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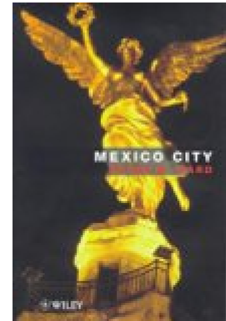
Peter Ward. *Mexico City.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998. 332 pp. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-471-97529-8.



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Looking back to when the first edition of Peter Ward's *Mexico City* appeared in 1990, Mexico, to borrow from a popular phrase, "was another country." At that time, many continued to feel highly suspicious about the 1988 presidential election, believing that the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) had rigged the contest in order to perpetuate their monopoly on power. Economically, the country had just begun to pull itself out of a dark hole dug by many difficult years of double-digit inflation and deep recession. On top of all this, most in the nation's capital at that time wondered how residents of the "world's largest city" would continue to cope. For doomsayers eager to speculate about the city's future, Ward praised the "resourcefulness of the Mexican people" and "cautioned about the accuracy of any crystal ball gazing." (p. 233, First edition).

While many things have changed since 1990, much has remained the same. On the bright side, Mexico has witnessed the rise of a new era of political competition and more transparent electioneering –particularly at the local and state levels. Additionally, new Federalist policies advocated by the Zedillo administration (allocating greater power and responsibilities to the states) in combination with efforts to grant greater autonomy to the National Congress and Supreme Court may be said to have helped to encourage political reform. More recently, the July 1997 victory by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas as the first-ever elected mayor of the Federal District also represents another positive political change as Mexicans look to the new century.

Nevertheless, conditions for many Mexicans are not improving. Real wages, despite the appearance of growing prosperity during the early 1990s, have declined. The Chiapas rebellion, assorted political assassinations, the 1994 peso devaluation, and U.S. bailout combined with a sharp rise in violent crime throughout the country all serve as painful reminders that "Mexico," as Ward first put it in 1990, "is a mischievous genie that can be both playful and dangerous."

Generally, the argument in *Mexico City* is that social inequality is reproduced through urban policy, planning (or lack thereof), people and politics. Eschewing generic notions regarding "world cities" and "dependent urbanization," Ward's agenda is to focus on ways in which various levels of economic, social, and political structure have built Mexico City. As he puts it, "globalization does not mean convergence to a common form, any more than dependency did ... [i]t is the engagement of global processes upon national and regional structures that will shape both the nature of local processes and their outcomes ..." (p. 4).

As before, the new edition is divided into eight chapters. Chapter One (fashionably renamed "The Paradox of Dominance yet Dependence: The Local in the National in the Global") details the political economy of Mexico City in the larger national context over the past century. Updated from 1990, the chapter includes an assessment of the Salinas administration with its optimistic embrace of neoliberal privatizations and free trade policies as well as sky-rocketing interest rates, indebtedness, bankruptcies, and crime which have come subsequently in recent years.

Sorting through the economic wreckage of the Salinas *sexenio*, Ward makes apt use of new studies which describe the ways in which Mexico City residents have had to adapt to changing economic conditions by sacri-

ficing health care, food and shelter in order to get by. Additionally, Ward notes how some–particularly women–have increasingly gone to work in maquila-type industries around the city. Outside the factory, participation in various so-called informal enterprises is also seen to be on the rise.

Chapter Two incorporates new historical studies of the capital to describe both the physical expansion and patterns of spatial segregation. Generally, Ward observes that as the city grew during the second half of the nineteenth century, the wealthy moved out of the city center to suburbs towards the west and south (in neighborhoods along the *Paseo de la Reforma* for example) while poorer groups took to the east and north. Subsequently, property owners converted buildings vacated by elites in the city core for commercial purposes and/or rental housing (tenements or *vecindades*). After this relatively early phase of urban expansion around the turn of the century, a new wave of settlement took place in all directions beginning in the 1940s. In the process, the city grew nearly seven times its size between 1940 and 1970. Since then, development has expanded in all directions (covering an area of more than 500 square miles) and stretching well outside the Federal District into outlying areas in the State of Mexico.

In the new edition, Ward enters the debate regarding current rates of Mexico City growth. He offers an "informed guess" as to population totals for 2010: 22 million as compared to 20 million as predicted by state demographers (CONAPO). "Whatever and whoever is proved correct," he writes, "these are nevertheless dramatic reductions on previous forecasts, and Mexico should be congratulated for having achieved a demographic transition in a single generation" (p. 54).

In another section, Ward discusses Mexico City housing and settlement patterns. Ward describes different types of popular housing ranging from older tenements (*vecindades*) in the city center to newer shack-yard accommodations (*ciudades perdidas*) situated on plots accessible near the city center to new housing (*vecindades nuevas*) often self-built on various forms of "irregular settlements" (invaded lands, illegal subdivision of *ejido* land, etc.) on the city periphery.

Tracing the origins of people living in these different kinds of settlements, Ward argues that many coming to the city in recent years have tended to avoid the inner-city in favor of "bridgehead" residences located in the city periphery (p. 66-71). He also argues that the process of suburbanization has "reproduced" social segregation throughout the Mexico City Metropolitan Area. Following the findings of Rubalcava and Schteingart (1987), Ward observes, however, that since 1970 there has been a decline in the spatial polarization between rich and poor as the position of middle-classes has improved "despite the fact that extreme disparities remain" between different socio-economic groups (p. 77). Given that Rubalcava and Schteingart's research came well before the 1994/95 crisis, however, one wonders if this is a trend still worth noting.

The final section in Chapter Two is entirely new for the second edition. In responding to critics who claimed that he paid too little attention to social movements in the first edition of the book, Ward briefly acknowledges what he sees as the periodic influence of urban grassroots organizing (Plan Tepito in the 1970s, mobilizations after the 1985 earthquake and, more recently, the formation of the Barrio Assembly). Nevertheless, he wonders why "even in the economic climate of 1995-96 there [were] no large-scale upswellings of urban protest and revengeful and radical activity such as that ... surrounding the Tompkins Square Park closure in New York in 1991 (p. 80)." Instead, Ward observes that "crime has increased dramatically in Mexico City, but it is not attached to the lightning rod of reactionary urban redevelopment projects in the historic core of the city–or in any part of the city for that matter" (p. 80). While Ward briefly mentions local "resistance" to government crackdowns on street vendors and refers to the "dynamic popular culture" of Mexico City neighborhoods (p. 84), he unfortunately does not examine these subjects in any depth. Instead, he relies on secondary sources to offer a short demographic and economic profile of the inner city area. >From this, it is clear that Ward still believes that the long-term political influence of urban social movements–if and when they arise–is negligible.

If, for Ward, urban social movements have not played a big role in shaping the politics of Mexico City, neither have recent new forms of citizen "consultation" as discussed in Chapter Three. Despite the creation of Federal District Citizen Participation Law (passed in 1995) along with earlier Consultive Councils and *Juntas de Vecinos*, for example, Ward argues that little progress is being made towards achieving "democracy" because politics continue to be more about social control than working to achieve more equitable forms of social organization and planning (p. 129-130). Despite trends toward decentralization and increased party competition, Ward suggests that many of the same problems remain when considering the practice of politics in the capital.

The city will continue to survive, Ward writes, "but not thrive" until ways are found to realize "empowerment through democracy and full representation" for all citizens. Maybe the administration of Cuauhtemoc Cardenas will help to promote the kind of social change Ward envisions. Maybe not.

Chapters Four, Five and Six assess Mexico City's history of urban transportation, planning and housing in order to further Ward's main argument that social inequality "has been reproduced" mainly because local political elites would rather maintain the status quo than enact any significant progressive urban reforms which might make local governance more responsive to the needs of Mexico City residents. While Ward notes that there are signs of improvement, "the problem has been that of largesse from above that has consistently disempowered any serious movement towards social change" (p. 220).

Indeed, popular political mobilization has historically been neutralized either through the use of repression, cooptation and/or largesse. But what sorts of political or cultural changes–albeit less tangible–have taken shape in the process? While often discouraged or defeated in the end, what, in other words, has been the larger social and cultural influence of urban popular movements over the years? These questions, while important, are difficult to measure when using the fairly strict economic and formal political indicators Ward prefers. In order to better understand Mexico's inner city, we need to know more about the "dynamic popular culture" and "the people" occasionally mentioned but never fully discussed in the book. Perhaps this task is better suited for more specialized case studies.

To be fair, Ward acknowledges past criticisms when he writes that others "view citizen and social movements more positively, arguing that they represent important means toward greater empowerment and may result in positive outcomes for disadvantaged groups, particularly when there is a convergence of factors such as need, existing social infrastructure, support from better-off supra-local social groups, and an opening in the local political space" (p. 220). As Ward leaves it, however, the question of whether citizen and residential-based groups can be effective in making claims on local governments is believed to be somewhat doubtful.

Shifting gears after a long, often detailed discussion of urban services, infrastructure, policy history, and politics, the latter half of Chapter Seven offers a welcome tour of Mexico City's architectural styles and monuments as a way to interpret ideological messages embodied in the capital's "built environment." According to Ward, "[h]istory is reflected in the ground plan, collective memory, physical structure, design and monuments of a city ..." (p. 231). At the same time, Ward adds that "it is not just the physical environment that is an outcome of historical processes; the population imbibe that local history and create a new history of the city through their own actions or praxis" (p. 232).

But while Ward briefly considers the meaning of popular architecture in the context of "the reproduction of social inequality," his treatment here focuses largely on elites and not on probing the many meanings of "collective memory" or popular agency. He writes, "Mexico City's architecture is a very important medium whereby the reigning philosophy and ideology of development are read and made legible to the general public...this reading of buildings [however] is not mindless, nor is it directed by the state authorities" (p. 277). According to Ward, it is another group, the architects, who largely control this mode of communication. While one can certainly agree when he says that "architects ... bring their own indigenously inspired signatures to [local] buildings and spaces" (p. 277), what of the reception of these messages? How, in other words, do ordinary people regard political monuments, international style, and the post-modern buildings which dot the Mexico City landscape? This question is largely left for others to examine.

In the end, Peter Ward has significantly improved and updated what was already a good book. As a comprehensive history of Mexico City's twentieth century development, his work is impressive both in scope and depth. Engaging a number of ongoing debates regarding public policy and politics in general, Ward manages to keep things interesting just when technical details threaten to overwhelm the reader. Whether one completely agrees with the author or not, there is no doubt that he has devoted considerable time to his own research while also respectfully considering the work of others. Indeed, Ward's even-handedness in handling such a complex and unwieldy subject such as Mexico City, reveals the work of an intelligent and mature scholar.

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