



YOUTH IN LATIN AMERICA

PEÑA NIETO'S GOVERNMENT AND THE MULTIPLE REASONS FOR YOUTH INDIGNATION AND UTOPIA IN MEXICO

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Abstract:

Enrique Peña Nieto's government is deeply marked by protest and mobilizations and for the indignation of Mexican youth, even from his election campaign in 2012, with the emergence of the movement #YoSoy132 and later, in 2013, with the teachers y social movement against structural reforms. In this article I return this pair social movements, to trace clues to understand the role of Mexican youth in the construction of alternatives national and civilizatory projects.

Keywords: Youth; Utopia; Mexico; Social Movements

INTRODUCTION

Urban and rural spaces have developed in scenarios where its habitants, specially youth and other historically excluded groups, are experiencing insecurity, poverty, marginalization, criminalization, social fragmentation, exploitation, inequality, violence and social exclusion. Those issues are the reflection of a multiple domination system¹ that has been in the basis of capitalist modernity, now in its neoliberal phase. To this domination, never full or legitimate, there are historical and contemporaneous social struggles opposing: peasant, indigenous, urban feminist, environmentalists, youth, among others.

Recently, young people² have been the protagonists in a series of social move-

ments emerging in Chili, Brazil, Spain, USA, Turkey and other places in the world, making visible, as well as questioning the unfulfilled promises of liberal democracies through which have questioned the unfulfilled promises of liberal democracies, collaborating at the same time, in the construction of social, cultural and political alternatives. Therefore, in what follows, I analyze the role of youth participation in contemporary social movements from the link between the impacts of multiple domination system on the youth situation in Mexico and a couple of contemporary social movements

ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSIÓN

Since the late twentieth century, forms of economical exploitation and



social exclusion of transnational corporations are associated with a new morphology of work that is shown in high unemployment levels, as well as its precarization, outsourcing, sub-contracting and flexibilization. In other words, jobs offered by the market are precarious, since they do not mean safety, with a contract, social security minimal standards, contribution to pension funds, the possibility to personal and/or professional realization. Companies place young people as adjusting work force or as leftovers from the system, a situation that worsens for those who search their first job.

To illustrate the situation, it must be said that more than half of the planet is under 25, in which nine out of ten people live in underdeveloped countries. Latin America has around 108 million young people among 15 to 24 years old, in which 55,6% have access to the formal job market, and 13,9% —7.7 million people — are unemployed, three times the adult rate, and the rest is on the informality or do not study or work³. In Mexico, among the 30 million young people from 15 to 29 years old, 47% which work and the unemployment rates (that considers young people from 15 to 24) is of 9.7%. ⁴According to the National Youth Values Survey in 2012, 26% of the young people interviewed said they received less than 1,821 pesos, while 46.7% from 1,821 and \$5,460, monthly.⁵

The juvenile condition is full of paradoxes, one of the most frustrating is that young people in the region have more education and less access to employment which represents. This represents a fracture in work and education, where the youth abandonment are another issue. Over 60% people leave school before 18 years for different reasons, whether economical, rejection of the educational system, consider that it does not bring them real knowledge or an opportunity to earn better, do not have parental support, among others⁶. Faced with this overall picture of a work y education, much of Mexican youth decide to integrate themselves in the informal sector of the economy, migrate to the USA or engage in illicit activities.

MILITARIZATION AND SACRIFICEABLE PEOPLE

The exacerbation of violence is one of major concerns of Mexican society, in the last years, has been strongly linked to the militarization implemented by Felipe Calderón's government to eradicate drug trafficking. In the alleged war against drug trafficking, youth death rates have increased, since of the 130,000 murders⁷, the majority is of young people. Violence outbreaks have extended to different cities, operating in a functional manner to



the militarization of the country and to the many tentacles of organized crime that dispute for power and territory. In the center, as victims or as victimized, young people are the protagonists of rubbery, arbitrary detention, police violence, kidnapping, murders and disappearances.

The existence of connections among distinct types of discrimination and social exclusion makes us return to the socio-cultural matrix of modernity's civilizational paradigm, defined dichotomously where the white, male, rational, occidental, european, developed, civilized heterosexual and bourgeois model opposes to peripheral categories of women, irrational, young, afro-descendent, indigenous, non european, underdeveloped, primitive, non heterosexual and poor. It is a symbolic system where differences are inequalities in detriment of women, young people, indigenous, afro-descendent, poor and other social types.

An expression of the persistence of this ordering are femicides, a limit condition of violence against women, based in patriarchal structure and impunity that defines the condition of sacrifice of a large majority of population, whose vulnerability is constructed since gender, youth, poverty, social precarity, degradation of justice and institutional corruption as categories. ⁸In Mexico, 6,4 women are

murdered each day, in which 95% rest unpunished. Between 2006 and 2012 it increased in 40%.⁹

THE ECOLOGICAL DEPREDATION

The ecological depredation triggered by developmental projects affect all humanity. Young people, the heirs of the world, are those who face uncertainty and risks, such as the destruction of the ozone layer; winter effect; genetic manipulation; deforestation of tropical forest; toxic remainders; obsolete technology; the effects caused by dams and mines, cornerstones of the extractive model of public and private inversion imposed on the bases of dispossession, promises, and alleged compensations. In Mexico can be considered as a legal "paradise" for more than 200 transnational enterprises that work in the country, dedicated to the extraction of precious minerals that leave behind social restlessness and environment degradation.¹⁰

DEMOCRACY (NOT) REPRESENTATIVE

Liberal democracies have reduced political participation to an electoral culture, reducing the political scope into voting and partisan representation, a serious problem to Mexico, where there is no will nor political capacity to bring answers to multiple necessities of youth trajectories



and where political parties have stopped working as effective political instruments of representation.¹¹ This has produced a distancing from political parties and young people¹², interpreted by conservative views such as political apathy, providing an invisibility of multiple practices, in which young people are constituting themselves as political and culture subjects, in student organizations, nongovernmental, youth cultures, artistical-political collectives and social movements.

The historic delegitimization of some of these practices is based on the prohibition, criminalization and repression of the same through the direct action of the police, the transformation of laws and manipulated using the media. During the last protests, there were shock troops infiltrated that generated violence and escaped to the protection of police force, who then respond against protesters with excessive violence¹³ and on the other hand, the changes made in different articles¹⁴ that authorize the authorities request the geolocation of mobile and social protest to equate terrorism.

THE ROLE OF MEDIA

The role of media in liberal democracies obliges us to rethink the link between information, image and power. Television en Mexico is far from presenting a democratic horizon, defined by the opening and multiplication of possibilities, constituted below the television duopoly —TV Azteca y Televisa— as an apparatus of domination, generating public opinion that incides in the election of governants, whose harmful expressions are the alliances between politicians and television “stars”, as the ostentatious amounts of money spent on Image consulting and production.¹⁵

Mexican television contributes to the criminalization of riots since what Rossana Reguillo names as the “social construction of the enemy”¹⁶, hammering ad nauseum manipulated audiovisual narratives, generating the certainty that rioters are “dangerous anarchists” willing to destroy the cities. On the other hand, vigilance, spying, the harassment and criminalization of communicators and activists is generated through several technologies such as, aforementioned, geo-localization of mobile phones, internet sites, blogs and social networks.

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#YOSOY132

In 2012 Mexico's electoral conjecture had the fraud spectrum around one more time; the mediatical imposition and with that, the return of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) now allied with the Partido Verde de México (PVEM). Even though their candidate Enrique Peña Nieto, after several setbacks in front of the media, on May 11th went to the Universidad Iberoamericana to present his political platform, where he took responsibility for the determination of the repressive actions in the Atenco case, after being questioned by a group of students. The event ended in a surprising way with the candidate leaving by the back door in the middle of a huge security operation.

Several medias classified the rioters as *acarreados* and *porros*¹⁷, with the response of 131 young people in Youtube that they were students, identifying themselves as such and not belonging to any political party. Hours later, thousands of youngsters manifested their support in social networks with the label or has-tag #Yosoy132. That was the start of a movement in which mainly students from public and private universities took part, organized by cells in almost all Mexico, later joined by teachers, academics, children, parents, activists and other social actors.

The main demand of the movement was the democratization of media, as an essential step to the democratization of the country. The movement builds into a long history of abuses against the Mexican people, its worker's struggle, urban, indigenous, peasant and student; questioning the increasing level of violence in which people live in the Mexican territory and the electoral conjecture manipulated by media, defining themselves as nonpartisan, pacific, student based, laic, plural, on social political character, humanist, autonomous, permanent and anti-neoliberal.

Among its actions in the previous days of elections, the numerous marches gained attention with a strong emotional, artistic and cultural aspect; the camping,

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performances against buildings; the rallies; the concerts, several activities in public spaces to promote the conscious vote and the organization of the third debate between candidates for the President of the Republic (with EPN's absence). During the electoral journey, vigilant and citizens electoral commissions were formed to photograph polls results, upload them into an Internet page and systematize the irregularities of the process.

In July 1st, when it was declared that EPN had virtually won the elections, frustration was reflected in riots that took place in different parts of the country. As part of the post-electoral agen-

da, #Yosoy132 organized a presidential counter-report and assembled different groups¹⁸ to protest against the imposition of PRI's candidate, in December 1st (1D), having won in a corrupted process and vote buying. Governmental response and the media duopoly could not brake the growing of #Yosoy132 movement, but the 1D was marked by repression of rioters using anti-riot troops, resulting in 14 detained and several injured, with the later decrease of the movement.

REFORMS AND ANTI-NEOLIBERAL REFORMS

With the second work reform signed in the last years of the sixth year of Felipe Calderón as president, the way to a bigger precarization, flexibilization and desestabilization of work was opened, with the educational reform proposal 9 months before the peñista government (that is far from proposing a transformation of the educational system), suspending teacher's union rights with the possibility of suspending their work contracts, from a standardized punitive evaluation, not taking into account the different contexts where it took place. This scenery was joined by several structural reforms regarding tax, budget and energetical that were in his anteroom, waiting for its approval.

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Given the labor reform, opposition was weak, whilst with educational reforms, riots were more intense, especially when the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE) called for an “insurgency” through various actions as marches, rallies, cordoning of buildings, toll collections or campings in the center of some cities. Legislative and executive answer that, until now, being the ruling of conflict and the weariness of the basis, on September 15th was transformed in repression and eviction of campings in DF’s Zócalo. As usual, the TV duopoly supported permanently the fascist campaign of delegitimization of the social movement (arguing that teachers did not want to be evaluated, taking advantage of the misinformation of broad sectors of Mexican society and the discomfort brought by riots) and the legitimating of structural reforms.

In those experiences it was notorious the presence of younger generations

of teachers, but mainly the gradual incorporation of student that will be teachers, the support of #Yosoy132 movement; student organizations; teachers; academics; activists, people who worked in the health sector; parents and other social groups joined with the teacher’s movement against structural reforms. In San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, for example, the participation of students from different levels of education (post grads, university and preparatory) was seen in riots in the streets, in the occupation of schools, occupation of cabins in many roads; analysis forums; front constructions and students coordination’s; supporting shifts in State’s capital and in the country, among other actions.

In negotiating tables, federal government did not backed, frequently inviting teacher’s representatives to go back to their States and negotiate with governments. With the progressive undermining



of the movement, the lack of interest of the major population and the withdrawal of the oaxaqueño contingent, one of the biggest installed in Mexico City, representatives of the teachers movement in different states signed an agreement with their state government. In Chiapas, after three months of a severe struggle, there was not a single change in the constitutional modifications that affected their workers rights, what they managed to obtain was a commitment for an educational project within the social context of the entity; the non administrative-judicial and economical repression; footwear and uniforms to 28 of the states with the biggest marginalization. The seeming result: frustration, few achievements and a worn out basis.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Mexican youth is experimenting a case of national emergency associated with a civilizational crisis, with high levels of unemployment, work precarization, outsourcing and flexibilization; criminalization of political-cultural dissident practices; protest repression; video-political practices by Televisa y TV Azteca allied with government; discrimination and different levels of violence; multiple risks regarding the environment; extractive projects of Capital and the consequences of global militarization, imposed in the country in recent years.

Therefore, young people together with other social sectors are the most affected in a multiple domination system, that sustains capitalism in its neoliberal phase, with political, economical, cultural and social components, supported by a gendarme or police State. It is not very reasonable to expect that the solution of problems come from those who produce it. It is necessary to think of alternatives where one redefines political power, politics and democracy, not only as an instrument of legitimate domination, but as the ability of a political heterogeneous community, with the participation of historically oppressed sectors.

It is possible to track this new form of political power on track by its several propositions, processes, organizations and peasant movements, indigenous, urban, neighborhood, trade unions, feminist, youngsters movements, environmentalists, solidary economy, urban cultures, land movements, autonomous or alternative communication. Those are historical and contemporaneous struggles that are crediting the construction of a new civilizational project, to overcome the excludent, exploitative, discriminative, adultocentered, patriarchic and predator capitalist paradigm. The current challenge is, as many may recognize, in articulating a large sum of emancipative, libertarian



and recognition demands that emerge for the Mexican territory, Latin America and Caribbean as for different places of the world.

If interpretations of those movements so heterogeneous can be so much as the actors that have joined, one cannot assume that few quantitative gains, lack of a long term political project or the null incidence of reforms and structural conditions, represent a complete failure. Among the contributions of those experiences, one must recognize them as places of struggle in which many young people are positioning (many for the first time in their lives) as political, historical, cultural subjects, building mediation bridges between what one wants to change and the horizons where one is directing oneself. Through these early risers' experiences and their own cycles of protest, continue to generate socio-political organization, micro processes that together represent a

significant potential for resistance waiting for a catalyst event.

Through those experiences, young people have been the protagonists of multiple emancipation alternatives in a global context of struggle, particularly through collective actions linked with the performativity of their bodies, the re-appropriation of their projects and life spaces; the re-appropriation of streets and other public spaces as the pedagogical scenery of resistance; the horizontal and rotary forms of organization, the recognition of the diversity of individual and collective subjects that join the group; the dialogical exchange with each other. Not without complexities, challenges, contradictions and paradoxes, Mexican youths are increasingly indignant, adding to the construction of utopian possibilities of living in this world.



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forming part of a student organization, pursues political or economic interests, supported by violence, serving as shock troops.

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