez has a decidedly residential character, save for the slivers of commerce along Reforma and Chapultepec, the neighborhood market, and the small repair shops, convenience stores, cafes, and the like that occasionally inhabit the ground floor. Across Chapultepec to the South lie the neighborhoods of Roma (split into *Roma Norte* (North) and *Roma Sur* (South)) and Condesa (including *Hipodromo* and *Hipodromo-Condesa*). Condesa, centered on two lovely public parks (*Parque España* and *Parque México*), has become one of the city’s more desirable neighborhoods in recent decades, and is said to be one of the more common areas for the transnational portion of the ‘white-collar’ labor force employed along Reforma.<sup>120</sup> According to local residents and academic observers, Condesa is an epicenter of gentrification in Mexico City. Though it boasts a thriving nightlife scene, Condesa caters to a decidedly wealthier crowd than does the Zona Rosa, and is inevitably suggested by locals as the premier area for such ‘high order’ goods and services (and harbingers of gentrification) as fancy barber shops, romantic rooftop martinis, and Sunday brunches cute enough make the hippest Brooklyn instagrammers opine their jealousy. Condesa is also, however, becoming a bit ‘settled’ for many younger residents who increasingly find their pleasure profiles more suited to neighboring Roma Norte, one gentrifying wave from Condesa. Here, fancy art galleries

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<sup>120</sup> I was told by numerous acquaintances that foreign corporations routinely rent blocks of apartments for their upper-tier foreign labor forces. I personally visited at least four such apartments in this area.

and a new generation of globally-recognized upscale cocktail bars mingle with dilapidated commercial and residential spaces in an aesthetic union distinctly *chilango*, but somehow also eerily familiar to certain pockets of gentrifying Chicago or New York.

In all three neighborhoods, the Porfirian grandeur of architecture, the abundance of well-maintained public space, the reputed relative security, and the proximity to the 'business corridor' along Reforma have conspired to attract an ever-wealthier, younger, and more international set of users and residents. As 'the scene' shifts from the 'overplayed' Condesa to the far northeast reaches of Juárez, longtime residents have become increasingly uncomfortable with the presence of persons and land uses unfamiliar in their neighborhoods. The following scene, which unfolded at a community meeting in precisely this section of Juárez, captures this sentiment. Herón, an architect by trade then serving as a community organizer and activist, was attempting to explain the concept of 'gentrification' to a meeting of local residents (field notes, 4/24/16):

Thinking a concrete example the best approach, he suddenly changed track. "It's like this *bar clandestino* down the block." "What bar?" several people asked at once, with surprise. "It's right down the block, just one door from the corner", he began. "You mean the taco shop?", someone asked. "Ah, no, there's a secret bar *inside* the taco shop. You have to have a special membership, and they let you in through a secret false refrigerator door in the back. Inside, there's a fancy bar." The whole room was taken aback. They were scandalized. People audibly gasped, and I saw a woman cover her mouth with her hands. These neighbors could not believe that such a thing had come to their beloved Juárez. A secret bar for fucking *fresas* and *mirreyes*, right here in Juárez. What had the world come to? This 'gentrification' had to be stopped.

I had heard of this bar before. It was all the rage among the party set. Iggy had been angling for a free membership there for six weeks (the annual fee is something like 2,500 pesos). Alex and Mario were already members, as was Claire. Right there in the midst of the scandalized Juárez neighborhood school of citizenship, while the horrified *vecinos* consoled one another and tried to make sense of this brave new world they hadn't known until this very moment they were already living in, I sent a text to Alex and asked if she could take me to this clandestine bar everyone was talking about. She said she would love to, and that we could go on Thursday night. I couldn't wait.

My own comical enthusiasm aside, this is precisely the kind of development city governments have privileged for several decades by encouraging the inflow of foreign capital and the subsidized ‘improvement’ of its preferred landing zones (Parnreiter, 2015). Seen from this angle, Chapultepec begins to look more and more like an eyesore, like something too ‘indigenous’, like an impediment to the integration of the trendy neighborhoods pushing in on it from all sides, squeezing its informalities into smaller and smaller corners until, with no fanfare or notice at all, the police come and unceremoniously remove them, as happened to the longstanding *tianguis*<sup>121</sup> located at the avenue’s southwest terminus above the Chapultepec metro station in the closing weeks of May, 2016 (see figures 3.3 and 3.4).<sup>122</sup> Simón Levy explicitly noted such uses of public space as one of the crucial factors necessitating his agency’s intervention, along with urgently needed neighborhood integration. In an interview with television station Teleforo in September of 2015, Levy explained that persons working on Reforma are beginning to live there as well, and need to be able to more easily cross the avenue to take advantage of the neighborhoods nearby. Even more, developing the retail potential along the avenue (and above it, as we shall see below) would keep this population’s spending in the immediate area by allowing them to find the kinds of upscale eateries and shops then more at home in nearby Polanco. Redeveloping the avenue, in other words, was necessary to connect the commerce of Reforma with the consumption and residential areas in Roma and Condesa, and to create an insular orbit

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<sup>121</sup> *Tianguis* are local markets, usually of an informal character though often occurring on the same site at regularly scheduled intervals or, as in the case of the site described above, existing on a single site uninterrupted in a precarious semi-permanence. The word is of Nahuatl origin.

<sup>122</sup> Local residents anecdotally lamented to me that the market had been there for many decades, and that at least some of the vendors had been bribed to move their livelihoods elsewhere without making a fuss. One friend reported that, among other things, this market had been his favorite place to purchase bootlegged DVDs.

for work, leisure, and retail catering especially to the city's growing (and increasingly international) professional and managerial classes.



Figure 3.3: The site of the *tianguis* above Chapultepec Metro station, 3/19/2016. Photography by author.





Figure 3.4: The site of the *tianguis* above Chapultepec Metro station, 5/29/2016. Photography by author.

As then constituted, the avenue did, as proponents of the planned redevelopment claimed, present a significant danger to its many daily users. Sitting at grade level with sidewalks and medians in many places and with few designated crossings, the avenue's many lanes are dangerous to cross outside of crosswalks, and even sometimes within them (see Figures 3.5 and 3.6). As a thoroughfare connecting the historic center to the park and the fancy residential and commercial areas that surround it (including those discussed above), the avenue continues, along with Reforma, to enable the routinized Maximilian escape from downtown, and from the city's lone international airport. This ensures that Chapultepec is full of reasonably high-speed traffic at nearly all hours, and most pedestrian crossers appear unsurprised by frequent close calls, not to mention cat calls, abusive language, and obscene gestures. At least as much as ensuring the safety

of pedestrians, however, many users of the avenue wish planners would focus on the efficient flow of traffic, which is slowed by unauthorized crossers and street vendors (whose operations often spill over the sidewalk and into the edges of the street), along with other unplanned obstructions.



Figure 3.5: *Avenida Chapultepec* near the Sevilla Metro station, 3/19/2016. Photography by author.

A last set of factors not often discussed by the project's proponents (or not at all, as the case may be) concern the profitability and development potential the project promised for its backers, the city as a whole, and for those transactors who spend at least some of their time opening envelopes in the many dark corners of the local bureaucracy. Publicly, there was the occasional mention of the profitability of the project, though its aesthetic and 'cultural' appeal were the real selling points. On another level, however, it remains an open secret that new leases and licenses present innumerable opportunities for graft.

The specific local flavor of this system of extralegal financial arrangements appears, anecdotally, to have changed only in its facade under PRD control, in line with governing trends outlined above. Tread carefully enough, and some *chilangos* and international observers will cautiously (and vaguely) relate the informed suspicion that such projects also present excellent opportunities for laundering vast hordes of money accumulated through narcotics and other nefarious enterprises, especially through unaccounted-for injections of cash that are said to magically appear to counter what observers skeptically view as all-too-expected cost-overruns.



Figure 3.6: *Avenida Chapultepec* near the Sevilla Metro station, 3/19/2016. Photography by author.

This convergence of factors is what led to the city's planners to see and frame the improvement of *Avenida Chapultepec* as a necessity, an urgent demand beyond the petty squabbles and disagreements of local residents. It was a problem the city's



planning elite<sup>123</sup> should have been well positioned to solve according to their own ‘social vision’, and this is precisely what they set out to do in 2015. By the time Simón Levy and ProCDMX unveiled the plans for the project in August, contracts had reportedly already been signed for its financing and construction (Anonymous, 5/28/16, personal communication). Because ‘democratization’ was the vehicle by which their postpolitical consensus had been achieved, however, the nominally democratic mechanisms of participation figured as an all-important last box to check in the realization of their plan. This should, by all accounts, have presented no problem at all, as the LPC contains several useful workarounds. The mayor need only choose one of the several non-binding mechanisms for citizen participation, jump through the proverbial hoops, make a boilerplate public statement emphasizing the impact of this valuable input on the final judgement, and then go ahead with the project otherwise unabated. Choosing the *consulta* option, wherein a non-binding<sup>124</sup> vote would be framed in a simple yes/no question as to whether or not the potentially affected public favored the initiative—after several public forums in which residents could ask questions and relate concerns about the project—was the obvious first step down this path. This process, however, unfolded in a manner decidedly less straightforward than initially predicted.

On the 18th of August, Simón Levy and ProCDMX presented the finished plans for the *Corredor Cultural Chapultepec-Zona Rosa*, which had evidently been in the works in some form since the early months of the year. A detailed account of the planning

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<sup>123</sup> This group could be said to include Simón Levy and his staff at ProCDMX, the Mayor’s office, several prominent architects, and the so-called ‘real estate cartels’, along with the retail groups whose stores routinely pervade such developments in a familiar pattern across the city.

<sup>124</sup> The language of the LPC states that should the results of the *consulta* differ from the plans of the concerned authority, the latter “shall be required to express with clarity the motivation and foundation of their decisions” in relation to the views expressed by citizen participants (Instituto Electoral del Distrito Federal, 2013).

process (bidding schedule, financing structure, project scope, some diagrammatic explanations of form, etc.) appeared in that day's *Gaceta Oficial* (the city's official gazette), and plans and scale models began to appear on tv news and across the twitterverse. It was announced that there would be a public consultation process in which residents would be invited to comment on the plans and voice any concerns, a process to be carried out through public fora and surveys conducted by the city's official electoral institute (the IEDF). Another key figure of this public rollout was Fernando Romero, the architect who had designed the project. Romero, the son-in-law of billionaire telecom and real estate mogul Carlos Slim,<sup>125</sup> also designed the retail and real estate titan's *Museo Soumaya*. Resplendent by design, the art museum's outer shell—a tessellated mesh of aluminum hexagons—pinches suggestively between rounded rectangles top and bottom and reflects the light of the sun during the day and the glow of the city's own lights by night. The museum's futuristic form looms above the *plaza carso* at the edge of the lavish Polanco neighborhood, making an aggressively 'global' aesthetic statement of the sort many<sup>126</sup> feel abstracts away from the city's history and culture. As is increasingly common to prominent architecture in the city's upscale neighborhoods (especially Santa Fe and other 'development corridors' created through the highly centralized planning practices discussed by Parnreiter (2015)), the *Corredor* was described in precisely such a globally-aspiring frame, with Romero and Levy both making frequent explicit reference to New York City's elevated lineal park, the High Line. Like the High Line, the *Corredor* would contain a carefully curated array of indigenous

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<sup>125</sup> Saying he had found his "moment in the sun", *Forbes* labeled Romero "the world's richest man's favorite architect" in 2011 (Dolan, 2011).

<sup>126</sup> Unknowingly illustrating the concerns of those who objected to the 'globalizing' aesthetic of many of Mexico City's rapidly developing neighborhoods, *The Wall Street Journal* described approaching Museo Soumaya thusly: "There's not a taco stand to be seen. Even if you've made the trip before, the slick establishments paving the way are just enough to make you forget you're in Mexico" (Casey, 2011).

flora to be appreciated by orderly visitors within a small range of carefully scripted consumption and passive recreation possibilities. Also like the High Line, a large portion of the project would be elevated above the street, with sections of the street below appropriated for commercial, pedestrian, and bicycle areas. The remaining auto lanes would also have to concede one lane specially reserved for a new Metrobus<sup>127</sup> line. The 'lineal park' would culminate in a sort of amphitheater rising several levels above the *glorieta Insurgentes*,<sup>128</sup> where a large screen could be used to show videos. Viewed as a scale model, the stark-white project loosely resembles a massive ocean liner, and locals were soon referring to it as '*el titanic*'.

Initial distaste for the plans in particular and the planning process in general began to coalesce into organized resistance almost immediately. Architects and urbanists across the city criticized the project's design, citing especially its outward-looking character and what some saw as its blatant attempt to appeal specifically to expatriate professionals and wealthy Mexicans, quite aside from the concerns of gentrification and its likely corollary, displacement, and the ironic argument that elevated lineal features like this one were more likely to separate than to integrate neighborhoods (see especially *Código*, 2015; Ruiz, 2015). Many also reacted strongly to the transformation of public into private space inherent to the project, and the lack of citizen input in the development of the plans. After all, many pointed out, residents were being asked only to comment on

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<sup>127</sup> The Metrobus is a recent addition (the first lines were introduced in 2011) to Mexico City's transit network. They run in generally straight lines across several sections of the city, and, unlike the countless smaller buses casting complex webs across the metropolis, run in lanes specifically reserved and barricaded off for their exclusive use. Metrobuses stop at dedicated elevated stations that sit in the medians of the city's largest streets, such as the North-South *Avenida de los Insurgentes* that bisects the city.

<sup>128</sup> This *glorieta* is and has long been a popular gathering spot for youths and members of Mexico City's 'counter-culture', along with serving as a common meeting place at the junction of several metro and metrobus lines. It also sits at the corner of several distinct neighborhoods, and its commercial spaces continue to be dominated by services less and less common in the city, such as those offering incremental internet access.

highly detailed, finished plans, rather than having input into the planning process itself. Levy had tried to avoid the privatization critique—highly predictable in Mexico City, given ongoing efforts to privatize everything from oil leases to communal farms and even communally-held urban properties throughout Mexico since at least the 1980s—by structuring ProCDMX’s control of the avenue through a renewable 40-year lease arrangement. This maneuver seems neither to have fooled nor satisfied most opponents of privatization in the city (see Medina Ramírez, 2015; Villavicencio, 2015). Cutting across these many critiques was the somewhat obvious superficial fallacy that while it was billed as a ‘cultural corridor’, the only culture it offered seemed to be its retailers and eateries. This made the project little more than a fancy mall for some detractors. Confronted with these criticisms, Levy and Mancera continually reaffirmed their faith in the *consulta* process. The area’s increasingly organized residents acted accordingly.

Bombarding Levy with difficult questions and harsh critiques at public meetings, residents sought to have their dissatisfactions with the project heard and respected. It quickly became clear that most residents were not interested in adjusting the project, but only in rejecting it outright. When the Mancera government announced on November 6 that the *consulta* process would culminate in a yes/no vote exactly one month later on December 6, the battle lines were firmly drawn. Residents<sup>129</sup> from Condesa, Roma, and Juárez held several marches along the avenue in the ensuing weeks, in addition to an aggressive media campaign. Fliers, posters, handbills, and the like were posted on utility poles, across public works, and in the windows and across the balconies of residential and commercial spaces (see figures 3.7, 3.8, and 3.9). Facebook groups formed to promote resident criticisms of the project, and twitter became a virtual battlespace for

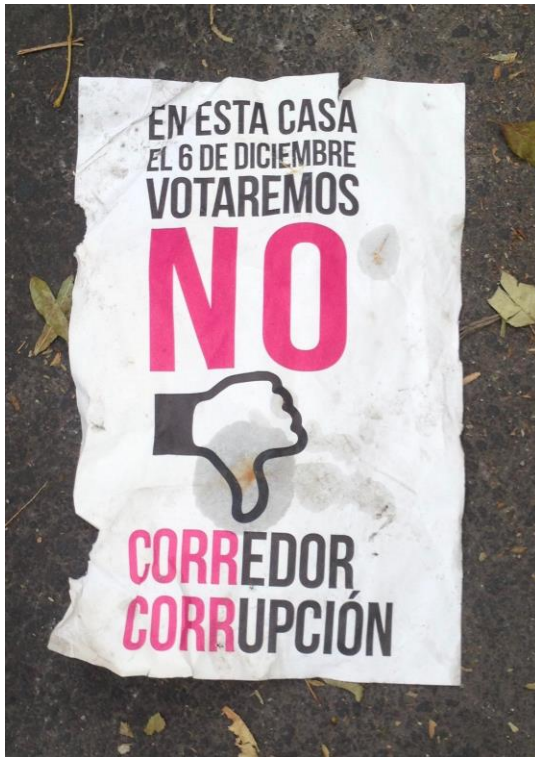
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<sup>129</sup> ‘Resident’ is my preferred translation of *vecino*, the term these people use for themselves. It can also be translated ‘neighbor’.

promoters and critics alike. Local television carried images of the plans, interviews with and comments from Levy and ProCDMX, and reminders of the date of the final vote. One of the more interesting and effective interventions was a youtube video produced by the so-called '*SuperCívicos*', a group whose comical admonishments and profoundly uncomfortable shaming of poorly-behaving residents, vendors, and city officials afford them some measure of local celebrity. In a five-minute-thirty-nine-second video, *Los SuperCívicos* pulled no punches in their attack on Mancera and Levy's plans and planning process. In the video, when the residents of Juárez, Condesa, and Roma voice concerns over the project ("fucking hipsters" as the Simón Levy character calls them), 'residents'<sup>130</sup> from other neighborhoods are brought in to outvote them, and they are unceremoniously dismissed as Mancera praises the victory of democracy and citizen participation. Just then, the *SuperCívicos* fall through the ceiling of the set, smashing Simón Levy's beloved model and bringing him to tears. They implore citizens to vote against the project on December 6, cutting to shots of the infamous 'second story' highway system on the west side of the city and explaining that this noisy landscape of cars and concrete will be the fate of their neighborhoods should the project be completed. They also point out that the *Corredor* was but "the first of ten projects that will convert our city into this [the 'second story' highway landscape]", placing further emphasis on this vote as a crucial first encounter in what would likely be a long and protracted city-wide struggle (Los Supercívicos, 2015).

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<sup>130</sup> This latter group of 'residents' display racialized attire and other aesthetic cues that mark them as decidedly 'other'. When the 'true' residents point this out to Mancera and Levy, they are told that these people are indeed residents, as they have been granted voter ID cards.



Figures 3.7-3.9: Signs produced by anti-project forces, displayed in Juárez, 12/13/2015-12/15/2015. Photography by author.

This variety of organizing spaces and techniques yielded an interesting coalition. Using the traditional tools of movements like the occupation of space and the distribution and display of print materials, along with the virtual tools of the social media era (especially twitter, Facebook, and youtube), the residents' opposition grew to include a diverse group of persons ranging across the spectrums of age, education, and any number of other social indicators.

For their part, Mancera, Levy, and the rest of the project's supporters waged a similar campaign. Levy made numerous public appearances and gave several television interviews extolling the virtues of the project. ProCDMX placed large wooden, tunnel-like structures containing beautiful visual renderings of the lineal park and bits of information about the project and its significance to the city in several public areas.<sup>131</sup> Bearing the colors of the city government, these archways appeared to be equal parts public information and project propaganda. Soon, some had been vandalized, their state-sponsored messages covered over with counterclaims. Still, the Mancera/Levy marketing campaign was highly successful in some ways, including especially branding. I found this out when I first began to ask questions about the project in the presence of opposition activists. I had to be told, more than once, that I was using the state's own language when I referred to the project as the 'triple C', as the '-Zona Rosa' portion of the name quickly disappeared from most advertisements and the project became simply the *Corredor Cultural Chapultepec* or 'el CCC'. In an attempt to respond to the state's effective marketing, residents generated several counter-brandings, including "Shopultepec" (a nifty anglicized neologism) and "*Centro Commercial Chapultepec*"

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<sup>131</sup> Incidentally, these archways provided my own first exposure to the project, as I wandered through and around them alongside other park-goers, some of whom confessed confusion nearly as deep as my own about the project in the first days of October.

(Chapultepec Mall). Parallel campaigns against the project used such slogans as “No *CORRedor*, No *CORRUpcion*” (‘No Corridor, No Corruption’) and “*Así No*” (‘Not Like This’, or ‘Not That Way’). Interestingly, the right to the city hardly figured in these efforts, though many of those active in this counter-campaign had been involved with or at the very least familiar with and respectful and appreciative of the CPCCMDC and its 2010 Charter.<sup>132</sup>

Mancera and Levy also had the powers of the state on their side, which had several implications in this case. It was of course a (nominally independent) state agency, the *Instituto Electoral del Distrito Federal* (Electoral Institute of the Federal District, hereafter IEDF), that set the precise terms of the vote. Many project opponents claim that the date of the vote, for instance, was chosen in an effort to limit voter turnout, as many residents reportedly take out of town vacations over the weekends in early December. The date of the vote can thus be understood to represent precisely the sort of postpolitical manipulation I argue to have been at work, as the ostensible reason for choosing a Sunday in December, from the IEDF’s perspective, would be a concern for the working public’s ability to participate in the process. Similar claims of manipulation were made about the location of polling stations, which were said to be strategically located to make them difficult to reach for voters in areas where opposition to the project was expected to be strong. These locations were not formally announced until three days prior to the vote on December 3, when an interactive map appeared on the website of the IEDF. Tweets, retweets, Facebook posts, and other social and traditional media notifications spread across the digital networks of the city as residents sought to get out the vote.

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<sup>132</sup> The public contest over the *Corredor* project can thus be understood as a prominent example of the right to the city not traveling or being pursued under precisely this name, despite obvious resonances.



Anecdotally, rumors of irregularities with the IEDF site circulated around the polling stations on the day of the vote, including my own. I had spent the previous day scrutinizing the IEDF map so that I might make an effective election-day canvas of polling stations. The morning of the vote, however, I was unable to access the map, receiving only an error message on the IEDF website. Local news sources also reported fraud allegations throughout the process, from the days leading up to the vote through the afternoon of the fateful day, including especially vote-buying (Llanos et al., 2015; *Regeneración*, 2015; Torres, 2015). The validity and extent of these claims, some of which can be reasonably substantiated with first-hand accounts, remains somewhat elusive. It is significant, however, that most accusations and arguments stem from a firm belief in the PRD's ability to control the voting process and the clientelist machinery of the neighborhoods around *Centro* (the city's historic center) in particular. As discussed in Chapter One, the neighborhoods of the historic center were hit hardest by the earthquake of 1985, and the local resistance to the PRI and its authoritarian practices have long made it friendly territory for the PRD.

Most important and most interesting of all the state's decisions pertained to the geography of the vote, which was to be taken at the level of the whole *delegación* of Cuauhtémoc. This choice made little sense to residents initially, as the *delegación* contains some sixty-five *colonias*, only three or four of which stood to be directly affected by the project, and only two of which technically bordered it. The LPC allows the *consulta* to be convened at nearly any conceivable geographical scale and configuration, leading many to wonder why sixty-five neighborhoods would be surveyed when only three to four stood to be directly affected. The official reasoning was that the project, in using some public monies and being pursued through a quasi-public agency, stood to affect residents well beyond the neighborhoods immediately bordering the avenue.

However, this justification obscures the intentionality of this choice in two ways: the rationale of larger effects in no way implies the *delegacion* as the correct scale for the vote (if anything, this would seem to imply the Federal District as the optimal choice); and, less verifiably, as mentioned above, Cuauhtémoc contains several neighborhoods in which the PRD enjoys especially strong support, or is said to be especially able to corrupt the voting process by buying votes, intimidating voters, or engaging in other kinds of electoral manipulation characteristic of both PRI and PRD governments for decades and of the kind anecdotally reported by local news sources on the day of the vote.<sup>133</sup> As I was told by a ProCDMX official, the ultimate result of the vote was received there as a highly unfortunate surprise, as Levy and Mancera had done all they could to plan for and produce a favorable, or at least negligible, result (Anonymous, personal communication, 5/28/16).

So, the planning process that produced the *Corredor* project is productively viewed as postpolitical in several senses. The project was developed by elites beyond the influence or knowledge of residents, legally-mandated citizen participation was limited to ineffectual ‘consultation’ about decisions that had already been made, and, as had overwhelmingly been the expectation among even the most active of opponents, even the miracle of a highly unfavorable result in the December 6 vote would likely produce little more than a few condescending words about the value of citizen input from Mancera and Levy, who would nevertheless go ahead and erect their monstrous

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<sup>133</sup> Maps of the vote seem, at least partially, to substantiate this suspicion, as these neighborhoods, which are overwhelmingly low-income, showed a pattern of voting for the initiative at a much higher rate (as high as 71% in favor) than their neighbors (most of which voted at least 50% against). These neighborhoods betray no other obvious reason this trend, and no competing explanations of this trend have achieved even reasonably wide circulation in the city. One such map of the vote and rates of participation can be found at: <http://subversiones.org/archivos/120397>

masterwork atop the avenue. The vote, however, did not go as the concerned authorities had planned. Rather, the final count was nearly two-to-one against the project (35.3% in favor, 63.5% against, 1.2% null), and by day's end Mancera had publicly (via twitter) announced that his government would respect the vote. News sources immediately reported the verdict and the unexpected decision to treat the vote as legally binding, and several days of tenuous energy set in concerning the project. Questions swirled as some residents celebrated and others cautioned that nothing was yet certain. Mancera's concession, not to mention the results of the vote, had been so unexpected that residents wondered whether it could be trusted. As it turns out, as I was told by a ProCDMX official some months later, the consequences for the planning process in Mexico City were far more pervasive than even the most hopeful supporters had dared to dream: Mancera immediately tabled the remainder of the rumored ten megaprojects (Anonymous, personal communication, 5/28/16). Announcements soon circulated that the city would explore new options for the avenue, including promises for greater citizen input throughout the next planning process.

Even amidst the celebratory atmosphere that had begun to set in by the time of the victory gathering in Juárez one week later, however, uncertainty persisted about the shadowy machinations and dealings of the local state that had so unexpectedly produced this joyous result.<sup>134</sup> While residents and observers could call to hand a ready set of answers, no solid body of evidence could explain why Mancera had chosen to treat the vote as if it were binding, given how carefully the process had been managed to afford his government its freedom of judgement in the final analysis. A common line of thinking, and the most compelling, is that Mancera had long planned to run for president

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<sup>134</sup> It should be pointed out that many residents I spoke with voiced little concern with Mancera's reasoning, and were happy to simply enjoy the favorable result.

in 2018, and did not wish to alienate voters by flatly denying their will in what had become a very public contest. Among adherents to this theory, there are those who believe Mancera will simply run as the PRD candidate and those who see a more intricate dance at work in which Mancera will run as the PRI's candidate, or as part of a coalition with PRI support. For those who see a more straightforward PRD path to a Mancera candidacy, disregarding the *Corredor* vote would seem to have been a potentially disastrous move, given the rhetoric Mancera has employed during his campaign for and tenure as Mayor. As with the establishment of the PRD's growing political control of the city through the 1990s, Mancera's path to the top executive post in the city was laid with the paving stones of continuing democratization. His official campaign slogan, "*Decidamos Juntos*" ('Let's Decide Together' or 'Deciding Together'), carried the image of a 'man of the people' while adeptly sidestepping the decidedly neopopulist cult of personality forever attending the complex figure of AMLO. This image could also be read as an attempt to retain the leftist appeal of the PRD base in the face of the bitter disillusionment many residents express in their assessments of the previous mayor, Marcelo Ebrard, whose decision to ignore citizen pleas and stern admonishments from the city's Human Rights Commission in the building of the *Supervía Poniente* (as explored in Chapter Two) severely tarnished his reputation.<sup>135</sup> Possibly as a result of his aggressively democratic message and promises to remain democratically above the fray, Mancera has enjoyed a robust popular mandate since his landslide 2012 election, in which he garnered a share of the vote 43.85% larger than the next leading candidate, Beatriz Paredes Rangel of the PRI/PRVM coalition.<sup>136</sup> No

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<sup>135</sup> Indeed, both Ebrard and AMLO presided over the construction of such 'second level' highway projects in blatant and highly publicized contravention of citizen outrage, a history not lost on opponents of the *Corredor* project and often mentioned in their media campaign.

<sup>136</sup> According to the IEDF (2012), Mancera received 63.58% of the vote, Paredes received 19.73%, and PAN candidate Isabel Miranda de Wallace received a meager 13.61%.

mayoral candidate had yet achieved such overwhelming support, not even the mythic Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, whose margin of victory was 23.5% in the city's first mayoral elections in 1997.<sup>137</sup> In order to run for president, this argument goes, Mancera must rescue what remains of his image as a politician whose respect for democratic processes can be trusted. This explanation thus compellingly places Mancera's ultimate *consulta* decision in line with the success of the carefully crafted narrative arc of his political career and with the failure of his government's attempts to ensure an electoral outcome that would justify its pursuance of the *Corredor* project.

## Conclusion

In the framing of *Avenida Chapultepec* as a problem requiring intervention, in developing the *Corredor Cultural Chapultepec* as a solution to this problem, and in the way it sought to implement that solution, the Mancera government and its allies demonstrated more clearly than ever before the existence of a postpolitical condition in Mexico City. The features of this state of affairs do not suggest an absence of politics, however. Rather, the history of the PRD's break from the PRI, its efforts to gain and maintain control of Mexico City's executive and legislative powers, and its continual production and defense of legitimacy in the years leading up to the *Corredor* episode betray a host of contentious activities only rightly understood as political. Moreover, Mancera's decision to honor the December 6 vote did not make political what had been not political, but only revealed the actions of the residents concerned as having always been the enactment of politics,

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<sup>137</sup> In 1997, Cárdenas received 48.1% of the vote, while his closest competitor, Alfredo del Mazo (PRI) received 25.6%, and Carlos Castillo Peraza (PAN) came in third place with 15.6% (Emmerich, 2005). For further comparison, AMLO was elected by a margin of only 5.57% (AMLO received 39.5% and Santiago Creel (PAN/Verde) and Jesús Silva Herzog Flores (PRI) received 34% and 22.7%, respectively, according to *La Jornada* (2000)), and Ebrard by a margin of 19.11% (Ebrard received 46.37%, with Demetrio Sodi (PAN) and Beatriz Paredes Rangel (PRI/PVEM) receiving 27.26% and 21.59%, respectively (IEDF, 2006)).

even 'proper politics'. Mancera's postpolitical regime was not apolitical, therefore, but simply hegemonic.

As the unfolding of the *Corredor* process and the ultimate abandonment of the project have illustrated, hegemonic relations are unstable and susceptible to ongoing assault by those forces bent on establishing a different hegemonic relation, a different police order with its own perceptual cartographies. As in the important related controversy over the city's planned airport explored by Davis and Rosan (2004) and Stolle-McAllister (2005), those opposed to the *Corredor* project refused the place assigned them, the role of anemic 'participants', in what seemed a hollow democratic exercise. Their response, however, was not simply to abstain. Instead, they transformed what the local state had intended as a limited dialogue within pre-determined spaces and on prearranged terms into an active organizing campaign, expanding the scope of participation to include the extensive use of multiple media to express their messages and reimagine the strength of their collective voice. Rather than succumb to their own dismal appraisal of political realities, they pushed what they largely considered a powerless vote beyond the Mayor's breaking point, and succeeded in bringing down a decidedly postpolitical initiative from within the established rules. There was no physical violence nor threats of such violence, as there had been in the airport saga, though the subjective violence of identity realignment was profoundly felt by residents in the aftermath of the vote. The following lines from a quiet, middle-aged woman who waited patiently to stand and deliver her perspective at a local neighborhood meeting in Juárez some months later, accurately capture this shift in attitude (fieldnotes, 4/24/16):

I'm from Juárez. Before December 6, I didn't know so many residents from Juárez, Roma, or Condesa. Now, because of the actions of Simón Levy, we shout together, we struggle together, we know each other. Now, we are strong.

Together, we are not less than Mancera, Peña Nieto, no one. Before December 6, we didn't know that.

These residents didn't refuse to accept democracy. They refused to accept that the participatory planning process the Mancera government had offered them was democracy. But rather than reject the process entirely, they strategically exploited its weakest point, piercing the heart of the democratic legitimacy so prized by its figurehead. Even holding aside Mancera's possible presidential aspirations, that his partially crafted, partially inherited postpolitical hegemony had been built atop a foundation of democratic participation made it vulnerable to precisely this political gesture performed in precisely this moment and place.

Less than a month after the the Corredor project was scratched by Mancera, the city that had been known as the *Distrito Federal* became overnight the *Ciudad de México*, and the sweeping suite of changes known collectively as the *Reforma Política* (Political Reform) began to take hold. The city turned its attention to the drafting of its first political constitution, among a host of other changes set to take effect between 2016 and 2018. As the structures of power are reconfigured, the interrogation of postpolitical hegemony should likewise shift to questions of dynamism. It is not difficult to imagine a near future in which Mancera's government may seek to exploit what political capital a revived democratic legitimacy may offer, if any. Nor does the possibility of a revolutionary *demos* now seem beyond the political pale, pushing through the seams of 'the social' envisioned by the city's prophets of progress. But whatever uncertainties may come for the residents of this and other sections of *El Monstruo*, they can now look back to a

sunny December Sunday on which they made their voices heard, shouting down the tyranny of TINA<sup>138</sup> by the sheer strength of their numbers.

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<sup>138</sup> The postpolitical ultimatum par excellence (see Swyngedouw, 2011), TINA is the acronym for the famous Thatcherism “there is no alternative.”



## Chapter Four

### The Redemptive (Urban) Revolution: Political Reform and the Birth of the Capital City-State

Madero, the so-called Apostle of Democracy, is riding triumphantly down the Paseo de la Reforma with his troops, in the wake of Don Porfirio's departure. Two campesinos, clad in the traditional white pajamas, stand amid the throngs that line both sides of the broad avenue. As Madero passes, the crowd erupts: "Viva Madero! Viva Democracia!" One campesino turns to the other and says, "Yes, long live our Liberator, Señor Madero. But who is this Democracia?" His companion replies, "Well, it must be Señora Madero."  
-recounted in Joseph and Buchenau (2013: 47)

#### Introduction

This chapter explores the suite of changes known collectively as 'the political reform', in the medium-to-long *durée*. This will include extensive amendments to Article 122 of the Mexican Constitution (of 1917) in January of 2016, which, among other things, dissolved the Federal District and created a new state within the union thereafter known as Mexico City (*Ciudad de México*) and made provisions for the drafting of that entity's first constitution, along with the process by which these proposals were executed in the newly re-christened capital city. It will begin with four ethnographic scenes which, taken together, will illustrate the outlines of a charged blend of excitement and trepidation at work in the general mood prior to the election of the Constitutional Assembly tasked with deciding the fate of the new constitution. The element of fear stemmed in large part from either a general distrust in a duplicitous Mexican democracy or from a more specific fear of the PRI and the dangers of its political schemes. The element of enthusiasm, by contrast, seemed to spring from a variety of sources, from a reinvigorated sense of the progress and promise of democratization to the obstinate faith that even if the worst prognostications of the trickery of the PRI were to be true and the constitutional process nothing more than an elaborate sham, it still presented the city's residents with an opportunity. That is, even if PRI and PRD leadership intended to use the constitutional process for sinister political ends, the democratic moment its birthing would necessitate was a moment of uncertainty not unlike that of the *Corredor* project, a reality some

residents stood ready to exploit. To make sense of the profane and tempestuous mixture of plans, promises, and prophecies uneasily circling these events in 2016 and 2017, I will once again follow the discursive, political, and temporal linkages implicitly or (more often) explicitly made to the Mexican Revolution. In order to parse these ties and the uses to which the Revolution is forever put in the capital city's politics, I will consider political reform from a vantage that attempts to capture an appropriate level of breadth, from its ideational inception at the local level and the national reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s to the adoption of Mexico City's first constitution by the Constitutional Assembly in early 2017. The idea of revolution, more specifically of the political reform as revolution, will propel this investigation through several dimensions to be explored in the sections that follow. In the third section, I will elaborate the unfolding of the processes of political reform in its two intertwined geographical scales of the Mexican federal union and the Mexican national capital, building on the tensions elaborated in previous chapters. The fourth section will consist of a multivalent analysis of these processes through the lens of revolution and the multiple refractions it provides for the parties involved, from residents of the city's peripheries to party bosses and real estate moguls. This analysis, focused on what I collectively refer to as a "revolutionary structure of feeling", will provide a useful approach for understanding the seemingly contradictory mixture of thoughts and feelings surrounding the process of political reform. I will build on this analysis to argue that many of the lines of revolution that might be traced through this "structure" are aimed in some way at a redemption of the tragic promise of revolution, along the lines proposed by Žižek (2012). And in this sense, I argue in the concluding section, whether their efforts sang with the sharpest sincerity or smacked heavily of unctuous Janus-facery, they shared an interest in making this urban revolution the truest Mexican Revolution of all.

### Everyday Political Reform: Four Scenes of Tempestuous Context

Nearly four and half months after the small December celebration in a sleepy corner of Juárez where residents and their allies met to celebrate the victory of their campaign against the Corredor Cultural Chapultepec, another demonstration<sup>139</sup> took place in Mexico City, this time with more obvious national origins and implications. On the sunny Sunday of April 24, 2016, a mass of humanity took over the Paseo de la Reforma in a call for greater attention to the value and the rights of women in Mexico. Many adorned with shirts bearing the names of organizations, parties, or lost loved ones, and some bearing no shirts at all, an inestimable number of women walked from the Monument to the Revolution to the Angel of Independence. Some sang, others laughed, and a few wept. I count myself fortunate to have witnessed some of their march (field notes, 4/24/2016, and see Figures 4.1-4.3):

The Angel had already begun to crowd with people when I arrived...The eastern side was filling up quickly with woman of all ages wearing purple and white t-shirts bearing a variety of feminist messages. Many carried flags or signs. There were also some men, some children, and some reporters and lookers-on. I found a good spot at the height of the steps, dead center. I took a few photos as I waited. The crowd was interesting, and there were some justifiably intense statements being made to reporters here and there, about the widespread violence against women in the country, about the lack of justice for women, about women being equal political voices, etc. Many of these statements were being made by young women, I found, but there were plenty of *abuelas* in the throngs as well.

Soon, the marchers approached, overwhelming the westbound side of Reforma while lines of (mostly female, interestingly) traffic police tried desperately to hold them to that side. Traffic continued to flow along the eastbound side. Soon enough, though, the march would invade that side as well and traffic would be halted entirely. The crowds began to fill the *glorieta*, to wild applause and a multitude of cheers and chants. Some women walked into the traffic massed at the south side of the *glorieta*, wading with signs and chants into the captive autos, pointing and shouting their message. Police whistles only served to heighten the general din.

...I came down around the south side of the Angel's perch and picked my way into the street. It was a comfortable chaos. I immediately noticed a great variety of women's groups and diverse agendas. ... There were some sidelong

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<sup>139</sup> *Manifestación* is the word nearly always used to describe public protests, marches, or other large planned or unplanned public gatherings of a political nature.

glances of angst and suspicion as [groups] bumped against each other at the pinch point of the march, where Reforma meets the glorieta. The takeover of the eastbound lanes had helped alleviate some of this pressure, as the marchers spread out across the boulevard, but still the tension found expression. Even so, a mood of acceptance and collegiality pervaded the event, and I never witnessed anything more than glances and murmurings among the participants.

For the men, it was another story. Though most groups had stated that all sympathizers were welcome, there were some groups for whom there were far too many men present. At some point, when the congestion had reached a head, a violent chant and dance broke out. A line of photographers had formed, mostly men, at precisely the wrong point at the glorieta/Reforma junction, and was seemingly contributing to the slowing of the march, particularly as it was difficult to get large signs through them. Frustrated by this, a group of young women formed a cluster that faced inward and began to aggressively chant “Solo mujeres!” As they chanted, the surrounding masses began to take notice. The chant grew in strength, and the group began to push through the congestion, forcing photographers and everyone else aside as they, at long last, punctured the glorieta. Wild applause followed, and a prideful euphoria seized the terrain.



Figure 4.1: Scene from a march for women's rights in Mexico City, 4/24/2016. The monument in the center is the “Angel of Independence”. Photography by author.





Figure 4.2: Scene from a women's march in Mexico City, 4/24/2016, looking roughly northeast along the *Paseo de la Reforma*. Photography by author.

One of the many groups I spoke with at this event wore t-shirts emblazoned with the logos of AMLO's Morena party, "the hope of Mexico". They told me that they belonged to the leadership of the women's arm of the party. Their shirts, and those of several other groups, however, also carried another message, that of the importance of the upcoming election of members of the Constitutional Assembly, a group of one hundred persons who would decide the fate of the city's forthcoming constitution. Others too wore t-shirts with constitutional messages, the most common of which was that depicted in Figure 4.3, which states: "For a democratic, popular, citizen, and FEMINIST constitution!" (original emphasis). As I spoke with marchers and onlookers, it became clear that the city's constitution was viewed by some hopeful residents as a significant opportunity for meaningful progress on women's issues, among other pressing concerns.



Figure 4.3: A woman at the women's march cited above (4/24/2016), wearing a shirt which bears the message: "For a Democratic, Popular, Citizen, and FEMINIST Constitution!" Photography by author.

As the march was beginning to clear in the early evening, I walked and took the metro one stop across Juárez to attend a meeting of what the organizers called the "Juárez Neighborhood School of Citizenship". These meetings were held in a stately old building

on Turín street still adorned with vestiges of the anti-*Corredor* campaign waged the previous fall. In a crowded room on the second floor, neighbors met on select Sunday evenings to debate the politics of their city and country, to ask questions of one another and hear the insider perspectives of those attendees most active in local politics, and to be educated on such topics as the history of rights and modern citizenship in the western world, as was the initial topic on this particular evening. Copies of the French “Rights of Man and Citizen” and the US “Declaration of Independence” were distributed as the two women leading the discussion extolled the virtues of a historical perspective on rights and the significance of Mexico City’s current political moment. Even their best efforts at promoting the institutions of democracy as useful channels of power available to citizens, however, had trouble penetrating the fog of skepticism and distrust that permeated every discussion. Daily coverage of the so-called ‘Panama Papers’ had only fueled this mood, and even one of the organizers at one point categorically stated that “Mexico is a paradise for the corrupt” (field notes, 4/24/2016). Still, the organizers fought for the idea that legal documents and philosophical antecedents like these declarations, along with international treaties and local and national law, have great relevance, at least in that “...governments sign these documents, and then they are obligated to follow them, and to make laws that support them!” (field notes, 4/24/16):

...a [man] seated in the opposite corner of the room bellowed his take on this issue of accountability for politicians: “Corruption is all powerful, and total, throughout this country!” ... This began a series of exchanges between him and the two women behind the table. At one point, [one of the women] began explaining...“In the United States, it works like this...” As she continued, [the man] interrupted her: “Yes, but we are not the gringos!” This was received with wild laughter and some light applause, and a few sad looks. It cut the woman’s idea down in its tracks, and the conversation moved on.

[The other woman] behind the table pushed the meeting to recognize the importance of collective strength. “Now we’re organized”, she stated confidently. “We’re not organized!” retorted [the man]. With a look of irritation, she responded “We’re organizing right now!” “We *want* to be organized”, he stressed. After a thoughtful pause, the woman specified “We are *in the process* of organizing.” Silently, but with a slight bow of acquiescence, [he] relented.

Here too the conversation turned eventually to the city's constitution, with Herón and the other organizers imploring their neighbors to pay careful attention to the process, as some of the most significant actors involved were beholden to or directly represented commercial or political interests. This allegation resonated with most of the group, it appeared, and fed the beating of the dead horse of corruption. As with the *Corredor* project, however, the process of establishing the Assembly required a democratic moment in that some of its members would be voted on by the city's residents. This presented residents, Herón argued, with an opportunity to force some semblance of accountability, and perhaps to make a meaningful contribution to the constitutional process. At this meeting, the intoxication of the victory over the *Corredor* project seemed to have worn off somewhat, despite the persistence of a victorious rhetoric, and mingled uncomfortably with general skepticism. Despite the organizers efforts, talk of corruption seemed to animate these residents far more than talk of participation in the constitutional process, the energy of critique and cynicism finding a strength then unmatched by that of creativity and hope.

The following day, I attended a meeting at the Mexico City Museum<sup>140</sup> in which several panels were convened to discuss the constitutional process (see Figures 4.4-4.7). The panelists were largely academics, activists, and civil society leaders, and the evening's keynote address was given by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano. The last panelist of the long day of speakers was Sergio González, an architect by training and resident of Colonia Juárez. Frankly stating the concerns of many residents, he forcefully argued at the outset that (González, 2016):

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<sup>140</sup> *El Museo de la Ciudad de México*, located on Isabel la Católica street in the city's historic center, is a converted mansion, once the familial home of the Counts of Santiago de Calimaya gifted by Hernán Cortés to loyal conquistador Juan Gutiérrez Altamirano.



This constitutional exercise is not anything democratic, for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the elucidation, debate and decision on the laws that we require is being carried out in haste, as the priority of the promoters is to synchronize such exercises to sexennial schedules and political objectives that are far outside the schedules of citizens. We are not in a hurry to get a Constitutional Assembly in six or eight months. And we are prepared to take all the time that is necessary for a project of such magnitude. On the other hand, it is an exercise without the direct participation of the socioeconomic and cultural diversity that characterizes the inhabitants of this city. The timetable of the political class and selective and vertical participation express a conception of democracy reduced to procedures and demographic polls: surveys, virtual consultations, opinion polls, forums like this one, which obviously excludes majorities from participation in the elucidation, deliberation, and decision-making of laws.



Figure 4.4: Marco Rascón speaks at the Museum of Mexico City, 4/25/2016. Photography by author.



Figure 4.5: Sergio González speaks at the Museum of Mexico City, 4/25/2016. Photography by author.



Figure 4.6: Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas delivers a keynote address at the Museum of Mexico City, 4/25/2016. Photography by author.





Figure 4.7: An audience member speaks at the Museum of Mexico City, 4/25/2016. Photography by author.

Other panelists struck a more hopeful tone for the process. Making reference to the *Así No* slogan of some anti-*Corredor* forces, one panelist insisted that as valuable as such explicitly critical and oppositional discourse could be, there was also a necessity for an “*así sí*”, a force to defend the neighborhood, and by extension the city, as it was and as it could be. He and others argued that the coming constitution provided a great opportunity to exercise such an affirmative voice. Voicing agreement on this point, Marco Rascón Córdova, a founding member of the PRD, provocatively asserted that the constitution should be “not an end, but a beginning” (field notes, 4/25/2016). Cárdenas espoused a measured optimism with regard to the constitution’s potential, but likewise cautioned that though the constitution promised to regulate many issues in “general terms”, much of the real political work would take place in the secondary or supporting legislation drafted in

its wake. His tone was less enthusiastic than many seemed to have hoped for, and his wide-ranging critiques of the process and cautionary notes about the state of urban development and urban governance in the city left many in the audience with a somewhat negative, if realistic, impression.

Some days later I found myself in an uber on my way to appointment, trying to make sense of this range of opinions and to focus in on the political story of the constitutional process. I had been repeatedly told by friends and strangers that the whole process was a trick<sup>141</sup> of the PRI, an elaborate scheme developed by party elites aimed at the reactivation or reconstitution of the party's machinery in the Federal District. In the midst of a casual iteration of a near daily conversation in ubers or taxis about my purpose for being in Mexico and my feelings about the capital city, I decided to broach the subject with the driver. Like many other older uber drivers I had met in Mexico City, he was or had been some sort of professional. Unlike many others, he was in no hurry, and even indicated that he wanted to finish our conversation as he tapped his telephonic completion of the trip's charges and pulled up to my destination (field notes, 5/3/2016):

He told me that as the DF would be treated more like a state in the wake of the reforms, it would lose some of the special privileges it held as a district, including some of its autonomy from the remainder of the country. He also had a lot to say about the PRI and its supposed return to the city through the reforms. "Of course it's a trick!" he said, in response to my saying that I had been told that the constitutional process, "es un truco del PRI, para reconquistar el DF" ["is a trick, of the PRI, in order to reconquer the Federal District"]. That he firmly believed the process of 'political reform' to be a "trick" in this way, however, was no obstacle to his thinking it a significant moment. It may be a trick, he reasoned, but it was still an opportunity to remake the city in spite of this. The PRI had lost the city decades ago, he explained (in a familiar refrain), and desperately wanted to get it back, as they had the national government with the election of Peña Nieto. The problem, he argued, was that *chilango* support was less easy to purchase or control than that of the rest of the country. "In the rest of the country, you can easily buy votes. But here in DF, people will take the money, but then vote how they want anyway."

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<sup>141</sup> The word typically used was *truco*, variously translated as 'trick', 'ploy', or 'ruse'.

Regardless of this man's perhaps comical appraisal of the process of vote-buying in the city vis-a-vis the countryside, his perspective is the most clear in its illustration of the coexistence of seemingly contradictory attitudes expressed in each of the other three scenes related above with regard to the constitutional processes of 2016 and 2017.

Treating the process as a trick, a ruse, was necessary in order maintain critical distance and, perhaps, to stave off another heartbreak of postpolitical 'democracy'. This much was clear, though the unexpected victory in the *Corredor* saga seemed to have caused a significant wrinkle in the normal political calculus of the everyday resident, creating space for a hope many continued to view with pained skepticism in some cases and public denunciation as naiveté in others. But to completely disregard the constitution based on this basic presupposition was equally dangerous, many argued. To leave this ruse to run its course would mean the surrender of the capital city to the ruling party or the real estate "cartels". It would be to allow their homes and communities to be fought over and horse-traded by those they vehemently derided as the wicked masters of graft, to turn the other cheek as Mexico City became a gilded hellscape openly regarded as "a paradise for the corrupt." The constitution promised for 2017 was not simply a trick, nor simply a tool, a prize, or a golden opportunity. Rather, as of the spring of 2016, it represented each and all of these possibilities to various parties. The constitutional process was therefore an open terrain, a privileged site for the staging of a politics that would surely have reverberations for untold decades. The next section will elaborate the incremental and episodic process by which political reform became a reality in Mexico City.

### **Political Reform and the Capital City**

The seeds of political reform are to be found in the calls for the capital's autonomy since at least the 1980s, if not long before, and are illustrative of a dangerous political

cleavage between the interwoven geographical scales of city and country that took on a heightened intensity during this period. As explored in Chapter One, the PRI's violent repression of the student disturbances of 1968 had only deepened the growing distrust of the party in the rapidly expanding capital, whose seven-fold population growth in four decades<sup>142</sup> was fueled by rural-to-urban migration from regions with a history of violent confrontation with national authority. An inadequate response to the earthquakes of 1985, the 1980s debt crisis and IMF-imposed austerity measures, and the contraction of public sector employment and the end of the "Mexican Miracle" of ISI policy, along with an internal power struggle that threatened to tear apart the PRI, all served to transform what had been a simmering tension into formal demands for urban autonomy. It would take several decades of incremental reforms for the city to wrest the institutions of governance from the national state, in a slow but steady process in which democratization, a significant concept at the national and local levels, was deeply intertwined with the political "emancipation" of the capital.

What became the Federal District had been firmly under the control of the Mexican national government since the 1917 constitution, and indeed even more so before the Revolution under the dictatorial regime of President Porfirio Díaz. At the behest of Revolutionary General Álvaro Obregón, the statehood of Mexico City was revoked and the Federal District created (as discussed in Chapter One). Between the Revolution and the reforms of 1996, the city was controlled by an executive Regent (*Regente*) nominated by the President. The Regent was primarily tasked with keeping peace in the capital and otherwise managing the carefully guarded and highly coveted electorate housed there, which del Carmen Moreno Carranco (2008, following Ward, 2004) argues

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<sup>142</sup> See Connelly (2003).

produced political appointees whose tenures were based either on adeptness and effective governance (as in the case of “Iron Regent” Ernesto Peralta Uruchurtu, whose fourteen-year appointment spanned three presidential *sexenios*) or personal loyalty to the President (as in the case of Manuel Camacho Solís, who worked with his friend President Carlos Salinas de Gortari to stymie early attempts at Federal District political reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s). In addition to directly appointing the executive head of the Federal District, the Mexican Presidency (still) dominates the national legislative process by proposing the legislation to be debated by the houses of congress. The President also proposes constitutional amendments, which then require a two-thirds congressional majority and ratification by seventeen of (then) thirty-one states. This incredible degree of executive authority, bolstered by the PRI’s control of the national congress and its domination of the federal bureaucracy, Edmonds-Poli and Shirk (2009: 78) argue, “made legislators a mere rubber stamp for executive legislation, budgetary approval, and even constitutional amendments”, which incredibly numbered “over 400” between 1917 and 2000. To say nothing of the rest of the country, this arrangement submitted virtually all functions of government in the Federal District to the direct control of the executive branch of the federal government, and placed the city under the personal purview of roughly seven decades of PRI presidents.

The first attempts to put a stop to PRI presidents’ ability to treat the Federal District as a personal fiefdom began in the late 1980s, under popular political pressure arising from the contested fraudulent presidential elections of 1988. In that year, the Federal District was granted an Assembly of Representatives, though for the next six years this body was able only to make ‘recommendations’. A further round of amendments gave it a measure of legislative authority in 1993, though even then this body was not directly elected until a yet further round of reforms in 1996, when it became the Legislative



Assembly of the Federal District (*Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal*, hereafter ALDF). The 1996<sup>143</sup> reforms, which also made provisions for the direct election of a newly re-christened Head of Government (*Jefe de Gobierno*, or Mayor) for the Federal District, came about in the tumult of the Presidency of Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León. The last presidential gasp of the PRI, Zedillo became the PRI nominee only after the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio Murrieta in Tijuana in March of 1994.<sup>144</sup> The early years of his presidency witnessed the collapse of the Peso (for which Zedillo requested and received US and IMF assistance, which did not help his popularity), the ongoing EZLN uprising in Chiapas and elsewhere, and several notable political scandals.<sup>145</sup> Amid

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<sup>143</sup> Which largely took effect the following fall, in 1997, aside from the direct election of the *delegados* (executive heads of the Federal District's sixteen delegations or boroughs), which did not take effect until 2000 (Becerra Chávez, 2003).

<sup>144</sup> Suspicion continues to swirl around this event, though Mario Aburto Martínez was tried and convicted of the crime and claimed to be acting alone. Colosio's assassination came one day after former Federal District Regent Manuel Camacho Solís ended months of speculation surrounding an internal struggle for presidential candidacy by publicly announcing that he would not seek the party's nomination (Perez-Pena 1994). At the time of the Colosio's death, Camacho was serving as chief negotiator to the Zapatista National Liberation Army (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, commonly referred to as the *Zapatistas*, hereafter EZLN), who had started an armed uprising in the State of Chiapas in the south of the country earlier in the year. Camacho had for years been the party's presumptive nominee (see Ward, 1989). Speculation surrounding Camacho's possible involvement stemmed from eerie predictions of Colosio's political demise, as DePalma (1994a) reported: "Within a few weeks of the [EZLN] uprising, Mexico City newspaper columnists were writing plots in which Mr. Colosio could become mysteriously ill and would have to be replaced as a candidate by Mr. Camacho." The Mexican Constitution of 1917 bars any presidential candidate from holding political office for six months prior to a presidential election, which cut severely into PRI leadership's choices in the wake of Colosio's murder, a fact which only contributed to the rumors and suspicions of criminal conspiracy.

<sup>145</sup> In September of 1994, PRI Secretary General Francisco Ruiz Massieu was shot to death in his car by a machine-gun-wielding assassin near the Monument to the Revolution in the Federal District (Darling, 1994). Brother-in-law to President Carlos Salinas, Ruiz Massieu was reportedly being considered for Minister of the Interior, a powerful cabinet position, in soon-to-be President Zedillo's administration. The investigation into his murder became a major scandal, especially when Ruiz Massieu's brother Mario (also Brother-in-law to President Salinas) resigned his post as Assistant Attorney General and chief investigator into his brother's assassination—having been appointed by President Salinas—alleging a cover up by the highest ranking officials of the PRI, and fled to the country. He was intercepted on his way to Spain in Newark, New Jersey for carrying US\$46,000 in undeclared cash, and was due to face money laundering charges in Texas when he died of an overdose (and apparent suicide) while under house arrest in New Jersey in September 1999. He had reportedly made twenty-six deposits—largely via proxy—of between US\$40,000 and \$800,000 each in a Houston, Texas bank over a fourteen-month period from 1993 to 1995, totaling US\$9,900,000, while serving as Assistant Attorney General, a post in which he was charged with prosecuting major narcotics traffickers (Gunson, 1999). President

these troubles, a suffering public image, and widespread national and international speculation on the demise of his party, Zedillo agreed to and promoted the 1996 reforms to demonstrate his—and the PRI's—commitment to meaningful democratization and an end to political corruption. In their first mayoral elections, as discussed above, the newly enfranchised *chilangos* elected PRD founder Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solorzano, who would vacate the office early in order to run for the national presidency again in 2000. This later election would see the conservative PAN finally unseat the PRI at the national level. Thus, while the national electorate expressed its fateful dissatisfaction in a rightward drift, the capital city spoke its inaugural democratic homily in the language of the left.

With firm control of the Federal District, the PRD went about consolidating its authority in the 1990s and into the 2000s. Using mechanisms and practices explored in Chapter Three, the PRD was able to take over much of the territory once controlled by the PRI, including many of that party's patronage networks and much of its political machinery. Meanwhile, the defeated PRI was forced into a vague alliance<sup>146</sup> with the conservative

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Salinas's own brother, "businessman" Raul Salinas de Gortari—who the US General Accounting Office reported to the US Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (within the Committee on Governmental Affairs) had illegally transferred some US\$90,000,000-US\$100,000,000 to personal Swiss bank accounts between 1992 and 1994 with the aid of Citibank in New York City (on whose Board of Directors ex-President Zedillo currently sits, as of June 2017) (USGOA, 1998)—was found guilty of masterminding the Ruiz Massieu assassination and sentenced to fifty years in prison (he was released when his conviction was overturned some ten years later). Another alleged conspirator, Congressman Manuel Muñoz Rocha, disappeared in the days following Ruiz Massieu's assassination, and it was strongly suspected that it was his remains which were found two years later on a ranch outside Mexico City owned by Raul Salinas, who claimed that federal prosecutors had planted them there (Fineman, 1996). See also DePalma (1994b) for a brief summary of several other scandals and otherwise unhappy events of 1994 in Mexico.

<sup>146</sup> Ackerman (2014) claims that a de facto alliance between the two parties had existed since the Salinas presidency of the late 1980s and early 1990s. This theory is tenable, given the ideological drift of the party since the early 1980s toward its 'technical' side, especially after the exit of Cárdenas's faction in 1988. The party's *tecnicos* tended to be US-educated (many having received graduate degrees in economics, business administration, or public administration) and favor broadly neoliberal reforms, not unlike their counterparts in the upper echelon of the PAN.

PAN, which as of 2000 occupied the highest and most powerful office in the land in the person of Vicente Fox Quesada. But where the PRI had attempted to re-forge its relations with the capital by making historic democratic concessions and vowing to purge itself of political corruption and widespread narco influence, the PAN turned its attention outward. Fox, the grandson of immigrants from Ohio and the Basque country of Spain who grew up in the Mexican countryside and was famously ridiculed for his folksy and colloquial language, spent much of his presidency dealing with crises that would likely have meant little to previous PRI regimes, such as the airport saga mentioned in Chapter Three, or his attempt to forge stronger ties with US President George W. Bush, an initially fruitful endeavor derailed by the attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York City. Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa, his PAN successor, is best known for his disastrous attempt to find a military solution to the country's narco-trafficking problems, especially in the north of the country. Both presidencies also failed to produce the kind of economic returns their constituencies had been promised, amazingly perhaps the lone unforgivable sin amidst the cesspool of violence and disarray that marked the PAN's only two terms atop the throne of the Mexican executive (see Ackerman 2012).

In 2012, the PRI's "boy president" Enrique Peña Nieto barely edged out the second campaign of the PRD's AMLO,<sup>147</sup> and a historic margin of victory brought Miguel Ángel

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<sup>147</sup> During and after the elections, AMLO and others accused the PRI of widespread electoral fraud, including vote buying. Of these accusations, arguably the most relevant in Mexico City was that publicly levied against major grocery and department store chain Soriana, the second largest grocery retailer in all of Mexico behind only Walmart. Voters were allegedly offered Soriana gift cards in exchange for PRI votes, a charge both the PRI and Soriana have always denied. Evidence of this practice abounds in testimonial and video forms, as do personal stories, rumors, and jokes of Soriana-aided vote buying gone wrong, as when voters, often without any sense of irony, accused operatives of distributing faulty or empty gift cards they were later unable to use to buy groceries. In January of 2014, the Federal Electoral Institute (*Instituto Federal Electoral*, hereafter IFE) declared the accusations of electoral fraud unfounded (*El Economista*, 2014). The allegations nevertheless loom large in the city, and I met several *anti-priistas* in Mexico City who remain committed to a (likely inconsequential) boycott of Soriano stores as a result. See also

Mancera Espinosa into the capital city's mayoralty (as discussed in Chapter Three). For some observers, these elections exemplified a regression or "interruption" of Mexico's democratization (see Tuckman 2012a), while for others the peaceful transition of power illustrated the robustness of the gains made since the election of Fox in 2000. As Ackerman (2014)—who cautioned against the apathy encouraged by the "myth" of a democratic transition—explains, one enduring legacy of the PAN years was the loss of centralized power under a strong PRI president and the consequent empowerment of regional PRI leadership. This, Ackerman argued, forced Peña Nieto into the uncomfortable and unfamiliar position of needing allies in order to effectively govern. The President's position and the temporal coincidence of their victories brought the resurgent PRI and the once rebellious PRD into close relationship, as Mancera and Peña Nieto forged a professional bond that immediately soured the leftist elements of Mancera's party and constituency. Indeed, a widespread perception of Mancera's centrism and coziness with the deeply unpopular Peña Nieto fueled the breakaway of AMLO's Morena party from the PRD in Mexico City some months later. Cooperation between Mancera and Peña Nieto was quickly formalized by their joint participation in the latter's *Pacto por México* (Pact for Mexico), an agreement between leading figures in the PRI, PAN, and PRD signed in a December 2 ceremony held at Chapultepec Castle. The agreement secured cooperation on Peña Nieto's proposed educational, telecommunications, and federal finance reforms (Herrera and Urrutia, 2012). Entering this alliance seems to have cost Mancera the confidence of many in the PRD, and certainly that of much of Mexico City civil society. What the *Pacto por México* accomplished for him, however, was to put the capital city back in the spotlight of national politics, and, especially in the wake of

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Tuckman (2012b) for these and other allegations of voter fraud in the 2012 election, which, she claimed, "exposed these practices as never before thanks to the explosion of mobile phone ownership and social media, as well as the activism of the new anti-PRI student movement that erupted in May [2012]."

AMLO's departure, to create a center-left governing alliance that could benefit both the PRI and the PRD.

Mancera's interest in the *Pacto por México* was explicitly framed as the culmination of the incremental political reforms of past PRI presidencies. Previous mayors, including AMLO and especially Ebrard,<sup>148</sup> had been making noise about the city's full emancipation from the federal state for more than a decade by then, as discussed in Chapter Two. But what Mancera asked of the President was the full breadth of changes first envisioned by the city's residents and progressive leaders in the late 1980s, full political autonomy and an equal place in the federation as the union's thirty-second state. Just over three years later, Peña Nieto delivered on this promise by signing his own round of political reform in January of 2016 (Elvira Vargas and Romero Sánchez, 2016). The changes to Article 122 of the Constitution of 1917 were far-reaching. With the stroke of a pen, Peña Nieto changed the city's name from the Federal District to Mexico City, and its status to that of an autonomous state within the Mexican Union. The reforms also required the new city to craft a constitution, and created a series of deadlines and a set of procedures for the drafting and formal adoption of this document. The constitution was to be debated and eventually adopted by an assembly of 100 persons, which was to convene in September of 2016. Of these, 60 *constituyentes*<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ebrard had felt the sting of federal control most personally and most harshly even before his tenure as mayor. In 2004, President Vicente Fox exercised his federal privilege in dismissing Ebrard from his post as Secretary of Public Security under AMLO's mayoralty, citing Ebrard's poor handling of the lynching of two Federal Police officers two weeks prior in the Tláhuac borough, in the far southeastern part of the Federal District (Elvira Vargas, 2004). The ability of the President of the Republic to dismiss political appointees of the Mayor of the Federal District would later become a major part of the campaign for additional political reforms during Ebrard's mayoral *sexenio*.

<sup>149</sup> *Constituyente* became an important word in 2016, though there was enough confusion surrounding its meaning that some of the city's promotional materials for the process included explanatory details for its proper use. In the singular, it can refer to the constitutional process as a whole (from the reforms of January, 2016 through the adoption of the city's constitution in January,

were to be directly elected by the former Federal District's residents on June 5, 2016 (via proportional representation), and the other 40 were to be appointed: 14 by the Federal Senate (the 'upper' congressional house), 14 by the Federal Chamber of Deputies (the 'lower' congressional house), 6 by the Mayor, and 6 by the President. This Constitutional Assembly, however, was not tasked with initially creating the constitution. Keeping with the aforementioned tendency to concentrate power in the executive branch, the reforms allowed only the mayor to present a draft constitution to this assembly, to which they could then make minor changes. To accomplish the task of creating a draft constitution, Mayor Mancera convened a group of 28 *notables* ('notables'), which included politicians, legal scholars, university professors, activists, and architects, which was announced within a week of the reforms (*La Capital*, 2016; Romero Sánchez, 2016).<sup>150</sup>

The drafting process also had a highly touted citizen participation component, which was promoted through public meetings and several online platforms. At innumerable public events held throughout 2016 (but especially in the spring months, before the June 5 election of *constituyentes*), everyday citizens were encouraged to ask questions about the constitutional process, make suggestions for the city's constitution, and hear from elected representatives, civil society leaders, and other proponents and opponents of the process from all political angles. Some of these gatherings were put together with the support or in the name of the city government, or one or more political parties, but often they were organized by independent groups and institutions, including universities and research institutes, NGOs ranging from local to international in scope, and neighborhood

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2017), the Constitutional Assembly as a body (here denoted with an initial capital, *Constituyente*), or to individual members of the Constitutional Assembly in particular.

<sup>150</sup> Enrique Ortiz Flores, an important member of the CPCCMDC (as discussed in Chapter Two) and a leading civil society figure, was one of Mancera's 28 *notables*.

associations.<sup>151</sup> I attended several such meetings, including the public launch of the city's *Espacios de Encuentro* (Spaces of Encounter) 'strategy' which featured *notables* Alejandro Encinas Rodríguez and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo,<sup>152</sup> among other speakers (see Figures 4.8 and 4.9). The bulk of the crowd at this event was made up of a small army of uniformed youth volunteers who would be charged with monitoring and offering assistance to those seeking to use the individual stations ("Points of Encounter") to be set up at some 300 locations all around the city and freely available for citizen use. These stations consisted of cardboard podiums containing iPads that would lead citizen users to the online platform through which they could craft proposals to be considered by the *notables* and the Constitutional Assembly, ask questions or offer comments on the proposals of others, and learn more about the constitutional process (see Figure 4.9). Though much of this type of participation was to be funneled through change.org,<sup>153</sup> which could theoretically be accessed from any device connected to the internet, the 'Points of Encounter' strategy was aimed at facilitating participation on the part of those residents without private access to this platform, whom the volunteer monitors would be able to assist should they need help navigating the technology. At the height of this push

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<sup>151</sup> The city claims to have held 55 official meetings of this type in 2016, which can be seen through a scrollable calendar at: <http://www.constitucion.cdmx.gob.mx/participa/#dialogos-publicos> (last accessed 12 June, 2017).

<sup>152</sup> Both are major political figures in the city and longtime PRD members. Encinas served briefly as Mayor (2005-2006) when AMLO left the office to run for the national presidency, and is currently serving as a Senator in the national legislature from the State of Mexico. He left the PRD in January of 2015, citing corruption of the party in the wake of the 43 missing students in the town of Iguala (in whose disappearance the town's PRD mayor was implicated) (Muñoz, 2015a). Muñoz Ledo was a founding member of the PRD and former President of the PRI, and has served in numerous government posts since the early 1970s, including Secretary of Labor, Secretary of Energy, and Ambassador to the European Union. He began a run for the national presidency in the election of 2000 as a candidate of the now defunct *Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution* (Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana, hereafter PARM), but resigned in support of eventual PAN victor Vicente Fox.

<sup>153</sup> The participation process also reportedly included some 602 citizen proposals submitted to the IEDF and the opportunity to read and make comments on some 30 essays submitted by notables to the online document sharing platform pubpub.org, according to the city's official constitutional webpage at: <http://www.constitucion.cdmx.gob.mx/> (accessed 12 June 2016).

for participation during the spring and summer months, however, it was often left unclear how this citizen input was to be collected and considered. I witnessed several encounters in which volunteers or authorities were unable to adequately answer resident concerns about this process, and cynicism regarding the efficacy of this initiative was rampant.<sup>154</sup> A common refrain among opponents to this process consisted of an attack on what the *constituyente* offered as ‘participation’, exemplified by a protestor who marched in front of the stage during one of the formal speeches at the Spaces of Encounter launch, holding a sign he hurriedly unfolded as he hustled to the front of the room, which read simply “CLOSED Formal Spaces + Web Page = SIMULATION” (see Figure 4.8). This person sought to convey in his thirty seconds of protest what many had been saying for months, that the carefully scripted interaction made available to them was better called political theatre than authentic participation. Still, change.org officially registered 348 petitions, the top ten of which ranged in support from over 10,000 to nearly 50,000 as of July 2016 (*Dfensor*, 2016), and many residents were pleasantly surprised to see their concerns ultimately represented (see González Martínez, 2016). This level of citizen input offered considerable legitimacy to the process and brought a good deal of international attention.<sup>155</sup> The heralding of this ‘progressive’ effort and grand experiment in democratic ‘crowdsourcing’ was arguably far more valuable to both the

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<sup>154</sup> The *notables* did have a process in place to deal with the most formalized part of this process, the proposals submitted through change.org. The crafters of the top proposals, measured in votes of support from the general public that numbered over 10,000, were invited to present their ideas to a smaller working group, who would relay the proposals to the larger group of drafters. Proposals receiving over 50,000 votes were promised an invitation to relate their ideas personally to the entire group of *notables* (Campoy, 2016).

<sup>155</sup> Some international observers gushed with praise over the document and the process of its construction. Citing its stance on often marginalized groups, Weiss (2017) argued that the constitution “reads like a progressive manifesto”, and the Progressive Alliance (2016) called it “among the most advanced in Latin America and the world.”



beleaguered Peña Nieto and Mancera administrations than the content of citizen's concerns, whether or not these ultimately made any lasting constitutional impressions.



Figure 4.8: A protestor interrupts a panel at the Museum of Mexico City (3/29/2016), during the launch of the city's "Spaces of Encounter" strategy for citizen participation. The message reads: "CLOSED FORMAL SPACES + WEB PAGE = SIMULATION". Photography by author.



Figure 4.9: The “Points of Encounter” stations on display at the Museum of Mexico City (3/29/2016). Photography by author.

Before analyzing the final version of this document and its potential effects, it is important to recognize the role of political geography as a fundamental ingredient in the conditions of its very possibility, as this section has begun to elaborate. At the heart of the complex dance of Mexican politics over the course of the last several decades has been a developing conflict between political parties, and even more fundamentally,

between their associated territories of authority. While the PRI began to lose control of the capital city in the 1980s, it nevertheless fiercely coveted this geography and took measures to ensure continuing relevance there. Though it has not always been read this way, the set of concessions to democracy made especially in the wake of the 1988 elections and the loss of the *Cárdenista* faction of the party to the fledgling PRD certainly support the thesis that PRI leadership, however quietly, desired to retain an electoral presence in Mexico City and, perhaps even more to the point, to make a play for the city's electorate and/or offices at some later date if and when the opportunity should arise. Even before the 2016 reforms, many of those observers who viewed the *constituyente* critically claimed to hear the whispers of unspoken collusion and to see the fingerprints of party operators on the *Pacto por México*. The PRI, with the help of unusually friendly PRD mayor in Mancera, seemed to be making its play for the city. The geography of the Assembly's appointment process (40/100 members being appointed), as many pointed out, slanted heavily toward the national legislative and executive powers, where the PRI is strongest (and where it enjoyed majorities in both the upper and lower houses), and PRI interests were also said to have been given some measure of influence among Mancera's group of *notables*,<sup>156</sup> though this is difficult to precisely qualify. Peña Nieto and the PRI thus were afforded, both directly through the President's reforms and possibly indirectly by Mancera, a greater measure of influence in the constitutional process than many observers claimed they deserved or could have won

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<sup>156</sup> These persons, Mancera repeatedly reassured the public, were chosen not based on party affiliation but rather on their being "people who know the city, who have worked for the city or who are experts in their field" (Durán, 2016). Among the notables, he told *Proceso* in February of 2016, "We have good coverage of themes, from indigeneity, culture, the feminist movement to the UNAM Institute of Juridical Investigations, and the same from the National Polytechnic [University]" (Durán, 2016). Interestingly, as with other instances discussed in Chapter Three and elsewhere, Mancera's supposed ability to trade influence on this council is here legitimated by a rhetoric of transparently shifting away from nepotism based on party loyalty. On this reading, purported democratization provides a veil that makes it possible to conduct traditional political horse-trading.

through almost any process of direct democracy based exclusively at the scale of the Federal District. The political geography of Mancera and the PRD's part in this bargain was also fairly clear. AMLO's breakaway Morena party, often openly antagonistic toward the PRD and its leadership, is rapidly gobbling up the PRD's electoral base in the city, destroying both the PRD's ability to effectively govern and possibly Mancera's potential to attain higher office. In this geographical double bind, Mancera appeared to have chosen an unlikely partner in Peña Nieto and his PRI in order to stave off the onslaught of AMLO and Morena. This alliance, begun in the *Pacto por México* and further solidified with the 2016 political reform, both promised Mancera a greater degree of control of the city in the face of Morena's challenge and kept his presumed plans for a presidential run at least theoretically viable.<sup>157</sup>

Perhaps even more interesting is the geography that was left unaltered by the political reform's revolutionary upheavals. Though a generation of scholarship and observation has made clear that the city's explosive growth in the latter half of the twentieth century left the borders of the Federal District woefully inadequate as indicators of the functional extent of Mexico City and even more so as jurisdictional demarcations worthy of the city's many expanding crises (as discussed in Chapters One and Two), Peña Nieto's 2016 political reforms left these borders unchanged as the city transitioned from Federal District to capital city-state. Many had argued that these reforms provided the best conceivable opportunity to redraw these boundaries and collect the Valley of Mexico's various authorities into one political entity. The surrounding states of Hidalgo and

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<sup>157</sup> Though unconfirmed, rumors surrounding the Peña Nieto/Mancera alliance have it that Mancera's 2018 candidacy would receive some type of support from the PRI, either in the form of a PRI candidacy for Mancera (however unlikely this might now be), a combined PRI/PRD ticket (also highly unlikely), some type of tacit support via political machinery, or at the very least an unobstructionist stance.

México, however, would likely have fought such a proposal with the sternest vigilance, especially México, some seventy-six percent<sup>158</sup> of whose population resides in the *colonias populares*, small villages, and other suburban fringe areas of the metropolitan region and whose electoral politics formed a large portion of the beating heart of the PRI's national power even during the PAN years.<sup>159</sup> The political cost of altering this geography was therefore simply too high, and the new city inherited its boundaries unchanged.<sup>160</sup>

Not unlike the geographical considerations of the broader political reform, the timing of the *constituyente* had far more to do with the perceived necessities and cruel vicissitudes of sexennial politics than with any rationale pertaining to either the requirements for assiduously crafting a robust legal foundation or the effective management of an ambitious program of citizen participation. As Sergio González argued in the public criticism cited in the introduction to this chapter, the process seemed rather hurried. The whole saga, from the national passage of the political reforms to the Constitutional Assembly's acceptance of the finalized constitution, took exactly a year and a day, from 30 January, 2016 to 31 January, 2017. Indeed, the entire process seemed to pass a good many ordinary citizens by without much notice.

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<sup>158</sup> The Metropolitan Area, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, hereafter INEGI, consists of the former Federal District along with one municipality in the neighboring State of Hidalgo and fifty-eight municipalities of the neighboring State of México (see Figure 4.10). As of the 2010 census, these fifty-eight municipalities were home to 11,529,701 of that State's 15,175,862 residents, or 75.97% (INEGI, 2017).

<sup>159</sup> As mentioned above, Peña Nieto was Governor of the State of México during Calderón's presidency from 2006-2012.

<sup>160</sup> Ward (1989) explained that even by the late 1980s the city's problems and the immense chore that urban governance had become were beyond the bounds of a single governing entity, but, though the idea had been discussed for some time already, it had received little political traction. This, he argued, is a symptom of the greater ill, the PRI's approach to governance. "In Mexico City", he wrote, "the power structure that has evolved is one of control, not one of development" (Ward, 1989: 320).

Certainly this can be partly attributed to the oft-noted and aforementioned apathy and cynicism regarding the city and country's politics, but the speedy timeline played a significant role as well. Many residents I spoke with claimed to have first heard of the political reform when they saw the city's campaign to advertise its legal name change posted in metro stations and on the trains themselves in the early months of 2016. These ads featured impressive photos of various city landmarks overlain with a simple message: "*Adiós DF, Hola CDMX*" ("Goodbye DF, Hello CDMX") (see Figure 4.11). In the months leading up to the June 5 vote, many of the city's billboards, whitewashed cement walls, and online platforms like Twitter and Facebook would also display the names and messages of a variety of partisan voices vying for position in the Assembly. That many of these messages, so rapidly installed and vigorously promoted, remained physically in place as of May, 2017 speaks to the frenzied pace of the constitutional process and perhaps to the somewhat artificial character of its timing. A low turnout (just under 29% of the city's electorate) at the June 5 vote,<sup>161</sup> despite what seemed a serious push on the part of the major parties in particular, further contributes to this criticism. By the fall months of 2016 (the Assembly was formally seated in September), a draft constitution had reached the *Constituyente*, where its finer points were debated over the next several months. By the end of the year, press outlets had begun to criticize the

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<sup>161</sup> This vote was to decide proportional party-representation on the Assembly, though there were also independent candidates. Proportional representation was divided based on the proportion of votes each party received out of the 'valid votes', or the total number of votes minus the 'null' votes. In the final tally, the valid votes numbered 1,926,608. The total number of votes (2,092,721) constituted a participation rate of 28.6791% (INE 2016). The results of the vote yielded the following number of seats for each party ultimately represented: Morena (22); PRD (19); PAN (7); PRI (5); Partido Encuentro Social (2); Nueva Alianza (2); Movimiento Ciudadano (1); Partido Verde Ecologista de México (1).

Ismael Figueroa Flores, head of Mexico City's firefighters union, was the only independent candidate to win a seat on the Assembly. Though initially some 10,000 votes short of the roughly 32,000 necessary for an independent to be seated, Figueroa was given a seat that was left vacant after the other proportional seats had been divided (given the inability to award a fraction of a seat to a party), by virtue of his having received more votes as an independent than had the highest vote-getting unrepresented party (*El Financiero*, 2016).

seeming lack of progress the Assembly had made, and by the first weeks of 2017 faith in the Assembly's ability to adopt the constitution by the looming January 31 deadline expressed in Peña Nieto's national constitutional reforms the previous year was a rare commodity. Much to the surprise of many in the city, Mancera's publicly-expressed trust in the Assembly was validated with the approval of the new constitution at 1:47am on the final allowable day (Suárez, 2017).

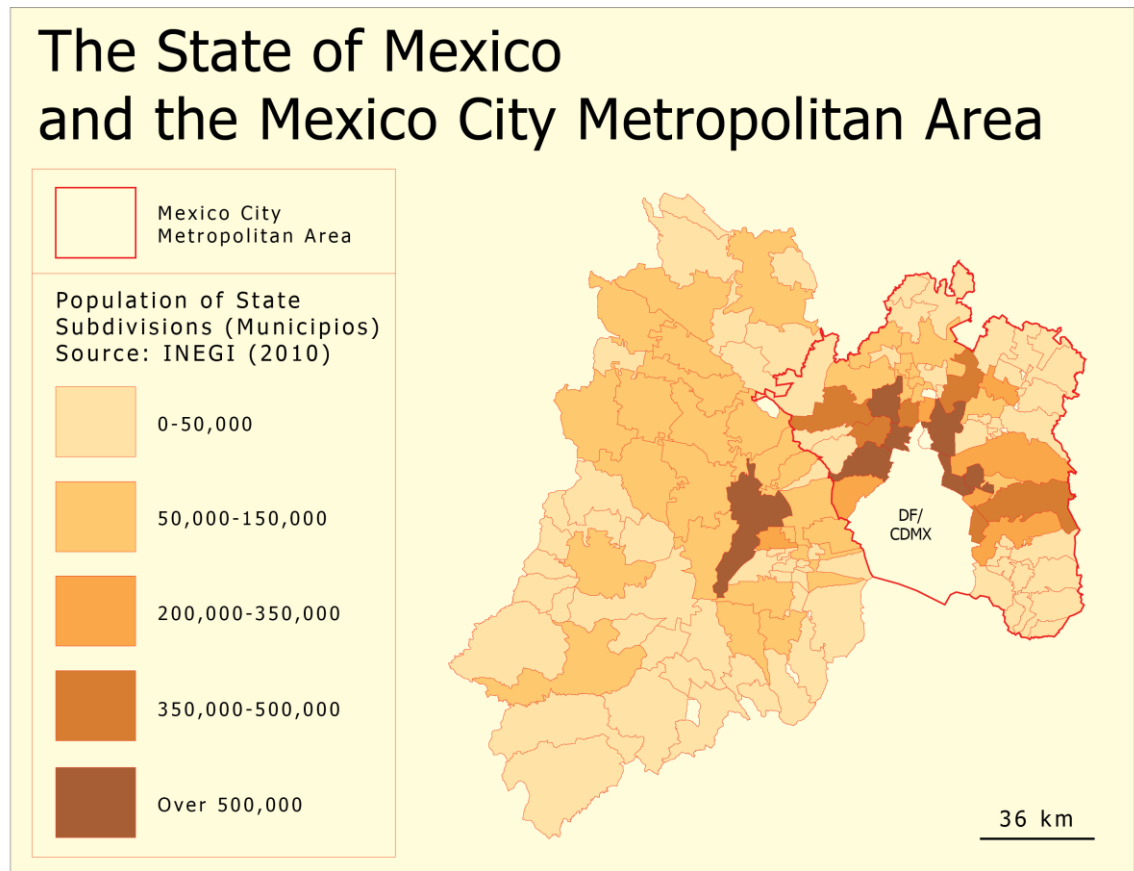


Figure 4.10: The State of Mexico and the Mexico City Metropolitan Area. Cartography by author.



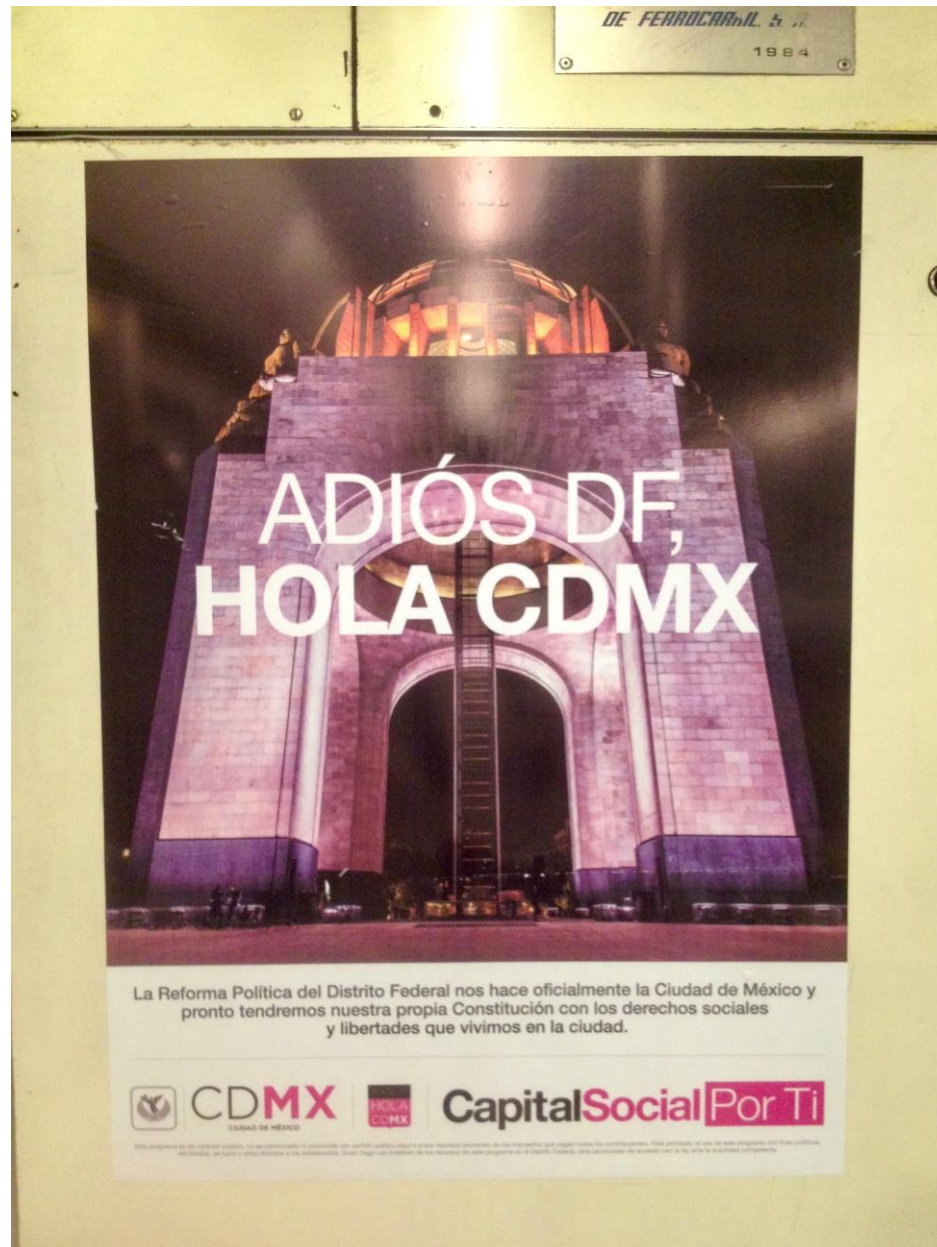


Figure 4.11: An advertisement on the Mexico City Metro, which displays the message “Goodbye DF [the Federal District], Hello CDMX [Mexico City]”. Photography by author.



The Assembly's ultimate adoption of the new constitution was far from the end of its journey to legal recognition, however. Within weeks of the Assembly's decision, the document and its proponents faced several court challenges emanating from the national political sphere. These cases charge various encroachments upon national authority in the former Federal District, and seek to prevent the constitution's acquisition of force. Alejandro Encinas Rodríguez, who had been chosen by the Assembly to serve as its President in October of 2016 (see Llanos Samaniego, 2016), threatened in February of 2017 to reconvene the Assembly in order to carefully reword the offending sections and nullify the most serious of challenges, which had already reached the country's Supreme Court (see Nuñez, 2017). The potential for such a reconvention notwithstanding, several challenges to the new constitution's authority remain active and potentially quite potent as of July, 2017 (see Langner, 2017). Barring its negation by the Supreme Court, the city's constitution is due to take effect in September of 2018, some two months after Mexico's 2018 presidential election.

Published several days later (in February of 2017) in the city's official gazette and distributed in booklet form in the ensuing weeks, the city's first "political constitution" begins its preamble with the immortal words of Aztec ruler Tenoch, from 1325: "En tanto que dure el mundo, no acabará, no perecerá la fama, la gloria de México Tenochtitlan" ("As long as the world endures, the fame, the glory of Mexico Tenochtitlan shall not end, shall not perish."). This brief preamble asserts that "the city belongs to its citizens" and places the constitution in a heroic political lineage, "...the culmination of a political transition of plural and democratic inspiration" and "historical resistance against oppression." Following the preamble, the constitution contains 71 articles and 39 additional "transitory articles" which cover a wide array of topics in varying amounts of detail. The second chapter, consisting of Articles 4 through 14, is organized as the city's

“Charter of Rights”. Beginning with Article 6, the document assures citizen rights by guaranteeing a city of certain qualities:

- 1) a “city of rights and liberties” (Article 6)
- 2) a “democratic city” (Article 7)
- 3) a “city of knowledge and education” (Article 8)
- 4) a “city of solidarity” (Article 9)
- 5) a “productive city” (Article 10)
- 6) an “inclusive city” (Article 11)
- 7) a “habitable city” (Article 13)
- 8) a “secure city” (Article 14)

Many of these same phrases appeared in the 2010 Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City, as the six ‘strategic foundations’ that comprise the CPCCMDC’s vision of the right to the city.<sup>162</sup> In the city’s constitution, the right to the city is ensured by its own dedicated article, Article 12. One of the constitution’s briefest articles, its first section states: “Mexico City guarantees the right to the city which consists of the use and full and equitable utilization of the city, founded on principles of social justice, democracy, participation, equality, sustainability, with respect for cultural diversity, nature, and environment.” Several persons familiar with the process explained to me that both the presence of the right to the city in the constitution and the obvious influence of the Charter’s strategic foundations on the constitution’s “Charter of Rights” came as a direct result of the participation of Enrique Ortiz Flores in the drafting of the latter text.<sup>163</sup> That the concept ultimately found a place in the constitution at all, and particularly such a prominent position, should be considered a significant victory for those CPCCMDC

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<sup>162</sup> These foundations similarly make up the second chapter of the Charter, as discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>163</sup> The presence of the right to the city, I was also told, was a point of some contention among the notables, for some of whom it represented a political moment that had passed, and for others of whom it was merely the particular concern of an older generation of political figures. In either case, it was considered ‘old hat’ by some of the people involved in the process, though this was almost never stated openly.

members and other right to the city advocates for whom its constitutional enshrinement was always a primary goal (see Chapter Two).

Given its brevity and the vague and expansive nature of its language—to say nothing of its somewhat odd placement among the other nine articles that make up the Charter of Rights, which are each devoted either to particular sets of rights organized around the themes noted above or to specifying the provision of these rights by the city government—Article 12 initially appears redundant and unnecessary. After all, the guarantees it seeks to assure are all covered in far greater detail by other dedicated articles that appear both before and after, some of which span several pages of text in their elaborations. The second part of the article, however, arguably makes a more significant statement: “The right to the city is a collective right that guarantees the full exercise of human rights, the social function of the city, its democratic management, and ensures territorial justice, social inclusion, and the equitable distribution of public goods with the participation of the citizenry.” Building on the twin pillars of complexity and collectivity that guided the production of the 2010 Charter, the constitution here distinguishes the right to the city from the other rights it establishes by virtue of its pertaining not to an individual, atomistic citizen but rather to the citizenry as a collective.

The Charter of Rights has received most of the praise offered by international observers, owing to the progressive entitlements, privileges, and protections it contains. Article 6 has received attention for its instantiation of “the right to sexuality”, which includes “the right to decisions about it and whom to share it with”, and freedom from discrimination based on “sexual preference, sexual orientation, gender identity, [or] gender expression and sexual characteristics”. Reproductive rights are also explicitly protected, including “the right to decide in a free, voluntary, and informed manner whether or not to have

children". Articles 7 and 8, in addition to dealing with many traditional rights of political expression and practice, make several interventions in the citizenship rights of the digital age. "The right to information" detailed in Article 7 subsection D, which covers citizen access to public information, is immediately followed by "the right to privacy and the protection of of personal data" in subsection E. Subsection C.3 of Article 8 asserts "the right to science and to technological innovation", which includes "free access in a progressive manner to the internet in all public spaces, public schools, government buildings and cultural sites." Other sections of the constitution offer definitions and principles for such diverse areas of governance as the identification of historic sites and cultural heritage (including requiring an official oral history registry) (Article 18 subsection C), "the rights of original towns [or peoples] and neighborhoods and resident indigenous communities" (Article 59), and combatting corruption in the city (Articles 61-63). Article 25, which deals with the city's principles concerning "direct democracy", clarifies and incorporates some aspects of the Law of Citizen Participation (discussed above in Chapter Three), organizing its organs of popular participation into five mechanisms: the "citizen initiative", the plebiscite, the referendum, the citizen (or "popular") consultation, and the newly developed "revocation of mandate". This last apparatus allows for elected officials of Mexico City to be removed from office "when this is demanded by at least ten percent of the persons registered in the nominal list of the electorate of the respective [geographical area]." The procedure for the revocation of mandate, the citizen consultation, may only be made once for a given official, "when at least half of the duration of the [term] of popular representation in question has passed." The opportunity to remove elected officials at such a low threshold of public incertitude has produced no small measure of heated discussion within the city and beyond, and many residents I spoke with again exhibited a mixture of excitement at the prospect of such a stern accountability mechanism and skepticism that it will ever be exercised in practice.

Subsection H of this article also clarifies and extends the conditions under which the other participatory mechanisms become legally binding (*vinculante*).<sup>164</sup> For referenda and plebiscites, the threshold is reached when at least one third of registered voters of the relevant geography participate in the initiative. For consultations, the threshold is only fifteen percent of the relevant registered electorate. Interestingly, Article 32 leaves the office and functions of the mayoralty intact and largely unaltered, even retaining the awkward label “Head of Government” (*Jefe de Gobierno*) publicly disliked by many (including especially ex-Mayor Marcelo Ebrard). Nevertheless, the constitution solidifies a great many other changes that verge on the radical for Mexican society, especially some of the more progressive stances espoused in the Charter of Rights, the limits and checks potentially imposed upon the executive branch and other elected powers, and the affirmation of the project of democratization and the further empowerment of citizen participation.

Political reform, the *constituyente*, and their ultimate products and effects represent the culmination of a conflict over the political geography of Mexico that developed over the last century. The rapid growth of the city to unmanageable proportions in the latter half of the twentieth century, a series of political and geological crises and a developing plurality within the PRI about how to solve them, and gross mismanagement and transparently corrupt administrations conspired to create space for a leftist alternative to the ruling party and eventually a rupture in its control of the city and the country in the 1980s and 1990s. Incremental reforms passed during the 1990s and offered as

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<sup>164</sup> Except for the “citizen initiative”, which evidently cannot achieve this status. The citizen initiative subsection (B) of Article 25 basically explains that citizens may develop proposals for laws or even amendments to this very same constitution, and that these will be considered by the city’s Congress (rather than having to funnel such requests through the executive branch) if they receive signatures totaling at least 0.3% of the city’s electorate.

concessions to the prized electorate of the Federal District eventually proved insufficient to quell this energy, but it took both the return of the PRI and the exit of AMLO and his Morena compatriots to create the conditions for the Mancera/Peña Nieto alliance from which the 2016 political reform emerged. This set of constitutional reforms promised *chilangos* their long-awaited political emancipation from federal control, transforming the Federal District into the thirty-second state, now called Mexico City, and creating a plan for the drafting of the city's first constitution. This document, which incorporates this emancipatory narrative with fiery language, strikes out in progressive directions in its protections and guarantees, and even enshrines a collective notion of right to the city. The alliance that created the new constitution and the manner in which it was produced, however, potentially portend the ominous return of the PRI's influence in the city even as the PRD struggles to maintain its own political and geographical base in the face of the increasingly potent challenge of AMLO's Morena. Thus was the city made free of the country only by its leaders' recourse to the power of the federal state and the party whose rule had generated much of the energy behind this territorial conflict in the first place. This emancipation is also under threat from national interests, whose legal challenges to the constitution may yet negate some or even all of its authority before it takes hold in the fall of 2018.

The next section will explore some of the context for this historical and ongoing territorial tension through the lens of revolution. This is the single most important and appropriate filter for this analysis, I argue, for at least two reasons. First, this is precisely the language and the history that many of the most significant actors involved in political reform used to promote their agendas, further their plans, and justify their actions. Second, it allows this complex series of events to be transected from a number of angles, producing an analysis that can at least begin to approach the rich mixture of

often seemingly contradictory attitudes and motivations that have surrounded the process of political reform from its faintest murmurings in Mexico City.

### **Vectors of Revolution: Political Reform and the Revolutionary Structure of Feeling**

The idea of revolution permeates many discussions of political reform, and is anyway an idea of singular significance in Mexico City. It is also an incredibly complicated and complex idea, burdened with a history that remains deeply disputed and a legendary status as elusive in its promises as was victory in the Mexican Revolution of the early twentieth century. Revolution in Mexico should not be understood as a singular event, but rather as elongated, episodic, and plural, owing to the nature of its historical referents and the fractious character of the political forces claiming its mantle in contemporary struggles. It is an idea that continues to animate politics across the country, to inspire strong feelings and drive cults of personality, and to legitimate actions and form the ideological basis of resilient movements that span the political spectrum and the national geography. Given this breadth of appeal and depth of expression, it is also an idea that allows its users to trace connections between a collection of events or practices that might otherwise be considered discrete, and to explain the coincidence of contradictory impulses that enrich one another even as they seek each other's negation. Political reform in 2016 and 2017 has brought many such revolutionary impulses and implications to the surface of Mexico City's political landscape, and pushed contradictions that had simmered for decades into heightened intensity or extended geography, pulling in larger sets of national and international connections.

This section will present a fourfold analysis of the rich palimpsest of feelings, motivations, and rhetorical postures that together form the conditions of emergence of political reform in Mexico City through the lens of revolution. Though metaphors abound

for describing this mental and material terrain, it is best approximated by Williams's (1977: 132) notion of a "structure of feeling", described as follows:

The term is difficult, but 'feeling' is chosen to emphasize a distinction from more formal concepts of 'world-view' or 'ideology'. It is not only that we must go beyond formally held and systematic beliefs, though of course we have always to include them. It is that we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs are in practice variable (including historically variable), over a range from formal assent with private dissent to the more nuanced interaction between selected and interpreted beliefs and acted and justified experiences...We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feelings as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a 'structure': as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies. These are often more recognizable at a later stage, when they have been (as often happens) formalized, classified, and in many cases built into institutions and formations.

The meanings and values that form the 'structure' from which political reform emerged in Mexico City over the past several decades and more especially in the past several years, I argue, are most clearly organized around ideas of revolution, forming what I will call a revolutionary structure of feeling. While Williams explains that such structures are more easily approachable posthumously, owing to the difficulty of understanding a structure in motion and in a constant state of 'becoming' (see Chapter Two), this observation clearly varies with the temporal character of the structure in question, its rate of change, and the geographical range of its inherence, among other factors. In the case of the revolutionary structure of feeling under examination here, it is worth noting that some of its deepest roots can be identified as far back as the earliest decades of Mexican Independence and the liberal reformers of the 1850s. This temporal scale allows for a better approximation of structural contours than might be possible in the analysis of a structure of a comparatively shorter temporal frame. The analysis



presented here is also pursued along vectors that cut through this revolutionary structure along paths contemporarily extant in the daily life and political theatre of the city, an analytical orientation that does not attempt to definitively chart the entirety of this structure, but rather to trace paths through it that effectively contextualize both the events and processes in question and the innumerable ways these are politically pursued, rhetorically refracted, and historically positioned and memorialized.

Ethnographic observations, extremely helpful for making sense of a shifting structure of “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt”, are here blended with contemporary and historical media reports and secondary literature, in order to effectively trace the four vectors I have identified in this revolutionary structure of feeling.

Examination of the first vector of this analysis will be propelled by the idea of the Mexican Revolution, the high-point of which (the Constitution of 1917) motivated not only the specific timing of 2016-2017 reforms, including the *constituyente*, but the orientation, rhetoric, and ideological underpinnings of many of its most significant players. The second vector will follow closely on the heels of the first, but will veer off to extend the notion of an urban revolution to the history explored above, wherein an increasingly distinct capital city is emancipated from the federal state that dominated it for more than a century. The third vector will present another narrative of urban revolution wherein Mexico City has been envisioned as the vanguard of a backward or underdeveloped country, popular in various iterations for more than a century among leaders from nearly every camp, from Díaz to AMLO. The fourth and final vector follows a similar understanding of Mexico’s urban revolution, though from a different perspective. Rather than seeing Mexico City as a tool of modernization or the urban-industrial or moral messiah, this fourth vector proposes Mexico’s urban revolution as a vehicle by which the promise of other revolutions, including the country’s (and the city’s) many failed and

forgotten revolutions, might see their promises redeemed. This last perspective, I argue, is a latent hope found largely in unrefined forms in the attitudes surrounding political reform, but one that deserves analytical attention. This analysis is not intended to offer explanations of the trajectory of political reform, *per se*, but rather to selectively contextualize it in important ways. The four vectors I have chosen to follow represent what I consider this historical geography's most significant perspectives as evinced by *chilangos* or as postulated by interested voices from without.

#### Vector I: The Mexican Revolution and the Conquest(s) of the Capital

The first transect of the conditions of political reform takes perhaps the most obvious perspective of revolution in Mexico, by attempting to forge connections between political reform and the Mexican Revolution. This is a time-tested strategy for grabbing legitimacy in Mexico, popular since the Revolution broke out in 1910. Always a complicated affair, the Revolution was less a conflict between an *ancien régime* and a liberating vanguard than it was a chaotic and episodic collection of rebellions and civil wars between regional factions of the armed forces, traditional *caudillos* (warlords, in this context) seeking enrichment or social advancement, organized peasants and peons bent on agrarian reform, the sons of well-to-do families frustrated by their lack of prospects in the calcified Porfirian state, and the disaffected and growing middle sectors (see Joseph and Buchenau, 2013). Though successful in deposing the aging Porfirio Díaz with extreme speed, the revolt which promised to finally bring democracy to Mexico equally quickly devolved into a series of intrigues, coups, and civil wars that would last until the PRI's consolidation of power under President Lázaro Cárdenas del Río in 1934. This made telling a clean story about the Revolution a difficult task, but certainly not for lack of trying. Since it began more than a century ago, claiming to be the true inheritors or champions of the Revolution has become common practice. The PRI was only the most

successful of a series of parties and movements that would explicitly use this language, and its name correctly identifies its attempt not only to legitimate its political project of national rule and sectoral and regional integration under the flag of the Revolution but also to extend that revolution's time horizon indefinitely. As the *Institutional* Revolutionary Party, its leaders claimed the mantel of the Revolution in perpetuity. As discussed above, however, PRI rule did not bring the democracy that the Revolution's first post-Porfirian President, Gustavo Madero, had promised. That task was left to the breakaway PRD, whose name takes the next logical step in claiming the Revolution as 'Democratic'.<sup>165</sup>

Despite the disparate claims of the Revolution's many combatants and camps, they shared an enemy in the autocracy of Porfirio Díaz. Under his control, the resplendent capital city came to dominate even the country's sleepiest regions through newly professionalized military and police forces and impressive infrastructural projects (especially railroads) that spanned Mexico's highly varied terrain (as discussed in Chapter One). His reforms, bent on liberalizing and modernizing the country, created class and regional cleavages that would not only pit the rural poor against the urban elite for decades to come but also cemented a more general animosity between the capital city and the rest of the country, with grievances that emanated from dispossessed peasants in the central and southern agrarian regions to politically stunted professionals and *hacendados* of the arid and industrializing north (Joseph and Buchenau, 2013). In a general sense, then, the Revolution brought together regional forces intent on curbing the power of the capital over their affairs. After Díaz's ouster, PRI control would reverse this trend as the city grew throughout the twentieth century. Though federal control

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<sup>165</sup> Another important attempt to steal away the Revolutionary mantel was made by the PARM, an alternative party whose claim to 'Authenticity' was never rewarded with much electoral success.

remained seated in the capital city, the Federal District came to be politically dominated by a party whose strength was based in a federal electorate, even as the city's own exploding populace drifted steadily leftward. The first conquest of the capital city, in this sense, was largely accomplished under Díaz, as the Federal District spread its tentacles across the uneven topographical and political surfaces of Mexico. The second conquest of the city, then, is represented by the PRI's decades-long struggle to maintain control of its volcanic throne. This allows both sides of this antagonism to claim political reform as an end stage of the Mexican Revolution. For the national PRI, gifting more direct democracy to the capital city fulfills the greatest of *Maderista* promises on the one hand, and on the other takes away the 'special privilege' that had always belonged to the Federal District by giving it equal federal status among the other 31 states of the union. For the PRD, self-determination and emancipation from federal "oppression" represent both the democratic fulfillment of the Revolution and its final act of liberation. It is for precisely these reasons that Peña Nieto's reforms specified January of 2017 as the delivery date for the city's constitution, so that its completion would fall on the centennial of the national Constitution of 1917 that nominally ended the country's last great conflict, a highly convenient political bookend to a century of Mexican Revolution.<sup>166</sup>

## Vector II: The Urban Revolution and the Emancipation of the Capital

The second vector distinguishes an *urban* political revolution from the national revolution explored through the first vector. Here, the lines of conflict are temporally located not in the tensions of city and country first established in the grand modernizing projects of the

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<sup>166</sup> Though I found no evidence of this connection ever being explicitly made, within this first revolutionary vector—which positions political reform as an end stage of the Mexican Revolution—it is worth considering the role played by the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City, whose 2010 mayoral endorsement is said to have inaugurated the most radical and significant period of reform for the Federal District (as discussed in Chapter Two), just as Madero's uprising of 1910 had done for the Revolution one hundred years earlier.

Porfirian capital, but rather in the explosive decades of the second half of the twentieth century. From this perspective, political reform is seen as the culmination of popular efforts by urban citizens themselves, and the heroic figures are not the heads of political parties, the operators of great machines, or the generals of victorious armies but rather the organic intellectuals and everyday residents of the city's marginalized zones and populations. The urban revolution, in this line of thought, is not simply a stage of an established political revolution, but rather is a revolution unto itself. From this perspective, this urban revolution consists of a geographical and temporal evolution of Mexico City beginning around midcentury, which only partly overlaps with the developments of political geography and the machinations of PRI and PRD regimes discussed above. My use of the phrase 'urban revolution' here coincides with the Lefebvrian theory of that name (discussed in Chapter Two) in one key respect: the notion of a quantity/quality change in the development of Mexico City. As discussed in Chapter One, the city's peripheral growth from the 1940s onward created new governance challenges to which successive PRI administrations failed to adequately respond. The resultant growth of popular resistance in marginal social and political sectors and peripheral zones eventually changed the political tenor of the city as a whole and fostered growing calls for urban autonomy. As the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City makes clear, however, the urban entity in question was no longer the Federal District but a metropolitan region with issues increasingly outside the reach of the GDF. As discussed above, in this respect political reform seems at best incomplete and at worst a partial failure, as the political calculi of states and parties in 2016 conspired to birth the spirit of a new Mexico City into the frail body of a Federal District already cracking under the weight of its metropolitan morbidity.

There is also a second geographical consideration in this vector, the urban revolution as envisioned by the leaders and supporters of AMLO's Morena. To this group, the relationship between the urban revolution (perhaps as much in its related guise of 'Regeneration') and political reform is as yet unclear. Morena has grown rapidly since its emergence in 2012, garnering an increasing share of the vote in several subsequent elections (see Figures 4.12 and 4.13). A good deal of Morena's urban base is made up of former PRDistas, many of whom feel betrayed by Mancera and by the national party organization more generally.<sup>167</sup> In their eyes, Morena's ascendancy itself represents an urban revolution far more than any that could result from the duplicitous dealings and shifting alliances of the PRI and PRD solidified in the *Pacto por México*. AMLO's bids for the presidency in 2006 and 2012, both of which ended in defeat at the hands of the PAN, represent the urban revolution as it might have been, and his 2018 candidacy under the Morena flag, which leads most polls as of July 2017, its possible fulfillment. Though many have criticized AMLO's populist tactics and the cult of personality that seems to flavor much of his following, Morena's supporters see in their party and its leader a qualitatively different orientation than that of the PRD or other smaller leftist opposition parties. As figure 4.13 illustrates, Morena's support is strongest at the city's peripheries, and its name and much of its rhetoric position it as the party of traditionally

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<sup>167</sup> As noted above, the PRD has also fallen victim to several notable defections from within its leadership, including Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 2014 (see Muñoz and Saldierna, 2014), Alejandro Encinas in 2015 (see Muñoz, 2015a), then party leader Porfirio Muñoz Ledo in 2000 (see Martínez and Pérez, 2000), Rosario Robles in 2012 (see *Sin Embargo*, 2012), Marcelo Ebrard in 2015 (see Muñoz, 2015b) and obviously AMLO himself in 2012. Some of these figures continue to work closely with the PRD, while others, like AMLO, have been openly critical and even hostile toward their former party. Others have joined competing parties, like Robles, who was appointed to Peña Nieto's cabinet as Secretary of Social Development in 2012. Ebrard's exit, wherein he cited party leadership's creeping proximity to Peña Nieto, completed the set of the five PRD mayors, save for the sitting Mancera who alone remains with the PRD. See Ross (2008) for an especially colorful telling of the "demise" of the PRD amid its factional strife during the PAN presidencies in particular.

marginalized groups.<sup>168</sup> This gives Morena considerable clout as the party of the urban revolution, as its political geography and rhetorical positioning align it with the areas and populations that produced the qualitative change identified as the urban revolution from this perspective.

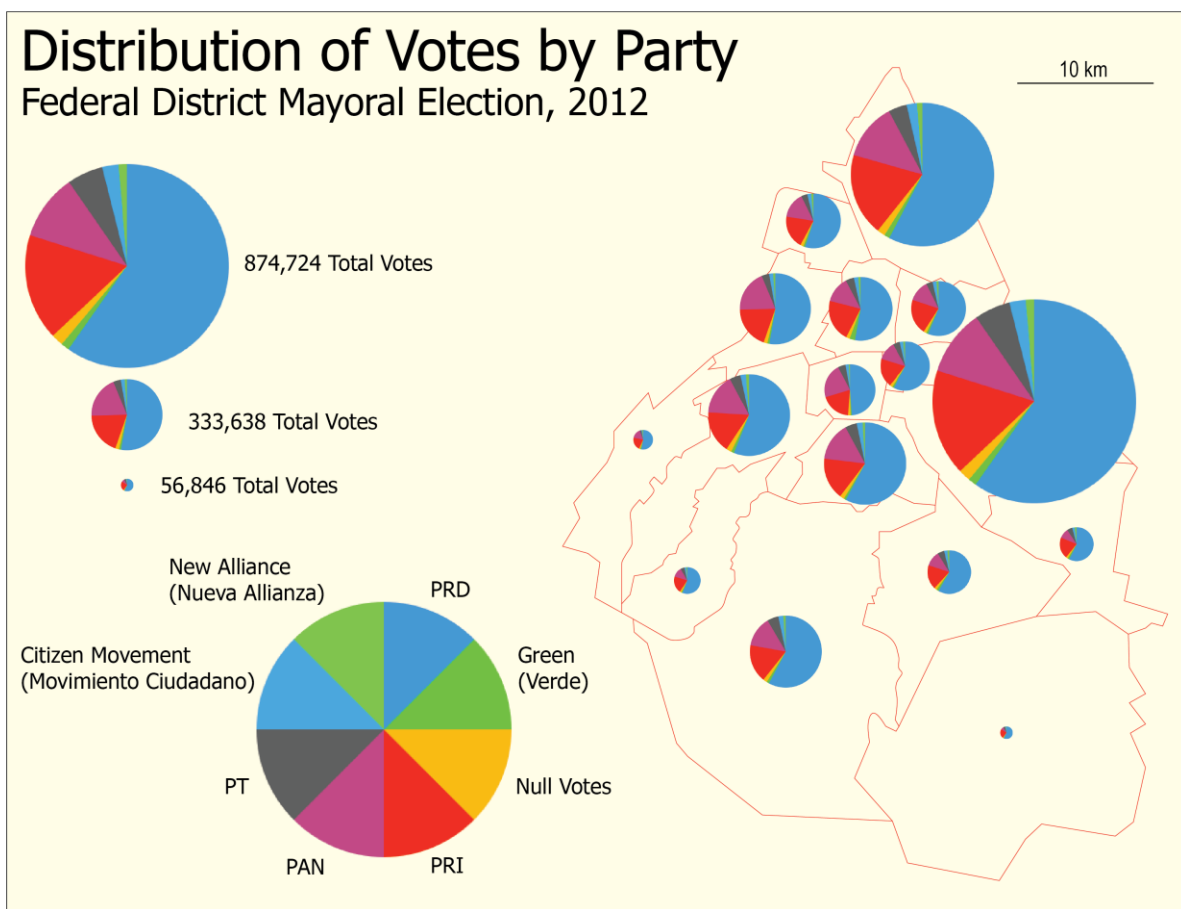


Figure 4.12: Distribution of Votes by Party, mayoral election (*jefe de gobierno*) of the Federal District. The electoral pie charts are scaled to the number of total votes for each *delegación*, and show a strong showing for the PRD (darker blue), followed by the PRI (red) and PAN (purple). Data sourced from IEDF, cartography by author.

<sup>168</sup> In common parlance, the word 'morena' usually refers to a person with a dark complexion, an important proxy for both race and class in Mexico. As the name ends in 'a' rather than the masculine 'o' (as in 'moreno'), it denotes a feminine person. The theoretical referent would be arguably be the most marginalized person in Mexican society: a dark-skinned woman. Using the abbreviation Morena (or MoReNa) for the party's full name (The National Regeneration Movement (*Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional*)) intentionally plays on this loaded word in an assertive way, foregoing the three-letter abbreviations of the other major parties (in this case, Morena would be MRN).

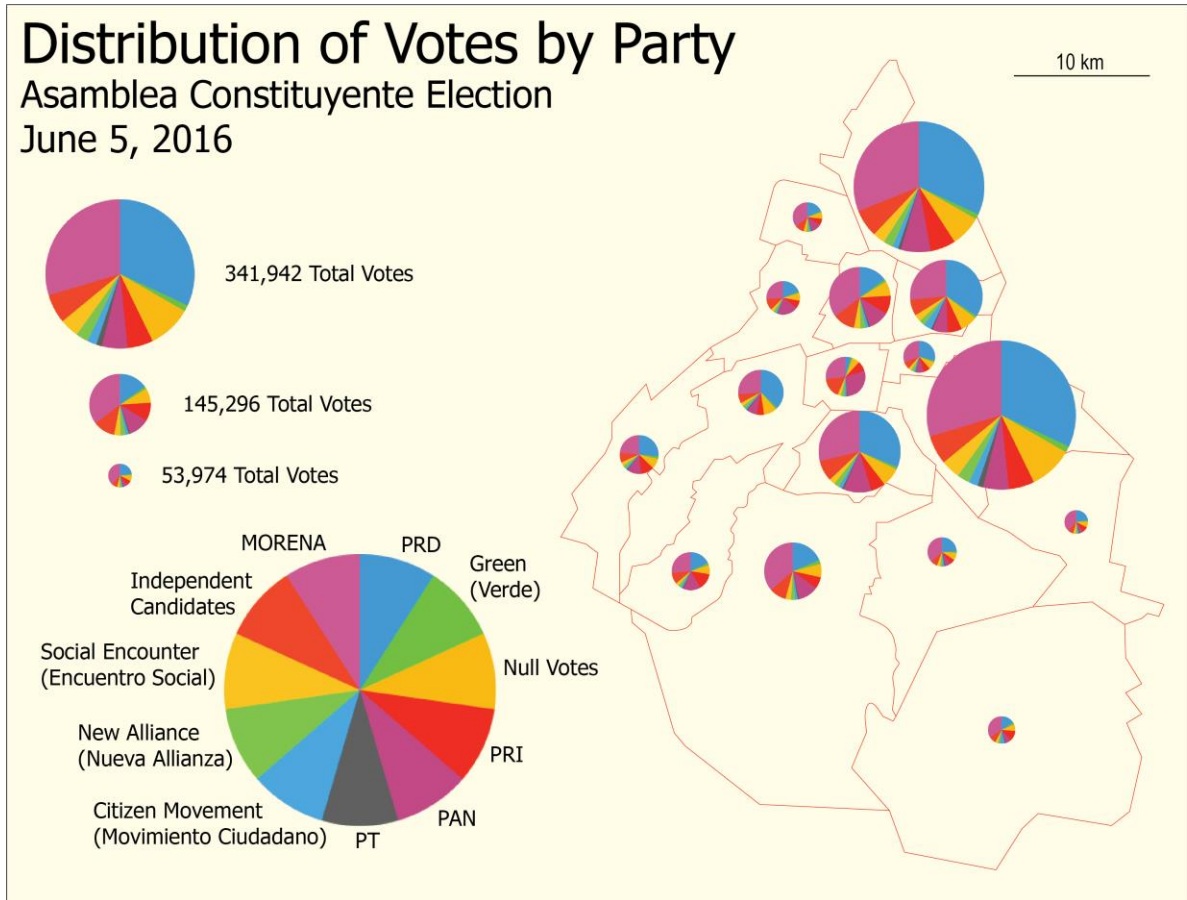


Figure 4.13: Distribution of Votes by Party, Constitutional Assembly election of the Federal District. The electoral pie charts are scaled to the number of total votes for each *delegación*. Unlike the election depicted in figure 4.12, this data illustrates the rise of Morena (purple, upper left) at the expense of the PRD (darker blue, upper right). Also notable is the large number of “null” or empty votes in this election, which represent a kind of active abstention. Data sourced from IFE, cartography by author.

### Vector III: The Urban Revolution and the Vanguard City

A third vector likewise follows the idea of a distinctly urban revolution, but from a different vantage. From this perspective, Mexico City acts as something like a vanguard agent in a process of revolutionizing a Mexico seen to be lagging behind. This line of thinking is perhaps the oldest of the four perspectives presented here, and its roots can be found farther back in Mexican history than even the liberal reforms of President



Benito Juárez García and his contemporaries. Indeed, attempting to modernize Mexico by way of the capital city is a strategy that has historically cut across a number of practical and ideological divides. For Emperor Maximilian, the erection of grand boulevards like the aforementioned *Paseo de la Reforma* (renamed after Maximilian's execution) and other beautification projects were pursued in an effort to bring Mexico up to speed aesthetically with the capitals of Europe (see Ross, 2009), bringing civilized culture to a backward country and reviving the promise of a once-coveted colonial viceroyalty. For Porfirio Díaz, industrialization and the modernization of an independent Mexico began and was pursued most vigorously in the capital, whose lingering aesthetic vestiges of this transformative era now form the substrata of an equally vigorous gentrification (see Chapter Three). For the PRI (and its predecessors, the PNR and the PRM), the city was the hearth from which the various waves of the "state-sponsored cultural revolution" emanated (Joseph and Buchenau, 2013: 109). These included a national education program oriented toward dampening the startling levels of illiteracy in the countryside and the commissioning of murals and other public art works that would educate and inculcate the populace with the spirit of the Mexican Revolution. These and other programs begun in the early years of the PRI were also always about forging a distinctly Mexican nationalism and civic culture, and, whenever possible, to tie their own ruling credentials to the revolution (as discussed above in the first vector). The PRD and Morena, both of which have serious national aspirations for the coming years, have built (or stolen) their political bases in the capital city, where their leftist rhetoric and practices find the greatest degree of sympathy and support. Contemporary social media and cultural commentary debates—particularly heated on twitter, facebook, and the

comments sections of *VICE*, *Medium*,<sup>169</sup> and related publications in the spring of 2017—both laud and lament the degree to which Mexico City’s art, food, fashion, and other aesthetic ‘scenes’ are drawing international attention to a country the western world often seems to regard with a disinterested mixture of fear and forgetfulness. This aesthetic vanguardism is not the exclusive pursuit of connoisseurs of the city’s fanciest *fashionista* parties, international music festivals, and hip art galas like the biannual *Zona Maco*, however. It has also been the explicit strategy of various iterations of the GDF for many decades, taking forms from Mancera’s pursuit of the *Corredor* project to PRI Regent Carlos Hank Gonzalez’s attempt to turn Santa Fe’s garbage dump, abandoned sand mines, and informal housing into his own “Manhattan” at the edge of the Federal District (see del Carmen Moreno Carranco, 2008). This is also the strategy at the heart of the push for Mexico City’s new international airport (scheduled for completion in 2020), which boosters claim will make the city the new regional hub for the Americas and the Pacific Rim, and will allow Mexican industry and capital to forge stronger ties with Asian and American partners, in addition to making the country as a whole more globally competitive.

*Constituyente* Executive Secretary and frequent public apologist for the constitution Porfirio Muñoz Ledo often explained political reform in terms that foreground the city’s role as the cutting edge of progressivism and democratization in Mexico. In early 2016, he argued in an interview with *El País* that the *Constituyente* needed to negotiate a path between the scylla of the PRI’s attempts to limit the capital’s autonomy and the charybdis of the PAN’s ideological objections to the Assembly’s progressive stance on

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<sup>169</sup> A particularly tense debate was set off by *Medium*’s publication of Tamara Velasquez’s (2017) response to *VICE*. Velasquez maintains that despite its glossy veneer, Mexico City’s poverty and inequality fly in the face of any attempt to christen it “the new Berlin”.

social norms, including especially sexual and reproductive rights (Beauregard, 2016). One of few political figures able to forge a productive working relationship with both the PRD and Morena, Muñoz Ledo's faith in a leftist urban coalition to work through the *Constituyente* exemplifies the current iteration of this line of thinking with regard to the city's capacity to act politically as an urban vanguard. The leftward drift of the city—even in the face of a fractured political left vying for supremacy and control—enables it to perform this role for Mexico. This is also a common perspective taken by international observers, for whom the progressive nature of the constitution demonstrates the potentially transformative role of the new State of Mexico City within the Mexican Union (see Campoy, 2016; Melchor, 2016; Flores, 2017; Progressive Alliance, 2017; and Scruggs, 2017).

#### Vector IV: The Redemptive (Urban) Revolution

The fourth vector is by far the murkiest, and requires the greatest degree of informed analytical speculation to be appreciated. In the common parlance of the residents of Mexico City, the utterances and attitudes that belong to this perspective are expressions of hope, or even better of faith. There is a strong undercurrent of religious fealty in the register through which this perspective makes appearances, despite frequently emanating from otherwise secular hosts. In this vector, revolution plays the role of redeemer. This role is distinct from a messianic figure per se, as the urban revolution (for which political reform here stands as proxy) is responsible neither for transforming something otherwise intrinsically evil nor for forging a divine connection, but rather for reviving and fulfilling the promise of previous revolutionary moments, events, and impulses, regardless of their original outcomes. This analytical vector finds inspiration in the words of Žižek (2012), who argues the following in Sophie Fiennes's film *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*:

In revolutionary upheavals, some energy, or rather some utopian dreams, take place, they explode. And even if the actual result of a social upheaval is just a commercialized everyday life, this excess of energy, what gets lost in the result, persists. Not in reality, but as a dream, haunting us, waiting to be redeemed. In this sense, whenever we are engaged in radical emancipatory politics, we should never forget, as Walter Benjamin put it almost a century ago, that “every revolution is not only—if it is an authentic revolution—is not only directed towards the future, but it redeems also the past, failed revolutions.” All the ghosts, as it were, the living dead of the past revolutions, which are roaming around unsatisfied, will finally find their home in the new freedom.

This perspective would have it that as the true revolution, the urban revolution in Mexico City reveals and reanimates a parade of previous revolutionaries and their visions of the promised land not as they were, but as they could and should have been. There is, perhaps obviously, a great deal of historical overlap between this vector and each of the others, in the sense that this take on revolution could potentially include the events and thematic elements covered in those vectors. Where this redemptive take on revolution differs, however, is the role that revolution plays in this tracing through the structure of feeling that surrounds political reform. For example, while the urban revolution considered through the second vector may have it that the city’s emancipation is a culmination of a democratic revolution begun in 1988, from the perspective of this vector it is the urban revolution that saves and redeems the promise of this democratic revolution, which may or may not have failed. It would be easy to call the PRD’s democratic revolution a failure given its well-documented history of fraud, corruption,<sup>170</sup> and betrayal, to say nothing of the defection of its highest-ranking officials and its most politically and symbolically important bases of support in the city. The lingering hope that can be found among supporters of political reform, while acknowledging these failures, nevertheless affirms their value and finds in the city’s new political autonomy the opportunity to realize the promises of the democratic revolution in whose name they

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<sup>170</sup> Similar, if less significant, charges also continue to swirl about AMLO and Morena, though as yet they have shown no sign of slowing the party’s rapid political ascent.

stroke. The urban revolution, on this view, takes the democratic revolution to a higher plane, reviving its energy despite its practical faults. The same can be said about the politics of the revolutionary youths whose tragic deaths at the hands of the PRI government in 1968 remain an open wound for many of the city's residents, the pain of which is revived and reinvigorated with each new discovery of a mass grave or story of missing students or murdered journalists in some other part of the country. While the student massacres did not galvanize opposition to the PRI nor bring about the social and cultural revolution many undoubtedly hoped (and died) for, placing their struggle in the lineage the 2017 constitution is in part an attempt to redeem their sacrifices and claim victory for many of their dreams. Crane (2015: 4) characterizes the student movement of 1968 as being birthed in the lineage and taking on the concerns of previous "waves" of activism in Mexico, and quotes activist Gilberto Guevara Niebla (following Caray, 2005) as explaining that "their demands, aspirations, and desires [were] not exclusively of student interest, but also of interest to campesinos, workers, intellectuals, political parties..." Crane (2015: 5) sees a danger in reifying the static and uncritically mythologized opponent of a PRI state unintentionally and unreflectively constructed through "kaleidoscopic narrations of genetic continuity in a movement family" (the lumping together of distinct movements across diverse conditions and against different iterations of the PRI-controlled state), which he argues "reflect what Ross (2002) names 'a police conception of history'." Certainly there is merit in this concern for the distinct conditions and characters of diverse movements and the governments they oppose, not least on the tactical plane as these events unfold (and on the analytical plane on which such "overcoding" obscures them). But as Joseph and Buchenau (2013) among a plethora of others have amply demonstrated, contesting and claiming this history is an incredibly significant component of contemporary Mexican politics, a fact not lost on

many of its diverse combatants.<sup>171</sup> This role of aggregating decades of activism under a new heading is precisely how many now understand and articulate the relevance of political reform, as a redemptive moment in which the concerns of women and minorities, workers, peasants, and others whose own unique movements have had greater or lesser moments of triumph and defeat over the course of the last century may find a rebirth of sorts under the banner of the urban revolution.

Indeed, revolutionary sentiments regarding political reform find expression in this register fairly commonly, though often as an undercurrent. This could certainly be said to be the case with respect to the constitution's recognition and protection of indigenous communities in the city. Though much of the 'cultural revolution' propagated by the PRI and the revolutionary state more broadly intended to promote a vision of Mexico united by a *mestizaje* identity that celebrated the mixture of indigenous and European heritage,<sup>172</sup> the work of some of the era's most celebrated artists sharply contests this harmonic narrative of post-revolution Mexico (see Figure 4.14), and many aspects of everyday life in the city continue to be saturated by racial hierarchies. The new constitutional language, which seeks to affirm and defend these populations without seeking to subsume them under a nationalist integration project, arguably demonstrates a redemption through maturation in the process of implementing the revolutionary attitude toward these vulnerable groups.

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<sup>171</sup> This point is perhaps best illustrated by a chant that commonly interrupts public meetings and political gatherings in the city, wherein one or more participants shout "*Zapata vive!*" (Zapata lives) to which a mass of others respond "*La lucha sigue!*" (the struggle continues). Emiliano Zapata, the revolutionary leader of dispossessed peasants whose deep distrust of the capital city and his adherence to rural aesthetic norms are the stuff of legend, now inhabits a favorite rallying cry of a significant segment of *el monstruo's* grassroots urban left.

<sup>172</sup> Most clearly in José Vasconcelos Calderón's notion of Mexican mestizos as the "cosmic race" (1925), a theory in which the new world peoples colonized by Iberian powers would transcend old world racial categories by virtue of their superior genetic mixture.



Figure 4.14: Part of the 1948 mural *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park* by Diego Rivera. Photography by author.

These four vectors illustrate some of the contours of the most salient frame through which *chilangos* and outsiders pursue and understand the revolutionary changes bound up in the processes of political reform. While they do not themselves provide many opportunities to attribute causal or even catalytic powers, they demonstrate the revolutionary milieu from which particular packagings of political reform have emerged in recent years, and from which they continue to be drawn in defense of the constitution or as entreaties for greater civic engagement in its wake. This revolutionary “structure of feeling” therefore provides residents and observers the raw material from which may emerge their imaginings of Mexico City’s political reform as an end stage of their long national Revolution, as an urban revolution unto itself, as the vanguard of an urban-led

revolution for Mexico, and as the redeemer that can call forth and reanimate the skeletons of all the fallen heroes and make good on all the promises of the many revolutions that preceded and foretold its glorious arrival. This milieu also makes it possible for contradictory positions to coexist within parties, households, and persons. It is for this reason that an average person can casually retort, with a look of surprise that betrays a slight suspicion toward my lack of grasp on the obvious, that while it is of course an elaborate trick of the cruelest kind, political reform nevertheless represents a moment for hope in the great potential of the process.

### **Conclusion: The Weight of Revolution**<sup>173</sup>

Even more than 2010, 2017 is a special year in Mexico City. It is a year for remembering the great deeds and legendary heroes of the Mexican Revolution, and for reasserting and reestablishing the principles in whose name it was allegedly fought. I returned to Mexico City in April, and within the first few days of the trip I was able to attend two exceptional exhibits at the *Museo de Arte Moderno* (Museum of Modern Arte) and the *Palacio de Bellas Artes* (Palace of Fine Arts), both of which dealt with the revolution's aftermath, and both of which were organized specifically for this centennial year. At the *Museo de Arte Moderno*, "Scenes of Mexican Identity" (*Escenarios de Identidad Mexicana*) blended portraits and landscapes of peasant and village life with scenes of volcanic eruptions and violent encounters with mythical beasts in tracing the process of the formation of national identity from the end of the Revolution through the 1980s. At *Bellas Artes*, "Paint the Revolution" (*Pinta la Revolución*) presented a no-holds-barred

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<sup>173</sup> This section title is inspired by the 2010 essay "A Future for Mexico" authored by former Foreign Affairs Minister Jorge Castañeda and author and historian Hector Aguilar Camín, the introduction to which is entitled, "The Weight of History". Castañeda and Aguilar claim that "Mexico is a prisoner of its history", and that it "needs to be emancipated from its past." Theirs is a perspective that emphasizes the failures of the last century of Mexican politics (even the so-called "transition to democracy") and the need for a kind of radical break with the norms established during the PRI's reign.



visual examination of the many depictions of what were, in fact, many revolutions, from stark and moving paintings of bloody encounters to cynical satirizations of parties and revolutionary figures. Both exhibits featured work by the most important figures of twentieth century Mexican art, such as Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Chávez Morado. Moving through both exhibits, I was struck once again, as I had been a year before amidst the energy of the *constituyente*, by the complex and contradictory feelings that surround the idea of revolution in Mexico City. The weight of the Mexican Revolution, with all of its progressive and democratic ideals, its wonton destruction of everything from rural villages to the grandest architecture of the capital itself,<sup>174</sup> its nearly two decades of political intrigues and assassinations, and its lingering wounds, which still cut deeply through the landscape and national psyche, lays heavily over the contemporary processes of political reform.

In the wake of Peña Nieto's 2016 reforms, several decades of incremental political reform finally culminated in the promise of the city's full autonomy and its recognition as the thirty-second state of Mexico. However, while the process for creating this state in the legal realm and even the heated debates regarding the contents of its first constitution were always fairly straightforward, the city's mood surrounding these developments was anything but. The very same people who thanked heaven for the arrival of the long-awaited reforms were often quick to caution that their passage was only part of an elaborate and sinister political scheme, while those who viciously derided Mancera and the PRD for their unholy alliance with the PRI and Peña Nieto would nevertheless insist on the hope they found in the most important product of the *Pacto por México*. The set of feelings, motivations, thoughts, rhetorical postures, meanings,

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<sup>174</sup> In particular, see Ross's (2009) telling of the battles fought through the streets of the city's historic center during the "ten tragic days" (*la decena trágica*) in 1913.

and values most helpful for providing adequate context for political reform, I have argued here, center on ideas of revolution, and are presented here as a revolutionary “structure of feeling”. Four perspectives on revolution, from the Mexican Revolution and its political uses to the notion of revolution that redeems the promises of its predecessors, cut vectors through this structure in ways that illuminate the weight of history on the present moment.

This analysis demonstrates the complexity surrounding political reform as a revolutionary moment, and illustrates why there is every reason for *chilangos* to be both apprehensive and excited about this process. Some of the most aggressive social protections and radical notions of collective ownership of the city have now become law, and the city is finally free of the clutches of a federal state whose political domination and sometimes violent subjugation spanned a century at least. But Mexico City is a better place than most for learning the hard lesson that the law is above all a relationship. The last century bears witness to this with countless fraudulent elections and otherwise deeply tainted exercises of cruelly anaemic ‘democracy’, and the unfulfilled or unevenly attended promises of a revolutionary constitution also once hailed as impressively liberal and progressive. Moreover, the legal challenges to the new constitution’s entry into force still have more than a year to interrupt the political left’s hard-won goals before they can be realized, and the early indicators for the 2018 presidential elections hold little hope for the parties associated with the *Pacto por México*. Even the political emancipation of the city so greatly prized by *chilangos* left the old Federal District borders intact, ensuring at least a temporary stasis in regional political tectonics and keeping the powers of the city in check, but also holding fast the glaring inadequacies of a mismatched political geography a half-century in the making. To navigate this political moment, residents of Mexico City look to the stormy decades of

their national revolution a century before, which bequeathed them a steadily simmering cauldron of conflict embodied in a monstrous metropolis nestled into the volcanic Valley of Mexico and fittingly nicknamed “the lake of fire”. Perhaps the two most important lessons to be learned from the violent epoch of Villa, Zapata, and Díaz and a hundred years of contesting its memory are that sometimes even the most sincere of promises go unfulfilled, and that a moment of revolution can easily sprawl to encompass a century.

## Conclusion

Despite the distance traveled and the many lessons learned, this dissertation reaches its temporal end on a note of hopeful uncertainty, with Mexico City's political future mired in the entanglements of constitutional challenge, PRI resurgence, PRD reform, Morena's national emergence, the demise of the DF's preferential status, and the rebirth of its statehood. In 2018, Mexicans will face a unique presidential election, with a slate of candidates who each have complex relationships with the capital city. The current frontrunner is former mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), and many believe the race is finally 'his to lose'. Having been declared the 'legitimate' president (despite defeat) in raucous 2006 demonstrations in the Zócalo, AMLO will run for a third straight shot at the presidency, this time under the flag of his breakaway Morena party, whose strongest support comes from the city's most impoverished areas. His political tactics have been characterized as 'neo-populist', and he is undeniably surrounded by a powerful cult of personality, despite his proximity to several scandals and rumors that position his mayoral administration in good company with well-documented corruption in PRI and PRD regimes. At present, he is joined in the race by PRD candidate Miguel Ángel Mancera, whose position appears to be fairly weak despite rumors of collusion with the PRI and his decision to respect the vote in the CCC affair, or perhaps because of precisely these factors. In any event the city has taken its place as the thirty-second state of Mexico, and should the currently pending legal challenges not prevent its entry into force, the city will have a new constitution some two months after the 2018 election. If current projections hold, the city could begin this new era with a mayor and president from leftist opposition parties for the first time since the Mexican Revolution. In the preceding four chapters, I have endeavored to contextualize the present moment and explain some of the complex history that led to or enabled its development. In this conclusion, I will review what I see as the high points of the ground covered in preceding chapters and offer some additional conclusions as afforded by the project taken as a

whole, and speculate to a small degree on the likely course of the next several decades in *chilangolandia*.

From an aging colonial capital built atop the ruins of an ancient imperial Indian metropolis, Mexico City under the control of authoritarian ruler Porfirio Díaz became an industrial and political power center at the helm of a rapidly modernizing national economy. Adorned with dazzling new architecture and fashionable diversions imported from Europe and its wealthiest North American sister republic, the capital was also beset with an increasingly large population of destitute proletarians and displaced peons and peasants from the newly integrated countryside that covers most of the vast national territory. In the wake of his defeat, the city and country were ruled by the winners of Mexico's Revolution, the complications of which would not die down until the *sexenio* of Lázaro Cárdenas, which concluded in 1940. By then, all local democracy had vanished, and the redefined Federal District had come under the direct control of the presidency. The city then embarked on an era of unparalleled expansion and economic growth, spurred on by policies of import-substitution industrialization that skewed heavily urban, beckoning the rural poor to the city in droves with the promise of upward social mobility. Successive waves of migrants and their progeny tore through the Federal District's boundaries, finding space to construct their housing on the ever-distant peripheries and pushing urban services well beyond their limits. As the 'Mexican Miracle' began to falter in the 1970s, the contradictions of its urban development patterns had also become both blatantly apparent and highly dangerous. The party that claimed the mantle of revolution and that had held power uninterrupted in its wake, found itself facing legitimacy crises on several fronts, and often responded to major events with violence and manipulation of various kinds. As its leadership sought a new course in neoliberal policy, the city's poorest residents were left even further behind. Some of the urban social movements that developed to fill the void left by the state or to challenge the PRI's legitimate hold on power found a partner in Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas's FDN and later PRD, only to have their

hopes dashed in the fraud of the 1988 presidential elections. Though their efforts widened the fissures beginning to open in the ruling party's claim to presidential perpetuity, national distrust in the PRI came ultimately to favor the conservative PAN, whose executives were finally able to exploit the country's growing dissatisfaction with electoral victory in 2000. At the close of a century of revolution in Mexico City, the capital has grown to immense proportions, and is home to such an array of existential dangers and quotidian insecurities that its most common appraisals continue to focus on various aspects of its monstrosity, even as the image of a totalitarian PRI begins to fade, if only ever so slightly. For more than seven decades of this time, the city was ruled by a national party whose practices and political orientation put it increasingly at odds with the growing metropolis, leading to two additional conflictual trajectories. On the one hand, the PRI was forced to deal with its internal contradictions and the grooves lain by decades of its policies, problems that would continue to haunt the parties and politicians trained in its traditions down the line. On the other, the city's "oppression" at the hands of the national state and its refusal to return local democracy to the capital would shape the course of urban politics for three decades in the wake of the infamous 1988 elections.

As social movements and the broader world of Mexico City civil society sought to make their demands heard in the late 1980s, some found great appeal in the language of 'the right to the city' and its dialectical ability to express the "complex" and "collective" claims they wished to make on behalf of urban residents. Through the 1990s and into the new millennium, a few respected voices grew into a broad coalition that included institutional partners and most of the city's executive powers. By organizing their demands through this Lefebvrian phrase, this coalition hoped to link urban issues that stemmed from a wide range of spheres typically considered distinct (economy, politics, environment, etc.). With the support and at the behest of PRD mayor Marcelo Ebrard, this coalition set about drafting the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City in 2008, and by mid-summer 2010 its mayoral endorsement was sealed in a public ceremony that

included many of its drafters and supporters from civil society and high-ranking members of the local state. In the ensuing years, the Charter found some utility as a tool of critique and claims-making, though it failed to continue to find support from officials in city government, and the drawbacks of critiquing state action on its terms came sharply into focus as significant institutional partners pivoted away from the coalition. As senior staff for the new PRD mayor Miguel Ángel Mancera explain, the concept and the coalition that bore its name belonged, as it were, to a different city than that over which his administration presided. This explanation makes clear that the same dialectical nature that functioned as a unique strength to the coalition during the formation of the Charter turned into a weakness as the political moment of its birth gave way to something else, and the city continued to grow and change around it. Though its drafters had worked hard to leave its principles as flexible as possible while maintaining some measure of specificity, the instrument had taken on linkages and connotations that made its endorsement by a new administration highly unlikely. This, I argued in Chapter Two, is an inevitable reality for all such dialectical abstractions, not least a Lefebvrian concept born of a critique of capitalist urbanization frozen, however carefully, within the legal and political confines of a city whose leadership is bound in many respects to the dictates and desires of urban political economy.

Chapter Three followed the PRD mayor into what may become the defining moment of his political career, the resounding defeat of an urban megaproject along one of the city's historic boulevards, *Avenida Chapultepec*. This was to be the first of several projects planned for the city under Mancera's watch, some of which reportedly already had signed construction contracts in place. Indeed, such finished plans are indicative of the 'postpolitical condition' I argued is deeply in evidence under the Mancera regime. As PRI leadership gave way to that of the PRD in 1997, the leadership of the latter set about consolidating their authority in the city, sometimes by simply taking over the tactics and machinery of the same PRI their party had broken away from in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Through corruption and cooptation but under the banner of

democratization, the PRD had amassed a legal framework and electoral primacy that shielded it from the actual demands of the public even while it claimed ever greater democratic legitimacy. But having been carefully constructed through the language of democracy, this hegemonic relationship was vulnerable at precisely this point, which neighborhood opposition came to realize only when Mancera unexpectedly decided to honor their wishes. The planning process required a citizen consultation, but also allowed the mayor to choose how citizen input would be collected and whether any resultant decision would carry legal force. Not only did the mayor choose the option that would make the result non-binding, but evidence suggests a systematic attempt to swing the vote toward a positive decision on the project. A resident-led campaign against the process, however, succeeded in carrying a roughly two-to-one majority against the project, which the mayor chose to treat as a binding decision, perhaps in an effort to maintain his democratic legitimacy by sacrificing this and the other planned projects (which were allegedly tabled after this process concluded). As one resident put it months later, “All that we *vecinos* can do, when everything else is impossible, is to raise the political cost of what they want” (field notes, 4/24/2016). In this case, democratic legitimacy that was the lynchpin of both Mancera’s political career and the PRD’s political hegemony in the city, was deemed too valuable to be sacrificed even for the most resplendent of signature redevelopment projects.

Some seven weeks later, the tension between the city and the national state that had simmered and boiled for decades reached a kind of conclusion in the round of ‘political reform’ passed by President Enrique Peña Nieto in January of 2016. These reforms unwound the revocation of local democracy handed down to the capital city by the PRI’s predecessors in 1928, and restored a re-christened Mexico City (CDMX) to its former status as the thirty-second Mexican state. In addition to being the outcome of a tense struggle between two scales of authority (and for some decades of this time, between two corresponding parties), these reforms initiated another process, that of drafting Mexico City’s first political constitution. This process, I argued, is best viewed



through the lens of revolution, the most common rhetorical frame for organizing these events in the city. A complex idea in Mexico City given its weighty history (much of it recent) and its continuing prominence in contemporary politics, revolution colors much of the discussion of ‘political reform’ and of the *constituyente* process, whether in the formal public discussions of the Constitutional Assembly or the informal conversations of the kitchens and dining rooms of *Colonia Tacubaya* where I lived for much of my fieldwork year, and therefore constitutes what I named in Chapter Four a “revolutionary structure of feeling”. My tracing of this structure along four routes commonly taken by persons of various walks of life highlights connections drawn from history even before the Mexican Revolution, and foregrounds the many uses to which the idea of revolution is put in order to understand, to manipulate, or to redeem a particular historical thread and to justify, critique, or further a given political position. The explanatory utility of this exercise lies, I argued, in attempting to make sense of the conflicting feelings, motivations, values, actions, (etc.) surrounding the process of political reform in the city. Contradictory assessments of this process often occupy the same voice in initially confusing ways (the sentiment “it’s a trick”, for instance, often shares a soul with “it’s an opportunity for change”), and this transect-tracing analysis at the very least provides a historical, geographical, and political context within which they might be reasonably interpreted. More than this, 2017 presents *chilangos* with a revolutionary moment perhaps as heady and historically significant as that of their violent revolutionary crescendo a century before, a moment for which its lessons have a heightened intensity and value. As Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas has astutely argued, much of the new constitution’s impact and import will be decided in the years to come, as its precepts and principles are debated and its foundations are overlain with more explicit and more operative generations of urban legislation.

There are also several general conclusions to be gleaned from the arguments and analysis presented in the foregoing chapters. One fairly obvious observation is that grassroots movements

that partner with the state seem to find dangers and benefits in near equal measure. The case of the coalition pursuing the right to the city is instructive in this regard. While some members of civil society were always wary of involving even what seemed the most trustworthy of government partners, those that eventually became part of the CPCCMDC chose the recognition and power that came with the partnership of Mayor Ebrard and the CDHDF, among others. While this put the right to the city on the map in a way that it simply had not been before, it also created baggage for the concept and for the coalition, linking both to a particular regime and a particular political moment. When this moment faded and a new administration was installed, the concept was seen as outdated and non-pertinent to the new mayor's priorities (not to mention that its proponents now belonged to a political constituency that had no working relationship with the new mayor nor with much of his staff). This history of mixed results weighs heavily on contemporary conversations in civil society, and is one major factor separating various organizations and popular factions.

That the right to the city explicitly found its way into the city's new constitution, and even more that the principles elaborated in the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City so clearly influenced large sections of the constitution's 'Charter of Rights', is suggestive of another conclusion: that even political moments that are short lived, even those perhaps perceived as 'failures', can have lasting effects, including becoming the scaffolding of future political movements. This argument is reminiscent of those found in the work of Mitchell (2003) and Holston (2008), for whom the legal establishment of a right can create a platform upon which a politics can be constructed. This fixing of a field within which a politics might occur is thus a foundational effect and objective of 'rights talk'. What my analysis suggests, however, is that even a right which is recognized as a guiding principle but not given legal authority can perform such a role, in due course. For example, it took Enrique Ortiz Flores and his institutional partners more than twenty years to earn any formal recognition for the right to the city. And when it was

finally granted, it came only in the form of public endorsement, not legal authority. The Charter had no legal value whatsoever, and its political utility faded quickly in the wake of its public endorsement. Still, the document's public endorsement secured it a place in the political realm it had not otherwise enjoyed, and, though its position was legally very weak, and though its most valuable partners perhaps wished to use it to accomplish distinct ends, its prominence enabled its later elevation to the status of law in the 2017 constitution. This placement too guarantees nothing, but does provide a sure footing for the construction of a potential politics based on the right to the city as a collective and complex right in Mexico City. The gradual and incremental process of political reform similarly illustrates the potential of such an approach, whether strategic or otherwise. Though the earliest conversations regarding political reform sought to obtain complete autonomy for the Federal District, it took some thirty years for this to be legally realized. Along the way, however, *defeños* were given a representative council (though at first its role was purely advisory), an elected executive, a legislative authority, and elected local officials, all via incremental reforms. This process was halting, and required circumstances and interests to align in specific ways to create advantageous conjunctures in which the demands of the capital's residents might be fruitfully pursued.

All of these conclusions suggest a need to reexamine the efficacy of strategies favoring incremental and immediate change, a conversation that recalls a familiar debate within radical circles of the relative merits of reform and revolution. As examined in this dissertation, the evolution of Mexico City may add a significant wrinkle to a powerful argument first established by André Gorz in 1967. Seeking to cut a path between socialist strategies that sought incremental reform ("reformist") or insisted on total social revolution, Gorz instead argued for the development of a strategy built upon the implementation of what he called "non-reformist reforms" or "revolutionary reforms". Though it may initially appear a simple conceptual or theoretical portmanteau, Gorz's strategy is slightly more complex. A reformist reform, Gorz

(1967: 7) wrote, “is one which subordinates its objectives to the criteria of rationality and practicability of a given system and policy” and “rejects those objectives and demands...which are incompatible with the preservation of the system.” The danger of reformism, then, is less that it unintentionally preserves the oppressive “system” in question than that it expressly does so. Any goal of a reformist reform, however ‘progressive’, must be subordinated to the boundaries of the system, or, to return to Rancièrian language, the “police order”. Gorz also makes analytical room for what he calls “a not necessarily reformist reform...one which is conceived not in terms of what is possible within the framework of a given system and administration, but in view of what should be made possible in terms of human needs and demands.” The third category of reform is the non-reformist or revolutionary reform, which is simply a categorically anti-capitalist measure. An initial difficulty with this analytical framework is its implicit temporality, as even Gorz notes the impossibility of knowing beforehand to which category a given measure may belong, at least in many cases. This is further complicated by the notion of unintended effects, such as a reform meant to be system-stabilizing that mistakenly does the opposite. PRI economic policies in the neoliberal era might foster a pertinent example, wherein reforms meant to produce stable economic growth and salvage the credibility of the PRI failed to do either, and indeed created opportunities for a growing opposition. Still, at the level of revolutionary strategy as practiced by many of Mexico City’s grassroots organizations and groups, the notion of non-reformist reforms is analytically useful, though it requires some refinement.

The arc of Mexico City’s recent history, at least from the era of the Mexican Revolution through the present, demonstrates a complex mixture of reforms that muddle categorical distinctions and bend even strategic definitions, and a lived reality of social revolution that flies in the face of existing temporal or even programmatic qualifications. To understand this history, Gorz’s strategy of non-reformist reforms requires at least two transformative revisions. First, while it may be practically impossible to qualify in advance the position of a given reform vis-a-vis its

revolutionary potential, Mexico City's history abundantly illustrates that such qualification is not always necessary. It need not always be known what good or ill may come of a particular law, program, or policy, for example, for these name only patterned relationships always subject to change. Moreover, even when they are allowed to run their course relatively undisturbed, the results of such arrangements can be highly unpredictable. In addition to the PRI's fateful neoliberal turn noted above, Mayor Mancera's disastrous attempt to carefully maneuver the *Corredor* project through the Law of Citizen Participation provides ample evidence of how reforms intended (at least in part) to pre-empt popular pushback against a particular hegemony can be used to precisely the opposite effect. Non-reformist reforms, indeed reforms of any kind, this evidence suggests, can only be *attempted* in the present, in near complete ignorance of whether their intended effects will be realized. A second necessary revision to Gorz's strategy relates to its orientation, specifically to the "system" against which reforms are judged in Gorz's analytical framework. My argument here has to do with the myriad social ills against which Mexico City's grassroots opposition have inclined themselves, and the irreducibility of such problems to capitalism, *per se*. An analytical position on urbanism cum capitalism à la Lefebvre pushes Gorz's argument closer to being able to handle such challenges as the environmental agenda of the CPCCMDC, for example, but can do little analytically to specifically address the issues of sexual violence that continue to plague the city and the country, nor the gender and reproductive rights issues only now approached in the language of the 2017 constitution. What I therefore argue is needed is an approach to non-reformist reforms that measures their efficacy not solely against their revolutionary potential vis-a-vis capitalism, but instead against an expanded field of social and political ills. Taking the case of Mexico City as elaborated in this dissertation as instructive, at least such "systems" as patriarchy, heteronormativity, and authoritarianism should also be under consideration. I fully recognize the potential for negative externality effects of non-reformist reforms as considered from this vantage, such that a housing reform might deplete political energy from an anti-capitalist movement. The opposite potential must also be

recognized, however, such that enhanced recognition and monitoring of human rights abuses might underscore the ravages of industrial capitalism, and, perhaps, highlight the inherent contradictions of capitalist development (see Harvey, 2006; 2014). Broadening the qualificatory horizon of non-reformist reforms in this way is an essential step in developing an improved framework for evaluating the merits of even the simplest incremental alterations, by placing them within a more holistic theory of revolutionary change.

Whatever the academic fate of Gorz's method and the global fate of his strategy, for labor or otherwise, my exploration of Mexico City has made one thing abundantly clear: Mexican revolution moves at its own pace, and is accomplished in its own time. It is often incremental, its advance can be halting, and it can sometimes even don an 'institutional' guise. Its movements can often be traced from a simple quantitative difference that builds to reach a qualitative crescendo. If time is marked from the Charter's endorsement to the constitution's passage, the city's urban political revolution displays a similar timeframe to that of the country's revolution a century before (2010-2017; 1910-1917), each ending with a constitution and each followed immediately by an uncertain period of implementation. A century ago, the adoption of the constitution was followed by nearly two decades of violence and disorder as rebellious groups remained at war with the state, as political leaders were assassinated or forced into resignation or exile, and as fierce debates raged over how to realize or curtail the constitution's principles. The city may find itself in a similar position over the next several decades, as the most radical provisions of its new constitution are tested in the legislature and judiciary. Will the provision for the revocation of mandate help forge a new relationship between political elites and everyday citizens? Will rights to reproductive health and sexual identity and practice soften the scourge of sexual and gender violence that plague even the county's most 'progressive' urban haven? If the history of post-revolutionary Mexico City is any guide, it can be said with surety that nothing born of such hopes

is reasonably given. But those who will fight these battles in *el monstruo* have certainly crafted a powerful new weapon.

### **Methodological Appendix: An Explanatory Note on Approach and Methods**

As I explained in the Introduction to this dissertation, my approach to the study of Mexico City is routed through and informed by my understanding of dialectical materialism. Conceptually, this can make for a somewhat complicated approach, as so little can be taken for granted when considered dialectically, and any system or framework developed for understanding the relations in question must be flexible enough to morph as new or different relations become apparent but also honed enough to make sense of these relations, whether in stasis or in motion. Practically, it presents equivalent challenges for the contemporary urban researcher. Delimiting the scope of relations under investigation and the approaches required to achieve an adequate sense of their interplay is no small task, and each vantage taken may open a view onto new and exciting but also complicating and necessarily obfuscating information and impressions. As I also argued above, following Marx (1967b), the mode of presentation may also and of necessity differ, perhaps greatly, from the method of investigation, in order that the set of relations in question may be sufficiently and convincingly displayed to the reader without the burden of tracing the myriad connections that lay thick and thin upon the mosaic that makes up any particular Relation (in the Ollmanian usage). Thus it is that in certain places in this dissertation I speak of “context”, “tension”, or “influence”, common terms that nevertheless function in a dialectical fashion, as when Williams (1977:87) describes a relationship of “determination” as a “setting of limits” and an “exertion of pressures”. In both the finest and most infamous geographic tradition, this dissertation also represents a journey of discovery, not least self-discovery, which in this case is worthy of some explanation owing to its influence on data collection and analysis, which will become clear in what follows. In this appendix, I will therefore explain the genesis of the research project from which this dissertation was born, the specific methods by which I arrived at the material I have presented within it, and the methodological approach that binds them into a unified study of Mexico City.



My initial interest in Mexico City came from a limited encounter with the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City examined in Chapter Two. Having been immersed in a seminar focused on the right to the city at the time, I was intrigued by what seemed to me to be a highly sophisticated exposition of the right to the city in practice on the part of the Charter's promoters, and one that appeared more Lefebvrian than any other I had seen (though they carefully avoid mentions of Lefebvre, and, as I would learn, largely see their notion as having little connection to his work). I began making preliminary research visits in the summers of 2013 and 2014, and by the end of my second visit I had begun to make some important university and civil society contacts, partly through introductions generously provided by friends and colleagues in New York. Through these contacts, I was able to arrange formal affiliations for my fieldwork year with the Institute of Geography (Instituto de Geografía) at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (*Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, UNAM) and Habitat International Coalition-Latin America. Colleagues in both places were extremely helpful as I sought funding for my intended project and shaped its parameters. While I initially planned to follow a movement, largely ethnographically, focused on pursuing the right to the city, I would learn early on during fieldwork that this would not be the best approach either to the issues I was most interested in or those most pressing or politically relevant to the actors in question or the greater population. Nevertheless, I was told repeatedly in the fall months of 2015 that I had arrived at a highly significant and unique political moment in the city's history, and that some of the issues then coming to the fore of the city's politics were sure to be of lasting import. Thus, early in my period of extended fieldwork (10/1/2015-5/31/2016), I began to recalculate the study, orienting my time toward those contemporary and historical issues that seemed to hold the most significance to the social movements and civil society organizations with whom I was in active conversation. What resulted from these changes was a project with both a broader and more targeted scope. During this period, I became primarily interested in several issues: 1) the origins and contemporary relevance of the right to the city in Mexico City, including everything from the

relationships that developed around and through the concept and its historical specificity in this context; 2) contemporary grassroots political struggles in the city, and their relation, if any, to the right to the city; and 3) the shifting landscapes of state authority and party politics in Mexico City and the country more generally. The degree of interrelation among these areas of focus became more fully apparent over time, as I collected data and accumulated experiences pertaining to each and even more as I returned from Mexico City and began to translate, transcribe, and arrange these data.

My initial approach to data collection in these three areas can most aptly be described as highly opportunistic. Affiliations at UNAM and HIC-AL gave me access to vast archival collections and civil society and social movement connections, both of which would become extremely useful across my three areas of focus. My own developing social circle in the city also yielded important connections and collaborators. Extensive time in the virtual world of press archives, contemporary press coverage, and the wide world of social media and other virtual media spaces would provide an important complement to these other methods groupings. To organize the collection of these data, I employed specific sets of methods pertaining to each collection agenda.

The first of these specific methodological sets revolved around ethnographic practices, especially participant and passive observation and semi-structured interviews. I conducted observations in a range of civil society spaces to which I was granted access, including meetings with officials of the local state, formal meetings of the group working on the right to the city ‘platform’, and many others. In these meetings, I would sometimes participate in discussions, but would often only observe. It was in some of these meetings that I first began to become aware of the privilege certain aspects of my position and physical appearance seemed to afford me. I was sometimes confused for someone of some influence, probably because of my choice of attire (I often wore ties to formal meetings) and the way I conducted myself in the room (I was often seated next to

officials, sometimes conversed with them before or after meetings, and often took furious notes during meetings). Switching from participant to passive observer was also an important part of my interactions with the social circles of friends in the neighborhoods of Tacubaya, Cuauhtémoc, Juárez, Condesa, Roma, and even Coyoacán. These different spaces afforded me extremely different vantages from which to approach the city, and thus provided invaluable data in the form of field notes in particular. Typically, I would carry a small notebook and pen, jotting down sparse notes during social interactions (or what Ignacio and I sometimes called “adventures”<sup>175</sup> around the city) or those formal meetings where open note taking seemed inappropriate. I would later expand on these notes when I returned home, typing and securely saving them for later use. I also conducted participant observation during several “demonstrations”, including the women’s march detailed in Chapter Four, and at some public fora, including at various university and municipal buildings. In all of these experiences, I made an effort to allow my own mistakes, insights, gaffs, (etc.) to permeate my accounts, such that included passages show as much as possible the necessarily partial and refracted qualities of the scenarios described. This set of methods also includes semi-structured interviews, which, although extremely useful, did not form as large a portion of my data as I originally intended. In all, I conducted some seventeen interviews with thirteen participants, which spanned from roughly thirty minutes to over several hours. These are best considered ‘expert interviews’, as each of the participants was an expert in one way or another (I interviewed several government officials, several members of civil society organizations, several journalists, and at least one business owner). I also had many personal conversations that were not recorded and which were not formally logged as interviews, though

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<sup>175</sup> Part of the joke here implied is that this word (*aventura*) is also commonly used to refer to extramarital affairs in Mexico City. Ignacio and I took many such excursions to various parts of the city on days when I was not in one or the other of my offices and when he wasn’t working. They included visits to such places as: Texcoco, San Ángel, Naucalpan, Iztapalapa, Navarte, Nápoles, Polanco, Doctores, Roma, Tepito, and Santa Fe, and typically involved a great deal of walking, often for many hours and in a few cases nearly an entire day. We would often enter into conversations with local residents or shopkeepers, and sometimes I took photos, though not always.

most of these were recorded in field notes entries. Conversations in bars, nightclubs, restaurants, university offices, an NGO library, museums, malls, ubers and taxis, and on canal boats, metro trains, and buses also made their way in substantial numbers into my field notes. For analytical purposes, these data were combed over thoroughly for thematic relevance, and interview data were selectively translated and transcribed, sometimes with assistance from native speakers or the interviewees themselves. These data figure prominently throughout this dissertation, and are given more analytical weight in Chapters Three and Four, as this is where they are most relevant temporally and thematically.

The second set of data collection methods I employed pertains to archival data and historical analysis. In this, I was greatly aided by my affiliations with UNAM and in particular with HIC-AL, whose library contains a wealth of information and analytical reports from their extensive history of activism and research in the city, along with that of their partners. From these archives, I was able to make copies of HIC annual reports, research reports prepared by HIC and their affiliates, theses written by affiliated students, and essays written on various topics, among other useful documents. I was guided in this by HIC officials, but was often left to pursue my own interests in their library at my leisure. The incredible wealth of material collected was invaluable in my reconstruction of the conceptual and political history of the right to the city in Mexico City, as HIC and its leading officials were centrally involved in its development from its earliest beginnings in the 1980s. I was also able to selectively access online archives of Mexico City daily newspapers *La Jornada* (based at UNAM) and *El Universal*, and I also collected extensive material from the reporting and commentary found in political and economic magazines and other such publications—whose relevance has grown considerably in recent years as a source of news and analysis in the city—such as *Proceso*, *Animal Político*, *Excélsior*, and *El Economista*. These data were sorted and largely organized by temporal file names, though in many cases copies were placed in special folders organized thematically as the dissertation's final themes emerged in the

course of data analysis and initial drafting. Translations of this material were almost entirely done by myself, though I had extensive assistance from friends and colleagues in Mexico City and in New York and New Jersey. These data inform the whole of the dissertation and are cited throughout, but form the bulk of the evidence for Chapter Two in particular, alongside several key interviews.

The third set of methods contains those deployed in virtual space. These methods are therefore distinct not in terms of general research practices, but rather in the spaces in which they were carried out. In covering the activities of a wide array of civil society groups, I was initially directed to social media behemoths Facebook and twitter, both of which, I came to learn, are heavily used as organizing and promotional tools in Mexico City. Many of the meetings and events I attended first became known to me via these platforms. While using social media, I acted largely as a passive observer, sometimes taking notes on interactions or comments that took place around a particular virtual or non-virtual event or provocation, and often taking ‘screenshots’ or downloading images or other graphic or verbal representations, of which I soon had an enormous repository. These graphic and discursive data are sometimes used as exemplary material for a general pattern I observed, and often inform my understanding of the arc or perceived significance of a given struggle or event, though my analyses always carefully account for the limited access many of Mexico City’s residents have to these platforms and the unevenly distributed understanding of their use and utility across the city. As my fieldwork progressed, I became a more active participant in some discussions, occasionally posting photos and descriptions of events I had attended or planned to attend, or other newsworthy events I had witnessed (such as the grossly underreported collapse of the historic Ermita theater just a block from where I was then living in *Colonia Tacubaya* in early 2016). I watched what probably amounts to several hundred hours of video, mostly on youtube and vimeo, sometimes with friends or acquaintances but often alone. In some cases, I transcribed and translated portions of these

videos and filed them among the other media data I had collected. In other cases, I organized links to such video material in thematic or temporal groupings. I also collected and reviewed a great deal of contemporary news coverage from such virtual spaces, often via links posted on social media platforms but also through six targeted google alerts I kept and routinely monitored for a period of more than three years, beginning roughly a year before my extended fieldwork began in 2015. I often also perused the comments sections of these media, again selectively making translations or taking screenshots for later use. I also used social media, most notably twitter and facebook, to comb through archived posts beginning roughly around 2010, in order to fill out historical research on the Charter in particular (detailed in Chapter Two).

Across data collection and analysis, the role my identity and perceptions of my identity played in the research process cannot be ignored. As an affiliate of respected institutions and a friend or colleague of members of such institutions, I was often granted access that would otherwise have likely proven impossible to obtain. As a relatively tall and typically reasonably well dressed white man, I was also often able to pass unquestioned beyond gates or boundaries that might have stopped others. I learned from friends and from trial-and-error that pretending to belong and moving with confidence can work wonders, and I was often not expected or asked to justify my presence at even formal events (especially if I was displaying my camera). This is only to say I perceived during the research process that a certain inescapable element of white, male privilege at least partially enabled me to access certain spaces in certain moments that would likely have been closed to me otherwise. Privilege, identity, otherness, and related themes were a frequent topic of conversation in English and Spanish among friends and colleagues alike, and certainly colored my experience to a large degree. I have done my best in the presentation of this work to allow the reader access to this process of discovery and self-discovery in ways that do not cause undue distraction or detract from the overall goals of the project. My views of Mexico City, this is all to say, are necessarily partial, and I take great care to note the ways that this partiality

influences the final product that is this dissertation. In this respect, my account of the city's recent history and my own experiences within its confines follow other treatments wherein the narrator is offered up to the scrutiny of the reader, such as Daniel Hernandez's (2011) *Down and Delirious in Mexico City: The Aztec Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century*, John Ross's (2009) *El Monstruo: Dread and Redemption in Mexico City*, and David Lida's (2008) *First Stop in the New World: Mexico City, Capital of the Twenty-First Century*, all three of which were written by 'foreigners' to some degree seduced by the beloved behemoth. Their accounts, and those of many others read before, during, and after my extended fieldwork certainly temper and influence my own perceptions.

The final note I wish to make about the use of data and source materials concerns the relative weight each was given in my analysis and presentation, and the variance in this arrangement that readers may expect to find. For obvious reasons, greater weight was afforded to archival, virtually collected, and interview data (along with secondary academic literature) for those events and histories I was not physically present to witness (i.e., Chapters One and Two). In the analysis of events, relations, tensions, and perspectives for which I do have first-hand ethnographic data, however, the evidentiary scale is not simply tipped toward those data, owing in large part to the partial nature of my own perspective, as noted above. Instead, I sought a balance of data sources throughout the dissertation, in an effort to 'triangulate' conclusions as much as possible. In the final presentation, I have made every effort to include multiple voices whenever possible for precisely this reason, and to qualify statements in a reasonable manner. The reader may be the ultimate judge of the effectiveness of these efforts.

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