

Review of the Book:

Ariadna Acevedo-Rodrigo and Paula López-Caballero, eds., *Unexpected Citizens. The Making of Citizenship in Mexico*

Ciudadanos inesperados. Espacios de Formación de la Ciudadanía Ayer y Hoy.
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As both historian and anthropologist, I celebrate a book on citizen formation that brings together chapters from both perspectives, covering two centuries of Mexican history. This effort is the result of a fruitful collaboration between an anthropologist who has done historical research, Paula López-Caballero, and a historian with anthropological sensitivity, Ariadna Acevedo-Rodrigo. Careful editorial work brought thematic unity to a wide range of studies on citizenship practices.

The book fits nicely into a trend in Mexican research on *ciudadanización*, best understood as a social history of the making of citizens, which seeks to study the agency of a variety of actors in the face of hegemonic processes and state formation. The title *Ciudadanos Inesperados (Unexpected Citizens)* evokes a seminal book, *Ciudadanos Imaginarios (denoting in Spanish both imaginary and imagined citizens)* by Fernando Escalante (1992), which argued that the political elites' complaint that there were no true citizens, as conceived in Europe, was an accurate description of nineteenth-century Mexico. A new generation of researchers moves in another direction, showing where and how to find citizens from the first decades after Mexican Independence in 1821 to our days. Drawing from a variety of currents of thought, they not only discover citizens in the making but also propose a new way of understanding what it means to be a citizen and to effectively exercise citizenship. For this purpose, the authors move away from legal and normative definitions towards a down-to-earth conception of dynamic and historical process of citizen formation. The book thus offers a change of perspective combined with a rigorous search for sources resulting in rich descriptions of particular citizen networks in unsuspected contexts.

Ciudadanos inesperados offers a wide range of analytical approaches to citizenship: it underlines practice and performance, it recovers local meanings, and it explores semiotic systems such as film and publicity. The authors are indebted to the cultural turn but they give it a materialist twist by describing attire and appearance, behaviour and technology, with a focus on flesh-and-blood people and their interactions.

A fascinating aspect of the book's chronological route from early nineteenth-century to present-day Mexico are the contrasts between the various chapters, which reflect the historiographical concerns of each period: Church-State relations after Independence (post-1821); hygiene and modernization from the late nineteenth century to the left-wing government of 1934-1940; the growing

strength of the twentieth-century state and markets, with special attention to media and publicity in the 1950s and 1960s, and last but not least, the new generations' interactions in the digital world as well as social movements, with a chapter on students and another on indigenous peoples.

Education is a crucial underlying thread in all chapters. However, the authors leave behind the clichés of citizenship education as taught by nineteenth-century public instruction and twentieth-century popular education (in the Mexican case fed by a strong tradition of patriotism and nationalism). The book contributes to a growing consensus in the field that education cannot be reduced to schooling, and therefore we need to study a variety of social domains in search of the complex processes of citizenship formation. Schools are then seen as one amongst these many social worlds. Obvious as it may seem, the question of what exactly is "a school" has been subject to intense contestation in the historiography of education. Responses range from the attempts to present a functional and universal definition of Western schooling to arguments highlighting the wide range of social processes crisscrossing the social sites called schools.

In the first chapter Eugenia Roldán-Vera presents a fresh approach to schooling showing how performativity distinguishes these institutions from other social spaces and contributes to citizen formation. She reexamines early national civic catechisms, often studied for their political content, stressing rather their performative effect when recited in school rituals. These catechisms, argues Roldán-Vera, were producing young citizens in the very act of a dialogic and repetitive enunciation of national belonging. The school's performative dimension was in fact a key to the new Independent nation's mission of making citizens.

Researchers commonly compare school rituals to religious rituals, but when they are seen as performative phenomena the analogy becomes more complex because it focuses on actions rather than symbolic systems. This emphasis on the ritual, practical and performative dimensions of the school is to be found throughout the book: the school's semantic or cognitive dimensions—the possibility of giving access to knowledge mainly through the printed word—gives way to the force of hygienic surveillance, the moving image and digital acceleration. Nonetheless, the cognitive dimension is rescued towards the end when Inés Dussel studies the import of digital media among secondary-school students. She acknowledges that the school is a slow institution which cannot change its curriculum

at the pace of the digital world, but she also suggests that if we pay attention to these processes we may turn this characteristic into an advantage by 'protecting [schools] from fashion and allowing for the articulation of longer term and broader proposals for a [new] public culture' (p. 249).

Schools, in particular state-run public schools, as an ideal but also as reality, opened up the possibility of providing young people with a likely antecedent of citizenship: 'civility', a notion fundamental to the achievement of peaceful coexistence through respect towards religious—and eventually political and cultural—diversity (Elias 1998). The changing meaning of citizenship—initially grounded in specific conditions of life in the city and only later used to refer to national belonging—overshadowed its close relation to 'civility'. Yet assuring civility is still a challenge in a world where arms take precedent over words. In its secular version, civility offers a way to understand diverse practices and avoid prescription, an explicit objective of this volume.

Various chapters explore topics at the intersection of civility and citizenship, for example by looking at the exceptional situation of the 'indigenous' population, or the former Indian pueblos, a crucial place of alterity in Mexico. The chapter by Daniela Traffano shows how Catholic indigenous citizens in Oaxaca handled Church morals and State legislation and adapted their application to suit their own and their communities' interests. A rich local civic and religious life kept both Church and State authorities at bay insofar as possible, and managed to preserve varying degrees of local autonomy.

Two chapters covering late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries change the topic. Fiona Wilson and Ariadna Acevedo-Rodrigo provide incisive analyses of how much appearance matters, in particular attire. Their studies complement each other. Wilson pinpoints the effective transformation of 'social divisions' through the adoption of modern dress and the distinctions it implies. This is surely one of the processes underlying the political revolution that divided the period (known as the Mexican Revolution), a transformation in the way people approached the urban world, which was the seat of political power. Acevedo-Rodrigo shows one of the most effective - and performative - aspects of post-revolutionary school expansion: the concern for and surveillance of hygiene and garb by rural teachers (who wore suits, ties and urban shoes). This slowly changed the dress habits of the inhabitants of the Puebla Sierra, having perhaps greater impact than the pragmatist and socialist content of the official educational policy of the period. Why are hygiene and costume relevant to something as lofty as citizenship? According to Acevedo-Rodrigo, 'in order to be able to speak in the name of civilization [as rural teachers were asked to do] it seems likely that appearances were given great attention because their improvement was more accessible than intellectual and technical learning', particularly in a context of scarce resources. Additionally, hygienic habits and dress change 'were favoured by State and market processes [...], were increasingly accessible

and offered the promise of transforming the individual for the better'.

The decades of the 1950s and 1960s have been fertile ground for the study of the relationship between mass culture and politics. In Mexico, an increasingly centralised and corporatist State apparatus, fostering the development of industry, media and the internal market framed this period. The chapter by María Rosa Gudiño examines documentary films such as those of the 'War on Malaria'. These films portrayed a State that protects its citizens and calls them to contribute to the extermination of the anopheles mosquito by using a lethal weapon, DDT; interestingly, such a discourse parallels that of today's 'War on Drugs'. In the older case, citizens are given new obligations; they must be 'clean and healthy as a condition to participate in public life'. The films also convey an incipient recognition of social rights, to be protected by a welfare state.

The following chapter, by Susana Sosenski, complements the picture by showing how the press constructed children as consumers, filtering into the public space the image of the well-dressed child surrounded by toys. Children were metaphorically 'turned into citizens before reaching voting age'. Sosenski shows the paradox inherent in the process of moving from an emphasis on creating productive workers to an emphasis on consumers. Under the apparent recognition of childrens' citizenship and agency, 'the implicit objective [of the media] was to subject them to the rules and needs of the market' (p. 220). Gudiño and Sosenski thus show a contradictory aspect of citizen formation: behind the visible supply of health services and entertainment, emerges the machinery of the market economy and the State.

Needless to say, this paradox also underlies the digital practices that absorb the energies of the young—and not so young—generations. Inés Dussel contrasts this digital multi-tasking with the classic public space of the 'lettered city'. She acknowledges the ability and creativity of secondary-school internet surfers and argues in favour of a school open to the digital world, but she also highlights the need for formal education to give a new meaning to the 'public' grounded in 'reflexive and written school knowledge'.

The chapter by Leonel Pérez-Exposito and three of his university students reminds us that young people do not live only in a virtual world and that the new social networks may also facilitate the construction of small, face-to-face collectives. The varied student associations they examined articulate participation around intra- and extra-university issues. Some associations are recognised by the university authorities, others build their own public spaces in the margins of the institution, taking advantage of the artistic freedom of expression and the wide public support of 'noble causes'. Turning on its head the nineteenth-century theses that still underlie civic education programmes in primary school, this chapter shows the crucial educational experience of participating in student associations

which are not part of formal education, but which nonetheless flourish in the social spaces wittingly or unwittingly created by universities.

This chapter reveals particularly well the multiplicity of meanings that students attach to their participation in associations and how they connect their experience with sophisticated debates in contemporary political theory. Thereby the authors contest the delegitimising discourse that labels student associations as breeding ground for 'anarchists' or 'rebellious troublemakers'. Students develop their own discussions, following all the rules of civility, on the meanings of public and private, of political consciousness, responsibility and commitment. In sum, they debate what it means to be a good citizen. These are explorations that will surely nurture their citizen practice as citizens, beyond higher education, hopefully for the better.

Last but not least there is the issue of citizenship among indigenous populations, a theme dear to both editors. Acevedo-Rodrigo and López-Caballero, together with a growing number of historians and anthropologists, have studied indigenous peoples' appropriation of a common heritage of civic liberties and government practices developed before and after Independence. In the last chapter, López-Caballero analyses the case of those who have vindicated their identity as 'pueblos originarios' (the current term favoured, over Indigenous, by Native peoples in Latin America) in Milpa Alta (one of the 16 boroughs that form Mexico's Federal District), in order to obtain recognition and funding from the Federal District authorities. Their particular appropriation of this term, increasingly used in international treaties, is to contrast themselves as 'originarios' with the 'avencidados', denoting the newly arrived residents of Milpa Alta, in order to claim exclusive rights. Drawing from her knowledge of five centuries of local history, but avoiding all form of essentialism, the author explores the subtly shifting meanings of being 'original' and the way the new term seems to replace the indigenous-mestizo dyad yet 'is still related to the predominant ways of defining autochthonous alterity in Mexico' (p. 308). Most importantly, this study shows the limits of a formal or classical definition of citizenship because 'the legal status of citizen does not suffice for them to be seen or heard in the public space' (p. 309).

The reflections in this volume raise a concern: although we can recognise a series of unexpected citizens uncovered by the authors, how many more remain invisible, inaudible, in the margins of a public space controlled by state, media and market? The book signals a new approach to continue producing empirical studies of the making of past and present citizens.

All in all, perhaps the most significant contribution of this book is the validity it lends to a thesis supported by many in recent research on the history of education: in spite of all the efforts to inculcate the rules of civility and citizenship among a population divided by colonial distinctions through schooling, in fact the Liberal and Republican ideals of citizenship reached the remotest corners of the

country through a wide variety of means. In the words of Daniela Traffano: 'the population became acquainted with, learned and used citizenship' in 'meetings between residents and local authorities, [in] churches [...] or by word of mouth as well as through the printed word' (p. 89). And we could add a good deal more sites: cinemas, markets and cybercafes, busy streets and public squares, and the ample university grounds and hallways, all spaces where citizens gather in search of the common good.

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