

A Ghost named Gramsci haunts Mexico

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Antonio Gramsci's "cultural battle" refers to his concept of cultural hegemony, which is a fundamental part of his Marxist theory. Gramsci, an Italian philosopher and political theorist, argued that power in societies is not only exercised through state institutions or economic force, but also through culture, education, and the media. According to this reference of Latin American leftism, cultural hegemony occurs when the ruling class imposes its own views, values, and beliefs on society, establishing them as the norm or common consensus. This causes their ideas to be widely accepted, even by the disadvantaged classes under this system¹. In summary, Gramsci's cultural battle addresses how the ruling classes maintain social control not only through economic and political means but also through cultural dominance, and how subordinate classes can challenge and transform this dominance to achieve social change.

In this context, the President of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), leader of the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA), adheres to the Gramscian logic of the "cultural battle." This is his political action base for his party to

1 Antonio Gramsci, *Pasado y presente* (Barcelona, España: Gedisa, 2018), <https://doi.org/eISBN: 978-84-17341-13-8>.

remain in power and to consolidate his Fourth Transformation in the long term.

This aim is materialized through three main pillars. The first of these is communication. Just as Hugo Chávez celebrated his television program *Aló Presidente* every Sunday, AMLO hosts a morning press conference called *Las Mañaneras* from Monday to Friday. During two hours each day, the president sets the public agenda, defines reality, and establishes the tone of the conversation. At the beginning of his government in 2018, all journalism had open doors. However, as months and years passed, as one might expect, the press conference turned into a space where pseudo-reporters serving his editorial line, rather than asking significant questions and challenging his government, present topics and variables of reality that end up becoming a preamble to the official stance. Thus, *Las Mañaneras*, like Chávez's *Aló Presidente*, is more of an educational space than an informative one.

The second pillar is education. In 2019, the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE) distributed 6,000 copies of educational textbooks to schools in the state of Michoacán. According to the Mexican media outlet, *El Universal*: "In the fifth-grade book, *Society*, the CNTE refers to neoliberalism, dedicates several chapters to the Sandinista revolutions in Nicaragua and Cuba, to Fidel Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara, as well as to the military dictatorships of the 1970s in Latin America. Two of the chapters related to the movement in Cuba are «Background» and «Armed Struggle» on pages 145 and 146: «On January 1st, Fidel Castro triumphantly entered Santiago de Cuba, declaring it the

provisional capital [...] The United States recognized the revolutionary government. From that moment on, power definitively remained in the hands of the revolutionary forces».”²

What happened in Michoacán set a precedent. Thus, the first semester of 2023 was marked by a legal battle over whether or not to allow the distribution of new textbooks by the Ministry of Public Education (SEP), which were certainly not the same ones distributed in 2019 by the CNTE. This was an experiment, and what happened last year was real and decisive. In most states, the distribution of the new educational material was a fact. Part of its content repeats and reinforces the presidential discourse. Just to cite one example, in the book “Ethics, Nature, and Societies” for first-year secondary school students, it says: “A fundamental cause of the origin of inequalities is the neoliberal socio-economic models implemented for decades in most regions of the world, which grant facilities, privileges, and incentives to the political and economic elites of the countries... and that public goods can have private owners who can appropriate them legally or illegally, in the case of Mexico, the minerals of the subsoil, water, forests, jungles, and wind”³. After reading, the one dictating seems to be a Karl Marx follower.

2 El Universal, “Fidel Castro, Marx y Comunismo en libros de la CNTE,” *El Universal* (Ciudad De México), August 2, 2019, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nación/política/fidel-castro-marx-y-comunismo-en-libros-de-la-cnte/>.

3 Raymundo Rivapalacios, “La Guerra Cultural de López Obrador,” *El Financiero* (Ciudad De México), August 7, 2023, <https://www.el>

The third pillar is the reform of the State. Specifically, there is a plan to modify or draft a new Constitution starting from the next legislative year. One of its main promoters is the leader of the *Partido de los Trabajadores* (PT), a friend of Nicolás Maduro and a staunch defender of López Obrador, Gerardo Fernández Noroña. It is no coincidence that this admirer of the Cuban Revolution is the official spokesperson for Claudia Sheinbaum's campaign. At the proclamation ceremony for the candidate chosen by AMLO, Fernández Noroña stated: "I am convinced that we should convene a constituent power, a people's assembly where we make a profound reform to the Constitution, or a new Constitution, and repeal all neoliberal reforms." Thus, it would not be surprising if this initiative becomes the centerpiece of the debate if MORENA remains in power.

With this triangle: communication, education, and state reform, there is no doubt that the ghost of Gramsci haunts the public sphere of the Mexican government.

Is there fertile ground for the Gramscian ghost to gain more strength in Mexico?

From Thinko Consulting, we've been conducting sociological studies to measure public opinion and, above all, to study the beliefs and culture of Mexicans. Focusing part of our analysis on the upcoming June 2nd electoral event in Aztec lands, we can conclude that 65% of Mexicans want a change in regime in their country. Specifically, this is a longing that

elfinanciero.com.mx/opinion/raymundo-riva-palacio/2023/08/07/la-guerra-cultural-de-lopez-obrador/

demands a profound transformation of the traditional political parties: *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN), *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), and *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD). This is one of the data points that explains the popularity of the President of the Republic.

It should be clarified: it is not true that the vast majority of Mexicans believe that AMLO is a hope for Mexico. However, he is the most visible face of change. There is no messianic sentiment towards his figure, but his image does continue to represent the new over the old. The sentiment of profound change expressed at the polls in 2018 remains prevalent in social mood.

At the same time, there's a great paradox. 60% of Mexicans support the President. However, 80% affirm that security, family economics, education, and health have either worsened or remained the same after AMLO's government. Why the socio-political paradox or contradiction? Because the tolerance range remains very high. In the qualitative studies we've conducted during these months, statements like "Five years are not enough" or "We cannot compare five years of management with 80 years of previous governments" are clear and indicate that AMLO still represents that change.

Another piece of data that leads us to conclude that the breeding ground for a new political model is a reality comes from the 2023 Latinobarometer. 56% of Mexicans stated, "I wouldn't mind if a non-democratic government came to power if it solves the problems." This number reflects the citizen phenomenon known as political disaffection. This phenomenon

is a consequence of anti-establishment sentiment and is something entrenched and palpable. Thus, there could be an attempt to pulverize institutions, erase the liberal democracy system, and transform the codes within the legal system, and in that dangerous space, civil society would have an obligation to react. The question is whether Mexicans know how precarious the future would become if the Fourth Transformation continues to deepen its perverse task.

What happens with the opposition?

Xóchitl Gálvez has been chosen by traditional political parties opposing MORENA to halt the course that began in 2018. As an entrepreneur and engineer, she is known for her work in the technology sector and her career in Mexican politics, particularly as a senator and General Director of the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples in 2000, under the presidency of Vicente Fox. In 2015, she ran as an independent candidate for the head of the delegation (mayor) in Miguel Hidalgo, Mexico City, winning the election and serving until 2018. From that year on, she was elected senator, standing out for her active participation in various committees and her focus on issues such as technology, transparency, accountability, and indigenous rights.

What does she propose? Her main proposals include the creation of a Ministry of Justice belonging to the Federal Executive Power, support for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to foster a middle-class economy, and responsible economic management to control inflation. She also emphasizes the acceleration of the transition to renewable

energies and the transformation of Pemex into Emex (Mexican Energies) to produce clean fuels and electricity, something that, by the way, the current national administration has been indifferent and frugal about.

Xóchitl Gálvez's campaign has plateaued in terms of voter intention. The most serious polls place her below Sheinbaum with a 12 or 13-point disadvantage. With 50 days left until the election, it doesn't represent an impossible distance to overcome, but it is a steep hill to climb. Initially, Gálvez must "carry" the enormous weight of the political parties. We say this because the rejection towards party structures is of such magnitude that every photo or image associating her with national party leadership and party brands represents a blow to her candidacy. The undecided voters, currently representing about 10%, hope to see Xóchitl as a figure completely separate from the parties. However, the challenge is enormous and difficult considering that precisely these parties organize and mobilize ground efforts, which is indispensable in a campaign.

Gálvez has decided to "citizenize" her campaign further by speaking more about herself and taking positions to empathize with the population's most delicate issues. These include insecurity and its various aspects (drug trafficking, fraud, robbery or assault, and extortion), the high cost of living, poverty, and the lack of conditions for an optimal public health system.

What should be done?

There are political principles that must be strengthened to raise awareness, stimulate citizen participation, and stop any pretense of a pseudo-revolution that could ultimately destroy a country. An initial principle is the creation of identity: if we don't know what we are, who we are, and what we represent, it will be impossible to persuade others that our identity is the right one. In this process of identity construction, it is essential to contrast with the anti-value. It is as important to define what we are as it is to define what we are not and what we oppose. We must define our “causes and/or flags”: in other words, it is about defining the “why and for what” of our identity, of what we represent.

Likewise, those of us who defend liberal democracy must be sowers and builders of what is good, beautiful, and true. Something that is beautiful and true will always be good. Something that is good and true will always be beautiful. And something that is beautiful and good will always be true. Faced with something like this, it is irresistible not to want to fight for it.

Additionally, we must cultivate knowledge: the greatest enemy of truth is ignorance. We should sow interest in cultural formation, the development of ideas, social values, and individual virtues. Without intending to give moralistic lessons, it is indispensable to establish common foundations to guide our actions towards a shared goal.

And two more things before we conclude: liberal democracy must recreate its own dictionary with creativity and new forms. This is fundamental to combat the “Gramscian alphabet,” which, in the face of educational voids, turns its proposal into something powerful and attractive. Lastly, family must be placed at the center of the debate. Why? Because it is the foundation of society and will always be the strongest bulwark to protect us from the anti-values that continue to pervade our Latin America, where Mexico is no exception.