

This book is about power in a place beyond dichotomies of democracy or dictatorship, namely modern Mexico. The authors come from distinct disciplines and different historiographical traditions, have diverse research interests, and were brought together without any single theoretical *diktat*. It was in part the very breadth of interests and approaches that suggested their incorporation, in a deliberate search for academic biodiversity. We encouraged disagreement. This approach to collaborative work has been dubbed a dog's breakfast.<sup>1</sup> We hoped instead for a cat's cradle: a skein of threads that, when drawn tight, might reveal a pattern.

Initially the only evident common factor was a shared curiosity in the no man's land of historicizing power in the mid-century, those three decades between 1938 and 1968 when dominant party rule coalesced and peaked. A preference for controlled eclecticism over theoretical monoculture did not, however, mean the absence of a framework.<sup>2</sup> We sought contributors whose work fell into one of three broad categories: high and low politics; work and resource regulation; and culture and ideology. These thematic choices presupposed an organizing concept: that the relations between rulers and ruled were characterized by authoritarianism, competitive politics, and resistance, making Mexico an early variant of a *dictablanda*, a hybrid regime that combines democratic and authoritarian elements; and that such hybrid regimes are profoundly complex, dynamic, and ambiguous, demanding heterodox approaches.<sup>3</sup> They reflected a debt to those scholars who have made empirical cases for the ability of everyday subjects to resist the projects of the powerful, shaping their lives in constant haggling with authority; for the state as a *masque*; and for the causal significance of popular culture in determining dynamic political outcomes.<sup>4</sup> They also reflected the proposition that this was not the whole story.<sup>5</sup>

We posited that cultural and materialist explanations were not so much dichotomous as complementary<sup>6</sup> and that struggles for power encompassed additional phenomena. Some were previously hidden. Cumulative case studies and once-unobtainable sources, notably declassified intelligence, revealed the underestimated violence deployed by both rulers and ruled; the related salience of popular political inputs; the enduringly central role of petty authoritarianism, also known as *caciquismo*; and the way that local autonomies and a fragmented public sphere—“many Mexicos”—might strengthen rather than weaken central power. Other phenomena were more obvious and as such might be undervalued by the seductive episteme of the hidden. They should not be: laws, institutions, and budgets were more than façades under which deeper causal mechanisms lurked. Moreover, the importance of an economic model that overtly privileged towns at the expense of countryside was unmistakable. Finally—and critically—we were struck by the ubiquitous phenomenon of actors who shifted fluently along a spectrum of resistance to, tolerance of, and alliance with the state.

The resulting framework identifies three arenas of power: the political, the material, and the cultural.<sup>7</sup> It conceptualizes power as the ability to do things, to get other people to do things, and/or to stop other people from doing things. This draws on two resistance-centric definitions: that of Max Weber, who deemed power an actor’s capacity “to carry out his will despite resistance,” and George Tsebelis’s idea of veto players, those “individual or collective actors whose agreement (by majority rule for collective actors) is required for a change of the status quo.”<sup>8</sup> In between the extreme outcomes of imposition or veto lies negotiation, in itself both a process and an outcome: a statement of a balance, albeit skewed, of power.

Negotiation was central to rule in Mexico, but that does not imply the pre-eminence of a consent-based cultural hegemony because negotiation in hybrid regimes involves violence past, violence present, and the fear of violence in the future. This is incompatible with one type of Gramscian hegemony, which opposes hegemony to “authority” and “dictatorship,” quarantines it from violence, and stresses instead its consensual core.<sup>9</sup> It is compatible with Gramsci’s alternative idea of hegemony as the balance (or “dual perspective” or “dialectical unity”) of “force and consent,” which, when effective, establishes a “compromise equilibrium” between rulers and ruled.<sup>10</sup> Yet advancing this is (as Michael Taussig observed regarding social construction) “nothing more than an invitation, a preamble to investigation,” rather than a conclusion.<sup>11</sup> As Kate Crehan suggests, “rather than being a precisely bounded theoretical concept, hegemony for Gramsci simply names the problem—that of how the power relations underpinning various forms of inequality are produced and reproduced—that he is interested in exploring. What in any given

context constitutes hegemony can only be discovered through careful empirical analysis.”<sup>12</sup> The question is not whether Mexican elites achieved stability, however rudimentary, on a national level through a balance of force and consent; they did. The questions, rather, are where that balance fell, how it was struck, and how it swayed from time to time and from place to place.

We discuss these questions in specific terms in the introduction. In general terms, gauging answers to those questions involves all three arenas of power: the political, the material, and the cultural. There is no single independent variable that provides a comprehensive explanation for the processes of state formation and its outcome. The three are, rather, tightly interwoven. For example, the political function of any state’s management of economic resources is coalition-building, but in Mexico, at all levels, those resources were leveraged by a cultural phenomenon: the pervasive revolutionary rhetoric that gave the excluded some hope of joining such coalitions in the future. Revolutionary nationalism did provide something of a common language for both hegemonies and counter-hegemonies, but that language was underpinned by violence. Everyday people were coerced into nationalist ceremonies by the threats of fines or jailing; archaeological artifacts were appropriated by platoons of soldiers despite village protests; journalists and Catholic militants, or *agraristas* and teachers, could face beatings or assassination.<sup>13</sup> Bribery—lunches for marches—was also salient. Moreover, rulers and ruled were polyglot, and in addition to the common language of revolutionary nationalism (which some refused to speak) there were other common languages that were tactically adopted as political mores shifted, such as the rhetorics of democracy and development. To see economic processes at work shaping culture, cultural forces shaping economies, and politics—both formal and informal—at the intersection of the two; to posit that causal primacy varies from case to case, when it can be pinned down at all; and to note a high prevalence of equifinality—different processes leading to similar outcomes—is not a “live-and-let-live” conceptual mush. It is a reasonable reflection of the case studies we have.

Mexican historiography is highly dependent on case studies for the obvious epistemological reasons of a large and diverse territory and population. This should not shut the door on systematic comparison both across and beyond Latin America.<sup>14</sup> Deviant case studies, exploring the exceptions that test the rule, can revise broad generalizations, as regional histories of revolution demonstrated.<sup>15</sup> Most likely (those where a theory should if anywhere work), least likely (those that should lie beyond the limits of a theory), and crucial case studies can test, extend, and even suggest theories. These may be less grand and more middle-range: universal but comparatively narrow proposals of social processes founded on the concrete, the specific, and the

time-sensitive.<sup>16</sup> Yet such generalizations are particularly apt for Mexico in the mid-century, with its neither-fish-nor-fowl relationships of power. As Fernando Coronil observed, “fragmentation, ambiguity, and disjunctions are features of complex systems”<sup>17</sup>; in Mexico and other hybrid regimes the fragmentation and the ambiguity are not just down to complexity but also form part of the ruling class’s strategies of domination: divide, confuse, and rule. The limitations of methodology are, in other words, perhaps less limiting in Mexico than elsewhere. At the same time history’s strengths—broad and deep empiricism, the explanatory richness that creates, and a sophisticated appreciation of the diverse rhythms and causal effects of time—might allow historians of Mexico to advance more universal discussions.<sup>18</sup>

It is difficult (but not impossible) to generalize about the frequency of the processes of domination and resistance that studies in this field are starting to trace. But in identifying and tracing the multiplicity of those processes, combining case studies, qualitative overviews, and basic cliometrics, we might come up with a coherent model of mid-century Mexico. That model is neither of a system based on consensual cultural hegemony nor one of Althusser’s Repressive State Apparatuses, such as bureaucratic authoritarianism.<sup>19</sup> The essays in this book argue that force was real, strategically applied, and successfully masked. It also was exercised by both rulers and ruled. It went hand in hand with a certain degree of consent: one produced by economic growth and a coalition-building distribution of resources, by political accommodation, and by culture. The outcome was not stasis but rather something like a chemist’s dynamic equilibrium, in which reactions move in opposite directions at broadly similar speeds.

This can be described by the term *dictablanda*: the combination of *dictadura* (dictatorship) with the switch of *dura* (hard) for *blanda* (soft). This has, as Jeffrey Rubin argues, a powerful, untranslatable resonance. It also enjoys a record of some usage inside Mexico, bypassing the more misleading labels of the democracy with adjectives, the perfect dictatorship, or even the *PRI*ísta state. *Dictablanda*, in both popular and general terms, is good to think for mid-century Mexico.<sup>20</sup> In comparative terms, however, Guillermo O’Donnell and Philip Schmitter’s definition, which denotes liberalizing authoritarian regimes, without elections, in transition,<sup>21</sup> suggests the need for translation, for a parallel, more precise, and broadly understood category. Translating the *dictablanda* seems particularly relevant given that Mexico shared some aspects of old Latin American authoritarian states while foreshadowing the post–Cold War genus of hybrid regimes, species of which encompass between a quarter and a third of all contemporary states.<sup>22</sup> In our period Mexico was in many ways a competitive authoritarian regime, a type of civilian regime “in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed

as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents. Such regimes are competitive in that opposition parties use democratic institutions to contest seriously for power, but they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favour of incumbents. Competition is thus real but unfair."<sup>23</sup> Some of the characteristics behind the Mexican regime's resilience—the institutionalized circulation of national elites within a single party, a powerful national story, and a deliberately fragmented public sphere, the negotiated nature of rule, the hidden violence, the local electoral contests—might interest political scientists who apply this historically contingent theory to places like contemporary Malaysia, Russia, or Tanzania, extending its ambit beyond the electoral and the elite toward a model of power that is simultaneously comprehensive and disaggregated, one that gives full play to the local and the informal and the cultural: soft authoritarianism.<sup>24</sup>

#### Notes

1. Barrington Moore, cited in James Scott, Foreword, in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), vii.

2. For controlled eclecticism, see Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution* (2 vols.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. I, 84. See also Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 3–10; Terence J. McDonald, "Introduction," in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, ed. Terence J. McDonald, 1–17 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

3. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Larry Diamond, "Elections without Democracy: Thinking about Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 2002): 21–35.

4. The classics are Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930–1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997); Jeffrey W. Rubin, *Decentering the Regime: Ethnicity, Radicalism, and Democracy in Juchitán, Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); and Joseph and Nugent, *Everyday Forms of State Formation*.

5. Emilia Viotti da Costa, "New Publics, New Politics, New Histories: From Economic Reductionism to Cultural Reductionism—in Search of Dialectics," in *Reclaiming the Political in Latin American History: Essays from the North*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, 17–31 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

6. While, as David Nugent points out, "It is a curious fact that neither of the two approaches to the state that currently inform academic debate—the organizational nor the representational—has had much to say to each other," scholars have long indicated the potential of such dialogues. David Nugent, "Conclusion: Reflections on State Theory Through the Lens of the Mexican Military," in *Forced Marches: Soldiers and*

Military Caciques in Modern Mexico, ed. Ben Fallaw and Terry Rugeley (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012), 240; William Roseberry, "Marxism and Culture," in *Anthropologies and Histories: Essays in Culture, History, and Political Economy*, 30–54 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991); William B. Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Richard Biernacki, "Method and Metaphor after the New Cultural History," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, 62–94 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); John Tutino, *Making a New World: Founding Capitalism in the Bajío and Spanish North America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 47–48.

7. This identification of loci of power complements Wil Panster's more process-based model of state formation, which identifies zones of hegemony, zones of coercion, and gray zones in between. Wil G. Pansters, "Introduction," in *Violence, Coercion and State-Making in Twentieth-Century Mexico: The Other Half of the Centaur*, ed. Wil G. Pansters, 3–39 (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

8. Weber as cited in Alan Knight, "The Weight of the State in Modern Mexico," in *Studies in the Formation of the Nation-State in Latin America*, ed. James Dunkerley, 212–53, 215 (London: ILAS, 2002); George Tsebelis, "Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Mutipartyism," *British Journal of Political Science* 25 (July 1995): 289–325, 289.

9. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996), 124, 170, 239. See, for example, Claudio Lomnitz's definition of hegemony as "an institutionalized structure of interactional frames, localist ideologies, and intimate cultures which allow for consensus around a particular regime." Claudio Lomnitz, *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 40.

10. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 124, 161.

11. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (London: Routledge, 1993), xvi.

12. An analysis that fully recognizes Gramsci's "intense concern with the materiality of power"; a concern that, Crehan argues, has been largely lost in anthropologists' usage. Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 104, 172–76.

13. Sandra Rozental, "Mobilizing the Monolith: Patrimonio and the Production of Mexico through Its Fragments" (PhD dissertation, New York University, New York, 2012); Carlos Moncada, *Del México violento: periodistas asesinados* (Mexico City: Edomex, 1991); Pablo Serrano Alvarez, *La batalla del espíritu: el movimiento sinarquista en El Bajío, 1932–1951* (2 vols.) (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1992), vol. II, 80; Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax Priísta, 1940–1962* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

14. For Latin Americanists' (largely missed) potential to shape theory in the social sciences, see the introduction to Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando López-Alves, eds., *The Other Mirror: Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America*, 3–23, 14 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

15. Important works include Luis González y González, *Pueblo en vilo* (Mexico City: SEP, 1984); Heather Fowler-Salamini, *Agrarian radicalism in Veracruz, 1920–38* (Lincoln:

University of Nebraska Press, 1978); Romana Falcón, *Revolución y caciquismo: San Luis Potosí, 1910–1938* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1984); Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman, eds., *Provinces of the Revolution: Essays on Regional Mexican History, 1910–1929* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990); Barry Carr, “Recent Regional Studies of the Mexican Revolution,” *Latin American Research Review* 15, no. 1 (1980): 3–14, 7.

16. Harry Eckstein, “Case Studies and Theory in Political Science,” in *Handbook of Political Science. Political Science: Scope and Theory*, ed. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, vol. 01.7, 94, 137 (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975). For a skeptical consideration of Mexico and grand theory, see Alan Knight, “The Modern Mexican State: Theory and Practice,” in Centeno and López-Alves, *The Other Mirror*, 177–218.

17. Fernando Coronil, “Foreword,” in *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. LeGrand, Ricardo D. Salvatore, vii–xi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

18. Patrick Joyce, “What Is the Social in Social History?” *Past and Present* 206, no. 1 (2010): 213–48, 216.

19. Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, ed. Louis Althusser, 145 (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

20. The term was coined to describe Spanish politics under General Berenguer during the 1930s and subsequently applied to the last years of the Franco regime. By the 1950s it had been adopted by Mexican intellectuals to describe first the Porfirian and later the PRIísta state. It lay at the heart of the stormy exchange between Octavio Paz, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Enrique Krauze of 1990s televised “Encuentro Vuelta,” in which Vargas Llosa dubbed modern Mexico the “perfect dictatorship,” Paz reacted furiously, and Krauze suggested the compromise of *dictablanda*. (Paz abruptly cancelled the ensuing round table; Vargas Llosa left the country adducing “family reasons.”) William D. Phillips, Carla Rahn Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 246; Daniel Cosío Villegas quoted in Enrique Krauze, *Místico de la autoridad: Porfirio Díaz* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987), 34; Xavier Rodríguez Ledesma, *El pensamiento político de Octavio Paz: Las trampas de la ideología* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés, 1996), 414–18.

21. Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 8–14.

22. Andreas Schedler, “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism,” in *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, ed. Andreas Schedler, 1–14, 3 (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006), 3; Diamond, “Elections Without Democracy,” 27.

23. Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5.

24. There are several extant types of what might be called authoritarianism with adjectives. While cautious to introduce one more, we think it is useful in this instance to think as splitters rather than lumpers: hegemonic party autocracies, for example, are generally thought of as noncompetitive, whereas competitive authoritarianism does not capture the distinct origins and multiple strategies of domination that characterize mid-century Mexico. Neither does Tocqueville’s concept of “soft despotism,”

with its subtle capture of “free agency” in the bureaucratic “networks of small, complicated rules” elaborated by an “immense and tutelary power,” which ends up securing “servitude of the regular, quiet, and gentle kind”; and neither does Joseph Nye’s formulation of “soft power” as “getting others to want the outcomes that you want.” Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeves, vol. II, 392–93 (Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1863); Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 5–6.