Modernization or Betrayal: Neoliberalism in Mexico

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Abstract

This paper examines the effects of neoliberalism in Mexico undertaken during the administration of Carlos Salinas leading to the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994. The effects of neolibralist policy on common people as well as resistance to the administration's policies are examined in depth.

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) launched an insurrection on the very date in which the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect—January 1st, 1994. Clearly, it was a powerful act of protest and denouncement against the series of neoliberal economic policies, which culminated with the successful negotiation of NAFTA, undertaken by the administration of Carlos Salinas. However, the Neo-Zapatistas, who claimed to speak on behalf of other disempowered Mexican *pueblo*, denounced more than the neoliberal reforms themselves; they attacked the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* or PRI), which had been in power for more than six decades since 1929, for being traitors to the Mexican *pueblo*. Indeed, many Mexicans, especially those in the marginalized sectors of the economy, sympathized with the EZLN in this regard.

Neoliberalism, introduced mainly by NAFTA, challenged the values formed during the Mexican Revolution, which had become key elements of the Mexican nationalism. These values were enshrined in the Constitution of 1917 and when the Salinas government introduced neoliberal reforms, the Mexican *pueblo* regarded its actions as an effective betrayal and denial of the promises of the Mexican Revolution. Furthermore, this perception of "betrayal" undermined the political and social legitimacy of the PRI government, which had appropriated the images of the Revolution to legitimize its dictatorial rule. In order to make the case that the introduction of neoliberalism was a betrayal of the promises of the Constitution of 1917, I first lay out the historical context that led to the introduction of neoliberalism into Mexico and its discursive construction by the PRI regime. Then, I demonstrate how these neoliberal reforms were considered traitorous to the marginalized people and contrasted from the visions of the PRI government.

Carlos Salinas came to power at a politically and economically precarious time, which demanded change in one way or another. The Tlatelolco Massacre of 1968 marked the end of any remaining illusions of the "Mexican Miracle." The discontent of the Mexican people against the repressive PRI regime was brought above surface with the economic downturn of the early 1980s. Starting with the drastic fall of petroleum prices in 1981, the growth of the Mexican economy started to slow down. The administration of José López Portillo and his predecessors attempted to remedy the situation by taking great amounts of foreign loans. Portillo borrowed approximately $15 billion dollars and the Mexican national debt increased eightfold during his presidency; by 1986, the national debt totaled $100 billion.[1] Thus began "La Década Perdida" of the Mexican economy.

President Portillo nationalized the bank and devalued the peso in order to remedy the situation. However, his measures were not effective enough and instead the inflation rates rose to 500%.

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[1] Judith Adler Hellman, *Mexican Lives* (New York: The New Press, 1995) 4-8.

Portillo's predecessor, Miguel de la Madrid, who was inaugurated in 1982, started to implement neoliberal economic policies to resolve the economic crisis. His cuts on the adjustment programs significantly reduced social services, which added to the discontent of the people. Furthermore, the devastating earthquake of 1985 demonstrated the Mexican government's lack of capacity to deal effectively with national emergencies; during a nationally televised speech, president de la Madrid admitted that Mexico "[does not] have enough resources to confront the disaster quickly and efficiently."[2] Protests about inadequate state response ensued, which Juliana Preston and Samuel Dillon paralleled to the continuation of the Tlateloco protest in 1968.[3]

Politically, the declining popularity of the PRI government was reflected in the rise of a prominent opposition party, the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional* – PAN) in a PRI stronghold region, Chihuahua. The declining popularity of the PRI was also reflected in the presidential election. Carlos Salinas, even with the electoral fraud,[4] performed poorly in the election and became the PRI candidate with the "worst showing of an official party candidate since 1929," barely won 50% of the vote (de la Madrid, who held this record until Salinas, had won 72%),[5] demonstrating the vulnerability of the PRI wrought by poor economic performance.

Thus, Carlos Salinas came to power in times of crisis in 1988. Understanding that PRI's success was built on and perpetuated by economic prosperity during the Mexican Miracle, Salinas made economic recovery his priority.[6] Furthermore, Salinas had the ambition of *modernizing* Mexico through the implementation of neoliberal policies. Salinas was educated at Harvard University, where he obtained two master's degrees and a doctorate in political economy. He was stunned by "progressive thinking about global economics and the lagging development of the Third World" when he first came across neoliberal economic theory and immediately drawn to it.[7] Hence, Salinas believed that he would both stabilize and modernize the country through the neoliberal transformation of Mexico.

The emphasis on the association between economic prosperity, modernity, and neoliberalism is apparent in Salinas' inaugural speech. From the onset, Salinas emphasized that "*nuestros problemas no vienen por el fracaso de nuestros esfuerzos, sirio por el tamaño de la adversidad*,"[8] suggesting the existence of a difficulty beyond national level. Salinas then stated that "*[l]a modernización de México es indispensable*," and also "*inevitable*," as it is the only way of affirming "*nuestra soberanía en un mundo en profunda transformación*."[9] Salinas then employed the word "*modernización*" various times throughout his eight-thousand-word speech. Salinas thus demonstrated his belief that the adoption of neoliberalism was not only beneficial for Mexico, but also imperative for survival in a fast-changing world.

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[2] Samuel Dillon and Julia Preston, *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 101.

[3] Ibid., 95-115.

[4] The election of Carlos Salinas is remembered with the phrase "*se cayó el sistema*," which refers to the suspicious computer crash that suspended the vote count. In 2005, Salinas' precedent, de la Madrid, revealed that indeed Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, had won the election then, thereby acknowledging the electoral fraud.

[5] Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman and Susan M. Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 669.

[6] Dillon and Preston, *Opening Mexico*, 183.

[7] Ibid., 184-5.

[8] Carlos Salinas de Gortari, "Toma de posesión," *Discursos: la historia a través de los discursos de sus líderes*, December 1, 1988, http://beersandpolitics.com/discursos/carlos-salinas-de-gortari/toma-de-posesion/681 (accessed October 8, 2011).

[9] Ibid.

Carlos Salinas' series of neoliberal economic policies culminated with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Canada. Salinas was at first disinterested in forming a bilateral agreement with the United States.[10] After all, the PRI had staunchly closed up the Mexican economy to the world for the last sixty years and gained popularity from its nationalist and defensive economic policies (especially against the United States), most notably the nationalization of the petroleum industry in late 1930s by president Lázaro Cárdenas. However, due to the "lukewarm" response from the world leaders during his European tour, which included a stop at the World Economic Forum in February of 1989, Salinas realized that the only way of drawing investors to Mexico was to "provide [them] with both cheap labor *and* privileged access to the U.S. market."[11] Salinas immediately approached the American government officials with the intention of negotiating a bilateral free trade agreement, shortly thereafter the administration shifted policies for the preparation and successful negotiation of NAFTA.

Carlos Salinas thus marketed NAFTA with fervor in and outside of Mexico and hastened the pace of the neoliberal reforms. Salinas wrote that he made efforts to "disseminate more information and confirm the active presence of key economic, labor, and business leaders in working groups" during the period of NAFTA negotiation.[12] His administration privatized public corporations and implemented land reforms. Furthermore, Carlos Salinas marketed his neoliberal policies as means of modernizing the Mexican politics as well, thus associating neoliberalism with democracy. In November 1990, Salinas said both political and economic problems, which he described as "clouds," were "dissipating."[13] Some even referred to Salinas' reforms as "Salinastroika," paralleling these to the radical introduction of socio-political transparency and freedom in the former Soviet Union.[14] The Salinas administration thus provided hope that these neoliberal economic policies would continue as political reforms as well.

Seemingly, Carlos Salinas' reforms were successful; his policies did draw foreign investments, Mexico relieved itself of a significant amount of debt and its economy grew by 4.4% in 1993.[15] Salinas administration earned the reputation as a "political juggernaut" for its political competency.[16] The elections for federal senators and state governors held in 1991 reflected the surging popularity of the Salinas administration; the PRI candidates won 61 percent of the congressional votes, giving Salinas "the power to make laws without having to seek any support from the opposition."[17] Most importantly, Carlos Salinas' leadership earned the respect and confidence of foreign investors. According to Dillon and Preston, President Clinton praised Salinas for giving Mexico "better leadership than ever in [Clinton's] lifetime" and *The Wall Street Journal* "looked favorably on [his] reforms."[18] Salinas was thus deemed a progressive and modern leader by the "first world," and many believed that Mexico was truly *modernizing*.

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[10] Dillon and Preston, *Opening Mexico*, 195.
[11] Ibid., 196.
[12] Carlos Salinas de Gortari, *Mexico: The Policy and Politics of Modernization* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés Editores, S. A. , 2002), 105.
[13] Los Angeles Times, "Perestroika, Si , Glasnost, No? : Mexico's Salinas has a lot of persuading to do," *Los Angeles Times*, November 3, 1990.
[14] Dillon and Preston, *Opening Mexico*, 186.
[15] Ibid., 226.
[16] Mark Eric Williams, "Learning the Limits of Power: Privatization and State-Labor Interactions in Mexico," *Latin American Politics and Society* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 92.
[17] Dillon and Preston, *Opening Mexico*, 204-205.
[18] Ibid., 227.

Many ordinary Mexicans shared this feeling of buoyancy and progress brought by NAFTA—the primary form of neoliberalism that they came across. Mexicans had long identified the United States with "modernity,"[19] and although historically described as an "imperialist bully," it was a country to be admired.[20] According to Dillon and Preston, the successful negotiation of NAFTA gave Mexicans the impression that they were entering an *equal* relationship with the "First World countries" like the United States or Canada, and thus rendered an elevated sense of patriotism.[21] Martín Calderón, an entrepreneur, echoed the ebullient sentiment of many Mexicans when he said that NAFTA would render "fantastic opportunities to Mexico."[22] The economic prosperity benefited many Mexicans in the upper and middle classes. Those in the middle class then started to use credit cards to purchase "first world" luxury items, which added to the sense of modernization. Hence, neoliberalism, mainly manifested in form of NAFTA to ordinary Mexicans, was in a way perceived as the very signal of Mexico's modernization and advancement into the "first world." Many Mexicans, who believed in PRI government's promises about modernization, were hopeful for political changes as well. Nonetheless, not everyone shared this sense of advancement or modernization; in fact, neoliberalism symbolized the effective betrayal of the Mexican pueblo by PRI for those in the marginalized sectors of the society.

Although some Mexicans, like Martín Calderón, received the neoliberal reforms of the Salinas administration positively, many others, especially those in the marginalized sectors of the Mexican society, saw these as the betrayal of the *pueblo* by PRI. Contrary to their name and self-constructed image of a "Revolutionary Party," PRI had been betraying the populist promises embodied by the Mexican Revolution and the Constitution of 1917. PRI regime had become a brutal oppressor, which had led Mario Vargas Llosa to refer to Mexico as "the perfect dictatorship."[23] The brutal acts of oppression by PRI, the crackdown of the student protesters in the Tlatelolco Massacre of 1968 being just one of the many examples, had been shadowed by decades of brilliant economic performance between 1940s and 1970s.

The neoliberal policies of the Salinas administration had various aspects that conflicted with the core elements of the Mexican nationalism, which had been greatly influenced by the memories and symbols of the Mexican Revolution. First, as Frederick C. Turner notes, xenophobia, especially against the United States, formed a fundamental base of the Mexican nationalism.[24] The war of 1847 and loss of territories are deeply ingrained in the Mexican public discourse. However, the main element of the modern Mexican nationalism is the memories of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. As Lynn Stephen claims, the images of Emiliano Zapata, the leader of the original Zapatista movement, were "[served] as a symbol for the institutionalization and nationalization of the Mexican Revolution, primarily under the tutelage of […] PRI."[25] Henry C. Schmidt notes that the Revolution came to be perceived as the "protean mythos of nationhood."[26] The Constitution of 1917, which was born out of the Revolution, fulfilled—at least in words—the *pueblo*'s demand for land reform

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[19] Jorge G. Castañeda, "Can NAFTA change Mexico?," *Foreign Affairs*, September-October 1993: 72.

[20] Dillon and Preston, *Opening Mexico*, 225-226.

[21] Ibid, 204.

[22] Hellman, *Mexican Lives*,146.

[23] Ioan Grillo, "Suddenly, Mexico's Old Ruling Party Rears a Youthful Face," *TIME* , July 5, 2011.

[24] Frederick C. Turner, *The Dynamics of Mexican Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 35-44.

[25] Lynn Stephen, *Zapata Lives!: histories and cultural politics in southern Mexico* (Ewing: University of California Press, 2002), xxxiii.

[26] Henry C. Schmidt, *The Roots of Lo Mexicano: self and society in Mexican thought, 1900-1934* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1978), 64.

(*ejidos*) and empowered the labor sector through the articles 27 and 123, respectively.[27] All of these historical memories were embedded in the discourse of national identity, more so as PRI had appropriated and perpetuated these to legitimize its rule. All in all, the Mexican Revolution played a fundamental role in shaping the modern national identity of Mexico.

Therefore, the neoliberal policies of the Salinas administration that challenged the achievements of the Mexican Revolution and opened up to the United States, the ancient enemy and "imperialist bully," symbolized PRI's turning away from the promises of the Mexican Revolution and even the Mexican *pueblo* itself. Alejandra, one of the interviewees of Judith Hellman, echoes the sentiment of betrayal incurred by neoliberalism when she says that the "real history of Mexico has become an embarrassment to the regime."[28] The following cases of unions, *maquila* workers, and land reforms, which demonstrate the contradiction of the promises of the Constitution of 1917, support my claim that the neoliberal policies undertaken by the PRI regime symbolize the clear betrayal on the Mexican *pueblo*.

Carlos Salinas trampled the workers' rights, one of the key victories of the Mexican Revolution enshrined in the Constitution of 1917, as part of his neoliberal economic agenda. The article 123 of the Constitution of 1917, among many other things, guarantees the right of the workers, whether employed by public or private enterprises, to organize and strike; it states that "[t]*oda persona tiene derecho al trabajo digno y socialmente útil; al efecto, se promoverán la creación de empleos y la organización social de trabajo, conforme a la ley*."[29] Salinas' brutal crackdown on union workers, which completely contradicted the article 123, symbolized the continuation of the PRI government's betrayal and oppression. For Salinas, the crackdown of the unions was a necessary step before the implementation of his neoliberal policies. In the context of free trade with Canada and the United States, the "competitive advantage" of Mexico consisted of "cheap labor" and "a minimum of state intervention in the economy," and thus the labor had to be subdued before anything else.[30] According to Mark Eric Williams, most of the scholars agree that the "weak labor opposition," diluted in the CTM, was one of the key characteristics of the Mexican industry that allowed Salinas to implement his privatization policies.[31] However, the labor leaders who wielded significant influence in Mexican society, such as Joaquín Hernández or Agapito Gónzalez definitely posed a threat to Salinas' agenda and hence it was necessary for him to overcome this opposition beforehand. Instead of negotiation, which would have been preferred in *modernized* countries and more in line with the Constitution of 1917, Salinas chose a rather *caudillo* and PRI method of resolving conflicts: brutal crackdown.

The arrest and sentencing of Joaquin "La Quina' Hernandez demonstrates the undemocratic and classical PRI method of dealing with dissidents which completely disregards the article 123 of the constitution. Carlos Salinas launched a war against the unions with the controversial arrest of "La Quina" in January of 1989. Galicia was the de-facto leader of the union of Petróleos Mexicanos

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[27] Laurence French and Magdaleno Manzanárez, *NAFTA & neocolonialism: comparative criminal, human & social justice* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004), 24.

[28] Hellman, *Mexican Lives*, 50.

[29] Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, "Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos," *Cámara de Diputados*, October 13, 2011, http://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/1.pdf (accessed December 16, 2011), 93.

[30] Ibid., 55.

[31] Mark Eric Williams, "Learning the Limits of Power: Privatization and State-Labor Interactions in Mexico," *Latin American Politics and Society* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 91-93.

(PEMEX) that represented the interests of more than 200,000 workers.[32] Hernández staunchly opposed the privatization of the petroleum industry and this belief was echoed when he said that "the oil should always be in the hands of the Mex-i-cans."[33] Hence, he was an enemy who had to be overcome by Salinas in order to privatize one of the greatest industries of Mexico. Eventually, Hernández was arrested on January 10th, 1989 on charges of corruption and possession of firearms.[34] Expectedly, Hernández's arrest sparked a series of strikes across the nation, which were quickly subdued by the federal government. Hernández "acquiesced" to the charges laid against him when the chief commander of the Federal Judicial Police threatened to harm his family, and was sentenced to thirty-five years in prison.[35] PEMEX was then gradually privatized—eventually having its petrochemical plants out for sale (open to both domestic and foreign buyers) in early 1993.[36] Subsequently, Salinas went after the dockworkers' union in Veracruz and another prominent labor leader Agapito González Cavazo, a day before his union was scheduled to protest against the *maquiladora* plants owned by the American investors.[37] The foreign media regarded Salinas as a competent leader who maintained the stability of the country—and commented that Mexico was being well prepared for the neoliberal market economy.[38] However, the brutal crackdown of the union leaders and their strikes demonstrate Carlos Salinas' disregard for the promises of the PRI government embedded in Article 123 of the Constitution of 1917.

The privatization of public corporations not only prepared the markets for foreign investment—but also strengthened the PRI government's grip on the power. After the crushing of the key labor leaders, the Salinas administration started to privatize various key corporations with free rein. Interestingly, many close associates of the PRI government, most notably Carlos Slim Herú, benefited the greatly from the series of privatization efforts.[39] Furthermore, Jorge Castañeda, who was then a professor of political science at UNAM, asserted that the series of privatizations and the upcoming implementation of NAFTA undertaken without political transparency, and predicted that they would eventually strengthen PRI's hold on power.[40] Hence, he interpreted the neoliberal reforms implemented by the Salinas administration as the means of strengthening its unjust grip on the power, and, therefore, as the perpetuation and confirmation of the betrayal of the promises of the Mexican Revolution and the Constitution of 1917. However, the challenge to the sacred Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917 was a far clearer symbol of the PRI government's betrayal.

The land "reform" of the Salinas administration was among the most controversial. As mentioned previously, Carlos Salinas, as part of the neoliberal policies that would prepare Mexican market for the implementation of NAFTA, amended the Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917. For many Mexicans, this article symbolized the victory of, and the promises of the PRI to stand by the Mexican Revolution; the statements of this article eventually became "central to the assertion of

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[32] Dillon and Preston, *Opening Mexico*, 190-191.

[33] Ibid., 193.

[34] The charges laid against Hernández were somewhat legitimate, but Dillon and Preston suggest that Carlos Salinas was primarily motivated by political goals and partly by personal grudges against him. Dillon and Preston, *Opening Mexico*, 192-194.

[35] Ibid., 195-196.

[36] Judith Teichman, *Privatization and Political Change in Mexico* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 133-138.

[37] Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman and Susan M. Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 671.

[38] Ibid., 671.

[39] Carlos Slim's wealth increased drastically after the acquisition of TELMEX, which took place as a result of the series of privatization efforts during the early years of the Salinas administration. Dillon and Preston, *Opening Mexico*, 220.

[40] Castañeda, "Can NAFTA change Mexico?" 68-70.

Mexican nationalism and the right of the Mexican state to control the activities of foreign capital."[41] The Article 27 basically delivered the long-demanded land reform to the *campesinos*—which guaranteed a "more equitable distribution of public wealth" and protection from the abuses of the church and foreigners.[42] Granted, the land reform guaranteed by the Constitution of 1917 was not entirely successful and in fact statistics suggest that the lands were not being used efficiently—mostly due to the lack of the capital to work on them.[43] Still, the Article 27 provided a sense of history and pride for the *campesinos* who associated themselves with the Zapatista rebels of the early twentieth century and legitimacy to the party that claimed to be *the* heir of the Mexican Revolution. These, however, would soon be gone with Salinas' land "reform."

In February 1992, Carlos Salinas took an even bolder step with his neoliberal economic policy and amended Article 27 to effectively privatize the lands. Under the amendments, Mexicans were deprived of the constitutional guarantee of receiving land from the government; the government lost the authority to expropriate and distribute lands; and the farmers were allowed to purchase, sell, or rent out their properties on the market.[44] Wesley Smith, writing for a conservative policy periodical, praised the implementation of this land reform as a policy that would effectively improve "Mexico's antiquated agricultural sector" and prepare the local economy for the implementation of NAFTA.[45] The Salinas administration defended this policy on the grounds that this would dramatically improve the productivity of the countryside, which did not fare well in comparison to the industrial sector, and also to attract foreign investments.[46] Rosaria Angela Pisa argues that the new land reforms were used by the PRI regime to gain a tighter control of the countryside, especially before the 1994 General Elections, which paralleled the idea of the democratic façade that it had been perpetuating throughout the twentieth century.[47] In all fairness, the productivity eventually increased in these lands and the former *ejido* reform was not doing enough for Mexican farmers—but many felt uneasy about this transition. Benito, a farmer, echoed this general feeling when he angrily said that his neighbor "shouldn't be selling his land, even if it is now the law."[48]

The trope of neoliberalism as the ultimate betrayal becomes clearer with the rhetoric of imperialism. Many Mexicans and foreign observers displayed concerns about the possible unbalance of economic benefits between the United States and Mexico. The NAFTA negotiation was in a way described as selling out of Mexico to the foreigners. Ramón, a farmer from Mexquitic, associated the PRI presidents with "Spaniards," drawing "a multivocal symbol of capitalism, greed, and foreignness," the characteristics that symbolized the United States.[49] As such, the neoliberal policies were then associated with the Salinas government and the American imperialists.

The invitation of foreign investment and the amendment of the Article 27, which allowed Mexican peasants to sell out their lands to foreigners, suggested the imagery of the American invasion—and as the betrayal of *lo Mexicano*. Zapata was the image of nationalism (as well as the Revolution,

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[41] Hellman, *Mexican Lives*, 53.
[42] Ibid., 53.
[43] Wesley R. Smith, "Salinas Prepares Mexican Agriculture for Free Trade," *The Backgrounder*, October 1, 1992: 2-6.
[44] Ibid., 8.
[45] Ibid., 1.
[46] Dillon and Preston, *Opening Mexico*, 220-221.
[47] Rosaria Angela Pisa, "Popular Response to the Reform of Article 27: State Intervention and Community Resistance in Oaxaca," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World EconomicDevelopment,* 23, no. 2/3 (Summer/Fall 1994): 267-306.
[48] David Frye, "Speaking Of The Ejido: Three Modes Of Discourse About The Salinas Reforms," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 23, no. 2/3 (Summer/Fall 1994): 315.
[49] Ibid., 322.

which the PRI government had appropriated), which sharply contrasted from the "selling out" attitude of the Salinas government. Benito, who I have quoted above, also made the association between the "*gringo*,"[50] and those "outside the community"[51] when he talked about his thoughts on the *ejido* reform. This imagery of imperialism was further reflected in the reaction of the *Maquiladora* workers.

During the period of the NAFTA negotiation, concerns about possible labor and environmental abuses by foreign corporations were articulated often amongst the Mexican public. These concerns were not unfounded, as the people living in the northern region of Mexico (the *maquiladora* area) where a few American firms had entered were suffering from brutal working conditions and environmental damages caused by the latter. In an article written as early as in 1991, Joseph Grunwald points out that the *maquiladoras* (the term used to refer the American factories in the border region of Mexico) had been accused of "sweatshop exploitation, pollution, and health hazards."[52] The Mexican *maquila* workers in the Lower Valley area worked for flimsy wages ("forty-five minutes for a quart of milk or a pound of chicken […] over a hundred hours for a double mattress"[53]), suffered the environmental hazard ("[…] miscarriage, birth defects, disease, and cancer rates are high."[54]), and often became subject to forced evacuations.[55] Sheldon Friedman echoes the concerns of many Mexicans and Americans on NAFTA as well. In his 1992 article, Friedman describes NAFTA (which was being negotiated then) as an "economic integration based on international division of labor in which Mexico supplies cheap labor and lax enforcement of health, safety, and environmental standards,"[56] ultimately suggesting that it was not a fair agreement. The transcripts from the film, *Maquilapolis*, reflect the helplessness of the Mexican *maquila* workers under the abuses of the American business. Axayacatl, one of the interviewees in the film, compared the *maquilas* to "'haciendas,' plantations from a century ago," thereby invoking the discourse of imperialism that equates the "Spaniard" with the "Gringo."[57] Thus, the "selling out" of Mexico to the *imperialists* symbolized yet another sign of PRI's betrayal of the Revolution and the Mexican *pueblo*.

The discourse that perceived neoliberalism as betrayal of Mexico was unleashed most explicitly by the EZLN. Even the date of their uprising symbolized a strike on the neoliberal policies of the Salinas administration. The Zapatista rebels undertook their uprising and declared war against the Mexican government on January 1, 1994—the very day in which NAFTA came to effect. The Zapatista communiqués written by now-famous character "Subcomandante Marcos," clearly reflects the understanding of the neoliberal policies under Carlos Salinas as the betrayal and opening of the gate for American imperialists. They made the association between the Salinas administration with imperialism in their first official communiqué, *Declaración de la Selva Lacandona* by referring to themselves as "*producto de 500 años de luchas […] contra la esclavitud […] expansionismo*

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[50] Ibid., 314.
[51] Ibid., 315.
[52] Joseph Grunwald, "Opportunity Missed: Mexico and Maquiladoras," *Brookings Review* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1990/91): 46.
[53] William Langewiesche, "The Maquiladoras," in *The Mexico Reader*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson, 698-707 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 699.
[54] Ibid., 700.
[55] "When nearby residents objected, Mexican authorities ordered the permanent evacuation of neighborhoods within two kilometers (1.25 miles) of the stacks: ten thousand people were affected." Ibid., 700.
[56] Sheldon Friedman, "NAFTA as Social Dumping," *Challenge* 35, no. 5 (September/October 1992): 27.
[57] *Mexican History: A Primary Source Reader*, ed. Nora E. Jaffary, Edward W. Osowski and Susie S. Porter (Boulder: Westview Press, 2010), 441.

norteamericano […] imperio Francés […] dictadura porfirista."[58] Using the image of Spanish colonization and battles against oppression explicitly associates the imperialism with the Salinas administration and its neoliberal economic policies—and ultimately portrays it as the abandonment of the principles of the Mexican Revolution and the betrayal of the Mexican *pueblo*.

In December 1994, the Mexican economy suffered another economic crisis, along with the Zapatista uprising. The resentment towards the PRI government started to surface again and the Mexican government fell victim to the "global forces" that Salinas had mentioned in his speech. The Salinas administration attempted to advertise NAFTA and other neoliberal policies as a step towards modernization—towards the "first world," which clearly manifests the so-called third-world complex that has existed throughout the modern Mexican history.[59] However, for many Mexicans and historians, the implementation of neoliberal policies signified the confirmation of the PRI government's betrayal of the promises entrusted in the Constitution of 1917 and the perpetuation of their façade of democracy. On the other hand, many also demonstrated concerns about American imperialism penetrating into the Mexican territory once again, but this time in a completely different form. The EZLN explicitly articulated the public discourse of the marginalized people in regards to the neoliberal policies of the Salinas administration through the rhetoric of betrayal and imperialism. In 2000, PRI lost its grip on power for the first time in seventy-one years, losing the presidential election to the Alliance for Change (*Alianza por el Cambio*) led by Vicente Fox. I venture to say that the witnessing of the acts of betrayal led Mexicans into pushing PRI out of its throne—from the "perfect dictatorship."

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[58] Comandancia General del EZLN, "Declaración de la Selva Lacandona," *Palabra Zapatista*, 1993, http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/1994/1993.htm (accessed 10 27, 2011).

[59] Eric Zolov, "Showcasing the 'Land of Tomorrow': Mexico and the 1968 Olympics," *The Americas* 61, no. 2 (2004): 164.

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