De-Westernizing Media Studies

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Media, political power, and democratization in Mexico

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The Mexican political system has to be counted as one of the most effective systems of power of the twentieth century. With the fall of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mexico's Partido Revolutionario Institutional (PRI) became the longest-ruling party in the world. Organized in 1929, it held an effective monopoly on political power until the late 1980s, and in 1999 still held the lion's share, including the powerful presidency. In recent years, however, a significant move toward a pluralist political system has taken place: opposition parties began winning state governorships and important mayoral elections in the late 1980s, and in 1997 the PRI lost its majority in the Chamber of Deputies. The PRI itself is increasingly subject to internal conflicts and is moving toward internal democracy. In the year 2000 it will for the first time select a presidential candidate through some sort of primary election, rather than by the designation of the outgoing president.

Mexico's media system is in many ways equally unique. Like the rest of Latin America, and like most of Latin Europe, the newspaper industry is poorly developed, at least in terms of mass readership. The television industry is another matter. Mexico introduced television in 1950, the sixth country in the world to do so. By the 1970s, its dominant television company, Televisa, had emerged as one of the most important transnational media conglomerates, exporting its signature *"telenovelas"* first to the rest of Latin America and then around the world. It also controls the most important Spanish-language television network in the United States. Within Mexico, Televisa's dominance was not unlike that of the PRI; with three and eventually four networks, it claimed the attention of 90 percent of Mexico's vast television audience. It is probably correct to say that there is no country comparable in size to Mexico in which a single private company so dominates the airwaves.

During the many years of PRI hegemony, the media were, for the most part, fully integrated into the structure of power. Today, with that structure in crisis, the media system has entered a period of significant and probably irreversible change. This chapter will explore the relationship between the Mexican media and the state and their role in the current process of democratization. It will, in particular, consider the adequacy of two dominant perspectives in media theory—liberalism, and the critical political economy perspective—to the understanding of the media, political power, and democratization in Mexico.

This focus requires setting aside several other issues, which are worth underlining before we move on. I will focus, for one thing, on the political realm in the narrow sense of the term. The media of course play a role in systems of power at many other levels. Mexican *telenovelas,* for example, clearly play a role in the reproduction and evolution of the traditional patriarchal system of gender relations, as well as in the development of racial ideology. These and other elements of social power may be affected in some ways by the current process of political democratization, but they also clearly have their own logic.

I will also be setting aside issues related to media imperialism, dependency, and nationalism. Mexico's development has of course been deeply affected by the influence both of its powerful neighbor to the north and of the global economy more generally. It accepted the North American model of a commercial media system, and its media have always been to a large extent vehicles for advertising of North American products; Mexican newspapers were selectively subsidized by the US government during the Second World War, and the Mexican film industry—like that in most countries—has been largely marginalized by competition from Hollywood. At the same time, the Mexican media have been far from appendages of North American media industries (Sinclair 1986, 1990). The Mexican radio industry, to take one example, played a decisive role in the development of distinctively Mexican forms of popular music (Hayes 1993, 1996). Most Mexican scholarship (e.g. Fernández 1982) points to the influence of outside forces, but places the emphasis on power relations within Mexico.

"The perfect dictatorship"

The political history of Latin America is generally characterized by an alternation between dictatorship and democracy. Mexico, on the other hand, has had an essentially stable system since the revolution (1910–17) was "institutionalized," a process which was complete by about 1929. That system stood somewhere between democracy and dictatorship. As Néstor García Canclini (1988) suggests, Mexican political elites were probably alone in Latin America in achieving hegemony in the Gramscian sense. The system was widely accepted as legitimate, and virtually all sectors of society were in some way integrated and given a stake in its persistence. There was no need for the kind of widespread repression practiced by the dictatorships that ruled many other Latin American countries through the 1970s.

Yet the "one-party dominant" regime the PRI created was far from being a real democracy (Cornelius 1996). Subordinate groups had little independent voice, and when softer means of control failed to keep political opposition within bounds, electoral fraud and coercion always stood in reserve. It was, as Peruvian novelist and politician Mario Vargas Llosa put it, "the perfect dictatorship," monopolizing power with great effectiveness but without open authoritarianism.

At the heart of this system is a set of corporatist organizations which tie various segments—workers, farmers, small businessmen, residents of urban neighborhoods—to the ruling party. These organizations deliver benefits to specific sectors of society, channel the political demands of those groups through the ruling party, and mobilize their support in elections in times of political conflict. They involve "clientelist" relationships (Fox 1994, Roniger 1990) in which material benefits and opportunities for participation and mobility are provided by elites in return for political loyalty and subordination.

The PRI is diverse ideologically, and has managed to incorporate a wide range of political tendencies under its umbrella. Often Mexican political history is recounted in terms of a series of shifts of political direction, usually coinciding with the transition from one president to the next, by which the PRI has maintained the loyalty of its various political currents. This political maneuverability in part explains how the PRI has succeeded in identifying itself with the populist and nationalist symbols of the Mexican revolution, even as it has drawn close to big business, both national and international.

The Mexican media as "ideological state apparatus"

The mass media have been an important part of this system of political power. Journalism is traditionally *oficialista*—passive and self-censored, with most political coverage based on official press releases, and with many areas of controversy being off limits. Ilya Adler (1993b), in a study of ten Mexico City dailies in

1984 found 123 stories favorable to the unnamed ministry in which he conducted his study, and 14 unfavorable. The sample also contained 211 stories favorable to the president of the Republic, and not one unfavorable: the Mexican president, elected for a single six-year term, exercizes vast power and has been treated as beyond public criticism. Adler argues, moreover, that when critical stories did appear, most could be explained either by conflicts among factions of the ruling party, or by a process of negotiation between newspapers and the political patrons they served. The press in Mexico has very limited circulation and, as in other regions without a mass circulation press—Southern Europe, for example—serves primarily as a means of communication among political elites and activists. The difference between Mexico and, say, Italy, is of course that in Mexico these elites have all belonged to the single, dominant party.

As far as the mass public is concerned, television is overwhelmingly the most important medium of political communication. Polls typically show about 50–75 percent of the Mexican public listing television as their principal source of political information, while 10–15 percent list newspapers, a similar percent radio, and the rest either multiple sources or none (e.g. de la Peña and Toledo 1992a, 1992b). And television is the least open of Mexico's media (Fernández 1982, González Molina 1987, 1990, Miller and Darling 1997, Trejo 1985, 1988). Televisa's news division, which until recently was the only significant producer of television news, has served essentially as an organ of publicity for the state and the PRI—as an "ideological state apparatus," to borrow the old Althusserian phrase.

The political character of Televisa's news has been particularly obvious during election campaigns. In 1988, for example, the ruling party faced its toughest electoral challenge in decades. Cuautémoc Cárdenas Solorzano, son of Mexico's most popular president, Lázaro Cárdenas, broke away from the ruling party, along with a faction known as the Democratic Current, and joined with various small leftist parties to run for president. The PRI was sufficiently worried about the challenge that it resorted to substantial electoral fraud to ensure victory. Televisa that year devoted more than 80 percent of its election coverage to the ruling party, 2 percent to Cárdenas's FDN, and 3 percent to the other principal opposition party, the conservative PAN (Adler 1993a, Arredondo, Fregoso and Trejo 1991).

In the next presidential election, in 1994, for reasons we will explore presently, Televisa gave substantially more coverage to the opposition. Still, its stories on the ruling party's campaign were full of color and enthusiasm, while those on the opposition were at best colorless (Aguayo and Acosta 1997, Hallin 1997, Trejo 1994a, 1994b). In part this was because the ruling party had far more money and organizational know-how to produce campaign events. But Televisa's manipulation of information clearly contributed. One example is particularly obvious. Shortly before the election the Cárdenas campaign held a vast rally at the National Autonomous University in Mexico City, which served to kick off the final phase of its campaign. Televisa's report was edited to show nothing but tight shots of Cárdenas at the microphone, with the hundreds of thousands of cheering supporters entirely invisible to the television audience.

Beyond elections, and beyond the question of access to television on the part of opposition parties, the authoritarian political culture of Mexico has been deeply embedded in Televisa's conventions of news presentation (Hallin 1997). Officials, and particularly the president, are treated with extreme deference, with reporters summarizing their words and the anchor praising their wisdom in frequent unlabelled commentaries. Negative news—about unemployment, corruption, disasters—was kept to a minimum. Ordinary citizens, meanwhile, traditionally appeared in the news in subservient roles, most of the time to receive clientelist benefits from political patrons. One of the most common visual images in Televisa's news was of the appreciative poor waiting to receive benefits from the president.

Media theory and the case of Mexico: liberalism

How well do the standard theoretical approaches in media studies apply to Mexico? Let's begin with the liberal, or what might be called for the Latin American case the IAPA perspective. The Inter-American Press Association, a Miami-based organization of publishers and editors from around the Americas, has played a particularly important role in promoting the liberal ideal of press freedom in the continent. The IAPA is committed to a privately owned commercial mass media, and sees the problems of Latin American journalism as rooted in state intervention. For many years, most North American scholarship on Latin American media reflected this point of view. Alisky (1981), for example, divided the countries in the region into three categories based on the degree and type of government control of the media: nations with censorship, those with media freedom, and, in between, nations with media guidance. For Alisky, Mexico belonged to the "media guidance" category.

There is obviously a good deal of truth in this point of view. Mexico, like other parts of Latin America, is characterized by a strong, relatively autonomous state and a much more weakly developed private sector and civil society. Indeed, the autonomy of the state is particularly strong in Mexico in many ways; because of the legacy of the Mexican revolution, for example, there is less direct participation by business in the ruling party than in many Latin American countries (Camp 1989). The media are deferential to the state, and in many ways are highly dependent on it. The newspaper industry, in particular, is integrated into the clientelist system much as other sectors of society are, receiving benefits from the state in return for political loyalty.

In 1990 Mexico city had twenty-five newspapers. One study estimated their combined circulation at 731, 000 (Riva Palacio 1997; Lawson 1999 gives a lower estimate). How can so many newspapers survive with so few readers? To a large extent, they survive by selling advertising to government agencies and government-owned enterprises, including *gacetillas,* paid articles which look like news content and go for higher rates than ordinary advertising. PIPSA, the state-owned newsprint supplier (now privatized), provided Mexican newspapers with newsprint at bargain rates and had a monopoly on the import of that key commodity. Individual journalists, mean while, have typically been poorly paid, but able to supplement their incomes through payments from politicians and bureaucrats whose activities they cover—and whose protégés they become.

The state has also at times owned stock in newspaper companies and been involved in arranging financing for newspaper sales. And it has many means of pressure at its disposal when newspapers get out of line. In the 1970s, for example, when the important Mexico City newspaper *Excélsior* began moving toward a more independent, socially critical form of journalism and angered President Echeverría, the latter engineered a takeover of the cooperative which owned the paper, using organizations of urban slum-dwellers, who occupied land owned by *Excélsior,* and client labor organizations which packed a meeting of the cooperative's board. Violence has also been used against troublesome journalists, though more by local political bosses than by the central government.

Yet the liberal perspective is hardly adequate by itself to capture the complexity of media power in Mexico. One key weakness of the liberal perspective is that it fails to consider media owners as part of a system of power. As in the rest of Latin America, Mexico's media are overwhelmingly commercial and privately owned. One Mexico City newspaper, *El Nacional,* was government owned (it has since been closed) and the government has run various broadcast properties over the years. But the state sector has always been a small part of Mexico's media.

Even for the relatively dependent newspaper industry, it is probably too simple to treat the state as the only important actor. Mexican newspapers are typically owned by wealthy individuals, many with political connections, and reflect the views of those individuals (Camp 1989). In Mexican media scholarship, the

most common approach to studying the media and political power is what might be called instrumentalist political economy, which involves "clarifying *who are* the groups and individuals who have established and developed the press, as well as their ties with other groups, especially in business or politics" (Fregoso Peralta and Sánchez Ruiz 1993:23 [emphasis in original]; Fernández 1982, Valero, n.d.). From this point of view, the officialist character of the Mexican press results not simply from government pressure, but from collusion between economic and political elites based on social ties and shared interests.

The limitations of the liberal perspective become particularly obvious when we turn from newspapers to television—by far the most important medium. The state does, of course, have means of pressure that it could use against Televisa, and Televisa certainly has an incentive to maintain good relations with the state. Broadcasting is a regulated industry. In principle the state could revoke Televisa's broadcast licenses, or encourage the development of competitors, or enforce regulations on advertising or other media content that would hurt Televisa's business. But Televisa is hardly in the position of a newspaper with 10,000 readers and a dozen competitors. It is a highly successful business which dominates its principal market. Emilio Azcárraga, Jr. who owned the company until his death in 1997, was one of the handful of world-class Mexican capitalists who stand outside the clientelist organizations of the PRI, and can deal with the government as independent actors. Mejía Barquera (1989:14) says of broadcasting, generally:

> The owners of radio and television have accumulated considerable political strength which permits them to maintain…an attitude which varies from unrestricted support for government actions which accord with their business interests to censure and denunciation of actions which affect their business or class interests… the government maintains a cautious attitude…not only because within the hegemonic faction of the government there exists a clear identification with business interests, but also because this sector of the political bureaucracy prefers to govern with the support of private radio and television and not come into conflict with the business group which controls them.

For a while, during the relatively leftist Echeverría administration of the 1970s, there was widespread discussion in Mexico about whether commercial television served the needs of a developing country, and calls for a stronger role by the state in enforcing public service obligations on broadcasters. Little came of this, however. On many occasions Mexico's media policy seems driven by Televisa's needs; this, for example, is how Mexican scholars have interpreted the launching of the Morelos satellite in the 1980s (Esteinou 1988, Fernández 1982). In general, the state has played a more passive role in broadcast regulation in Mexico than in the United States, Europe or Asia.

Azcárraga, to be sure, was a loyalist of the PRI, something he declared openly on a number of occasions —though, as Mejía Barquera suggests, he also broke with the leadership of the PRI over certain issues, including the nationalization of the banks in the 1980s, and the civil war in Central America in the same decade, on which Televisa took an anti-communist position that conflicted with Mexican policy. Two other families which were among the principal investors, the O'Farrill and Alemán families, also had close ties to the PRI. In the 1940s it was President Miguel Alemán who rejected the recommendation of an advisory commission that television be set up according to a public service model, approved the introduction of commercial television, and when he left office invested in one of the networks that eventually became part of Televisa. But Televisa's relationship to the Mexican state is not comprehensible in terms of state censorship or "guidance." It reflects interpenetration of political and economic elites and convergence of interests between them. And it reflects a very great concentration of relatively independent power in private hands.

Another limitation of the liberal perspective is that it dismisses the possibility that the state might play a positive role in the democratization of the media. As we have seen, Televisa's election coverage became substantially more open between the 1988 and 1994 elections, moving from a 25 to 1 ratio between coverage of the PRI and coverage of the main opposition parties to a 1.5 to 1 ratio. The story of that change is rooted in the aftermath of the 1988 election. The vote count was interrupted by a mysterious "crash" of the electoral computer system. The opposition charged fraud, and the phrase used to announce the "crash" of the computer system, *"el sistema se cayó,"* came to symbolize the collapse of the legitimacy of the political system itself.

Concerned to avoid further dangerous erosion of that legitimacy in subsequent elections, the government opened discussions with opposition parties on electoral reform. One of the most important issues was access to the media. Free time for party broadcasts, provided by commercial broadcasters to the state and distributed among political parties by the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE), was expanded (Trejo 1997). The government also pressed the broadcasting industry to accept guidelines for news coverage of the campaign. The IFE, which had itself been reorganized to reduce government control and to operate more like an independent public agency, was given the task of monitoring compliance, and produces detailed content analyses of broadcast coverage of each elec tion (Instituto Federal Electoral 1997). As we shall see, other factors also pushed Televisa in the direction of greater political openness. But state pressure played an early and important role. Azcárraga was aligned with the hard-line faction of the PRI which resisted democratization: the commercial broadcaster, far from leading the charge to pluralism, had to be dragged kicking and screaming by the state.[1] Here, Mexico provides a good illustration of Schudson's (1994) argument that the state and the democratic public sphere are by no means entirely separate or antagonistic.

Critical political economy

The critical political economy perspective emerged in the 1970s as a critique of thendominant liberal media theory. Liberalism saw the development of market-based mass media industries as conducive to democracy: the development of media markets, according to the liberal view, freed the media from dependence on the state and on political parties, allowing them to play an independent role as a "watchdog" of the government and forum for debate. The critical political economy perspective tends to portray the market and political democracy as essentially antagonistic. The development of media markets, from this perspective, concentrates control of the media in the hands of business (both media owners and advertisers), limiting the range of points of view represented. It also, in some variants of the argument, tends to drive political content out of the media, replacing it with entertainment-oriented content that makes money for media corporations but does not contribute to the development of political democracy (Curran and Seaton 1997, Curran, Douglas and Whannel 1980, Hallin 1994).

In many ways, the critical political economy perspective applies well to the Mexican case. We have already seen that Mexican researchers tend to employ a variant of this perspective, which sees the media as instruments of private owners with political ties. In the case of television, the critical political economy perspective might be said to apply even more fully to Mexico than to the developed capitalist societies to which it originally referred, since many forces which moderate the effects of private ownership and of market logic are absent, including limits on media concentration, a tradition of public service broadcasting, regulatory agencies answering to a pluralistic political system, and journalistic professionalism (Televisa's journalists are very strictly servants of the company, without a conflicting sense of loyalty to the profession or the public [González Molina 1987, 1990]). Televisa's entertainment programming follows a strictly

commercial logic, while its news broadcasts serve as a mouthpiece for the company's political views, as well as a promotional vehicle for its other corporate interests.

In other ways, however, the critical political economy perspective, as it has been developed primarily in Britain and in the US, fails to account for the complexity of the Mexican case. Certainly, for one thing, the economic dependence of the newspaper industry on the state is an important difference. In order to understand the process of democratization, moreover, a more nuanced view of the relation between market and political democracy is required.

Here it will be useful to step back and take an overview of the shift in the Mexican media toward greater openness and pluralism. The beginning of that shift can be dated to the late 1960s, when certain Mexican media, particularly the then very prestigious newspaper *Excélsior,* began to move toward a bolder, more sophisticated form of journalism, with greater focus on social problems. Why this shift began is something little explored in media research. Mexicans often say that society—presumably meaning the urban middle class, which reads newspapers—became more sophisticated and demanding. The change may be related to economic growth, which was robust in the 1960s, and to increases in education. At any rate, the change in journalism accelerated following the student rebellion and its brutal repression in the streets of Mexico City in 1968. (It was also in this period that Televisa organized its Directorate of News, breaking with an old practice of having sponsors produce news programs, and giving the corporation a political voice of its own.)

In 1976, as we have learned, the government engineered the ousting of *Excélsior's* editor, Julio Scherer García, who was joined in exile from the paper by many more of its journalists. The same year Scherer and other members of the old *Excélsior* staff founded the weekly magazine *Proceso,* which became the first of a series of new publications which would establish an independent media sector alongside the traditional officialist one. In 1982, the government cut *Proceso* off from government advertising, but the magazine managed to stay afloat with commercial advertising. Former *Excélsior* journalists also formed the newspapers *unomásuno* and *La Jornada,* and the latter became the principal paper of the Mexican left.[2] *El Financiero* was founded in 1981, incorporating some former *Excélsior* staff members, and also became part of the growing independent press.

Finally, in the 1990s, two additional independent newspapers were formed, *Siglo 21,* later replaced by *Público,* in Guadalajara, and *Reforma,* in Mexico City. *Reforma* was established by Alejandro Junco de la Vega, publisher of the Monterrey newspaper *El Norte* (Alves 1997). Published since 1972, El Norte was modelledon North American newspapers, and had always been far more independent of the PRI than Mexico City newspapers. (Monterrey is known for a business sector that is more independent of the state than the business sector of Mexico city, and more oriented toward the US. With a few exceptions, it should be noted, regional newspapers have been *more* deferential toward ruling elites than the Mexico City press.) *Reforma's* journalists, like *El Norte's* are better educated than most Mexican journalists—meaning that they can approach government officials on a more equal basis, and better paid. They are forbidden to accept gratuities from government officials.

Since 1993, the independent papers have generally been more successful at competing for readers than the traditional officialist press, and certain of the latter have begun to move in the direction of greater independence (Lawson 1999). Their shift may also have been motivated in part by the realization that government support could not be counted on in the future. The last two Mexican presidents, Salinas and Zedillo, have pursued neo-liberal economic policies which have involved shrinking the state sector. PIPSA has been privatized, as have many state enterprises which once supported newspapers with their advertising; and the public relations budgets of government agencies—an important source of payments to newspapers—are being cut.

In the case of radio, the devastating Mexico City earthquake of 1985 played an important role. In general, the earthquake accelerated the process of political change in Mexico. The government was unable to respond adequately to the magnitude of the disaster, and citizen groups organized to coordinate relief and rebuilding from the bottom up. Many of these groups continued to function after the disaster, expanding the civic sector of Mexican society. The growth of a stronger civil society, as we shall see, has affected the development of independent media in many ways. For example, the Mexican Academy of Human Rights, an NGO, has carried out its own monitoring of media coverage of elections, and has played an important role in putting the issue of media access on the agenda (Aguayo and Acosta 1997).

In the aftermath of the earthquake, Televisa followed its usual habits, covering the disaster through comments of government officials. But a number of radio stations responded with more popularly oriented coverage, giving a voice to ordinary citizens and the neighborhood groups they had formed. This produced a jump in radio listenership, and in subsequent years radio talk shows, often much more open politically than anything that had existed in the electronic media previously, became highly popular. With popularity came success as an advertising medium, and radio news in general, which had little presence at the beginning of the 1980s, experienced a boom (Lawson 1999, Sarmiento 1997).

Televisa, as we have seen, faced political pressures which became acute by the 1994 election. It also faced market pressure beginning in 1993. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari had made the privatization of government-owned enterprises a centerpiece of his neo-liberal policies. Among the last to be privatized was Imevisión, a government television network, which became Televisa's first commercial competition since it had absorbed a rival network in 1972. The buyer was Ricardo Benjamín Salinas Pliego (not a family relation of Salinas, though it is widely believed that the president's family had a covert financial stake in the new enterprise), and the new enterprise was named Television Azteca. Salinas Pliego had no experience in media, and apparently was chosen in part because he was seen as having little interest in political activism. Asked by *Proceso* what role the new network would play in the democratization of Mexico, he said it would play none at all: "television is a medium of entertainment and relaxation" (Ortega Pizarro 1993:6).

Nevertheless, the political role of Mexican television following the launching of Television Azteca did change rapidly. In 1996, for example, Televisa, then embroiled in a bitter internal conflict over the direction of its news division, aired a leaked videotape of a massacre of peasants by the army in the state of Guerrero —something which would have been inconceivable in an earlier period. In March 1997, Emilio Azcárraga, Jr. died, his son took over, and the internal conflicts within the organization intensified.

In the 1997 federal elections, the three major political parties for the first time receieved essentially equal coverage from both Televisa and Television Azteca, with slightly more coverage for the leftist Cárdenas, who ran successfully for the new office of Mexico City mayor. The attention to Cárdenas reflects a triumph of media logic over political logic: Cárdenas got more coverage because he was a better story. Research by Chappell Lawson (1999) provides strong evidence that the shift in Televisa's coverage had enough impact on Mexico's currently volatile electorate to have been decisive in the outcome of the election, in which the PRI for the first time lost its majority in the Chamber of Deputies. Finally, in January 1998, Jacobo Zabludovsky, who had been Televisa's principal news anchor since the 1950s and head of its Directorate of News since its organization in the early 1970s, was dumped and his flagship news broadcast renamed, reorganized, and oriented much more toward ordinary viewers (Hallin in press).

How large a role did the emergence of commercial competition play in changing the political character of Mexican television? It is difficult to untangle the forces that were at work, just as it is in general difficult to separate the effects of economic liberalization and political democratization in Mexico, as the two overlap historically. As we have seen, the changes in election coverage were in part the result of government pressure. It is also possible that the broader changes at Televisa resulted as much from a political calculation

as from a concern specifically with commercial competition. That is, Televisa's management may have concluded that in a changing political environment the benefits of alliance with the PRI were rapidly diminishing and the costs or potential costs increasing, and chosen to distance itself from the ruling party—a choice which could have been made even in the absence of commercial competition. Televisa had become the subject of street demonstrations and protests by opposition politicians and citizen groups—the increasingly active civil society mentioned above; it was increasingly held in contempt, particularly among the educated and politically active, and if there were a shift in political power it could conceivably lose more than just prestige.[3] As one of Televisa's top executives said, shortly after the death of Azcárraga, "as far as politics is concerned, the company historically has had the capacity and the flexibility to read the times and to adapt to them" (Mayolo López 1997).

Still, it seems certain that the emergence of competition did play a significant role in the political change. Television Azteca was not particularly bold in pushing the political boundaries of Mexican television, though it did make some innovations. One of its early successes was a *telenovela, Nada Personal,* which dealt with questions of official corruption previously untouched in Mexican entertainment television. Its news broadcasts were modestly more lively—introducing puppet caricatures of political figures, for example, which were used extensively in its 1997 election coverage.

But the mere existence of competition may have pushed Televisa to make different decisions—the massacre videotape, after all, might have been aired by Azteca if Televisa hadn't done so—and eventually to rethink the whole character of the news broadcast. Televisa did suffer considerable losses of audience share from its news broadcast. These seem to have been politically motivated in part; that is, people who supported opposition parties abandoned the hated Televisa for Azteca. And the losses were significant because opposition supporters tend to be younger, better-educated and wealthier than PRI supporters—and hence more valuable to advertisers. The truth is that Televisa's news was always a bizarre product for a commercial television company—dreadfully boring, full of long-winded speeches by political functionaries, official press releases read word for word as the text scrolled on the screen, and interviews with wealthy cronies of the owner. Surely it could not have survived competition for long.

Conclusion

Neither the liberal nor the critical political economy perspective is fully adequate to the analysis of Mexico's unusual system of power or the process of political change now under way. This should not be surprising: both are broad-brush approaches which are likely to fall short in the analysis of any concrete historical case, particularly once they are removed from the particular contexts—for example post-war Britain—for which they were developed in their most detailed forms. The value of the kind of comparative enterprise undertaken in this book is to force us to think in more subtle ways about the variety of relationships which can exist among the state, commercial media, civil society, the profession of journalism, and other key elements of the system of public communication.

For the Mexican case, the liberal perspective is correct in pointing to the state as a key component of the system of power—though the triumph of neo-liberalism means that this will be considerably less relevant to understanding Mexican media in the future. It is also correct in its argument that the development of media markets can play a role in the process of democratization, both by providing the media with an economic base apart from the state, and by providing incentives for responsiveness to popular tastes and opinions. Its key failing is that it does not take into account the interdependence of state power and private capital.

The critical political economy perspective was developed primarily to provide a critique of the media system in liberal democracy. It has, for that reason, tended to take liberal media institutions—including both

commercial media and journalistic professionalism—as given, and has never put a priority on theorizing the process by which they come into being to begin with. It falls short of understanding the old regime in Mexico, in which liberal institutions were never fully developed. It also falls short of understanding many aspects of the political transition now under way. It is clear, in particular, that the assumption that market forces inevitably push toward depoliticization and a narrowed spectrum of debate is too simple. Under certain historical conditions market forces may undermine existing structures of power, providing incentives for the media to respond to an activated civil society.

The role of civil society is worth underscoring here as something not adequately theorized in either perspective. Liberal media theory tends to assume an identity between commercial media and civil society. Critical political economy has shown greater interest in civil society in recent years, but its traditional concern is with the power of private media owners and the constraints of the market, and it is fair to say that it has not fully theorized the way these interact with developments in civil society. In the case of Mexican scholarship, the critical political economy school traditionally looked to the state as the source of reform in media institutions, but there has been a significant shift in recent years toward a concern with initiatives "from below" (Sánchez Ruiz 1994). As Mexico's political system becomes more pluralistic, one of the key issues will be how widely different sectors of civil society are served and represented by the emerging media system.

It is possible that with the passing of the transitional period in Mexico, many of the dynamics pointed to by research in the critical political economy tradition in the US and Britain may eventually assert themselves more fully. In the case of the press, for example, it is clear that the logic of commercial media production is not at this point fully dominant. The new independent papers were for the most part started as journalistic more than business enterprises. *Proceso* and *La Jornada* were founded by journalists who scraped together enough financing to survive; their motivation was to have a public voice and to democratize Mexico's press, not to build commercial media empires. *Siglo 21* was started jointly by a businessman and a group of journalists; the two later parted ways, the journalists founded *Público,* and *Siglo 21* closed. Only *Reforma* was started primarily on the initiative of a capitalist, but Junco de la Vega is something of a special case, a print media specialist who identifies strongly with journalism as a profession.

It is certainly possible, however, that as the newspaper market develops more fully in Mexico, right-of-center commercial papers will eventually drive out of the market not only the old officialist press, but also the independent papers started by journalists, which may be able to survive only in a period of political transition when interest in politics is high and the commercial press not yet fully developed. And it is possible that with the receding of this period of relatively high politicization, television news will eventually move strongly in the direction of apolitical sensationalism. As neoliberalism triumphs, the role of the state recedes and that of the market expands, critical political economy may become more rather than less relevant to understanding the Mexican media—along with related perspectives centered on the notion of journalistic routines, which analyze the power of the state, for example, not in terms of censorship or pressure, but in terms of its role as a "primary definer" in the professional production of news.

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Notes

1 According to Sánchez Ruiz (1994), Televisa's coverage of the 1994 election shifted substantially one day after the Interior Minister (Secretario de Gobernación) met privately with Azcárraga.
2 *La Jornada,* the most important leftist paper, has continued to receive some government subsidies; the Mexican government has always seen the continuation of some oppositional papers as important to maintaining legitimacy, and sees a newspaper that circulates among intellectuals as a relatively small threat to its political hegemony.
3 Research by Porto (1998) suggests that Brazil's TV Globo made a similar shift, without any clear change in its market situation or any reason to expect immediate gains in ratings.

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