

A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF MEXICAN RURAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This paper puts into context the demographic, social, economic, and cultural changes and transformations of rural Mexican society in the period 1990-2016. To start, we discuss some trends that have reshaped rural and urban society of the 20th century. We also describe the stereotypes and prejudices that the media have developed on the Mexican countryside and farmers. We mention the principles of corporate globalization, and their social and environmental costs in developing countries such as Mexico, which has been characterized by applying dogmatically neoliberal policies to the rural sector in recent decades. Moreover, we explain the role played by the environmental movement and environmental politics to challenge the exploitative development model of capitalist modernity in rural and urban contexts. Finally, the arrival of the tycoon Donald Trump to the White House in the United States represents a serious threat to the economic, political, and social stability of Mexico, whose background could deepen the crisis of rural society, if the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is repealed by America and the border wall is built. It notes that this work was developed based on a literature review specializing on the subject in question.

Keywords: Mexican rural society, globalization, capitalist modernity, political ecology.

1. Introduction

The year 2016, specifically Tuesday, November 8, will be recorded in world history as the day Donald Trump came to power in the United States. With the coming to power of a character as controversial (sexist, racist and nationalist) as Trump, the geopolitical implications toll for the world order on free trade, human rights, security, and global climate change, because like 9/11 with the terrorist attack on the twin towers in New York, the presidential elections of November 2016 were inevitably a door to unimaginable future geopolitical consequences.

It is a fact that the phenomenon of Donald Trump reconfigures the research agenda of social science and public policy of Mexico and the world. In that sense, it is very likely that the next US president fulfills his campaign promises (the construction of a border wall, the deportation of three million fellow countrymen, and pulling out of NAFTA) to appease the “white wave” that gave him the vote, thereby affecting trade and diplomatic relations with Mexico. One of the areas that Trump might could affect is the renegotiation or cancellation of NAFTA, pulling his country out of the trade agreement would bring serious consequences for the economy and social stability of Mexico, particularly in rural society, the sector of Mexican society most hit by the neoliberal policies of recent decades.

This work aims to expose the socio-demographic, social, and cultural changes that have fallen on Mexican rural society in the period 1990-2016, which is why it has been divided into five sections. In the first section, some data and trends on the socio-demographic dynamics experienced by Mexican society in the twentieth century are presented. Then, in the second section, social and media imaginary prejudices and stereotypes towards the Mexican countryside and farmers by the media are analyzed. In the third section, one of the postulates and consequences of the implementation of corporate globalization in Mexico are discussed. In the fourth section, the role played by the environmental movement and environmental politics to challenge the exploitative development model of capitalist modernity in rural and urban contexts is explained. Finally, in the fifth section, some conclusions and reflections arise.

2. Changes in Mexican society during the twentieth century.

Societies are not static, they are always changing, at least this has been the teaching of history. The Mexico of 1916 is different from Mexico in 2016. A century is not only the passage of time or the set of ten decades that a calendar marks. In this period of Mexican history, many changes have been implemented in politics, economy, culture, technology, demographics, the environment, and rural areas. However, the most accelerated pace of change that Mexican society has experienced, for analytical purposes, is the period of the revolution (1910-1920), the student movement of 1968, and the period of neoliberal governments ranging from 1982 to the current PRI government of Enrique Peña Nieto. Moreover, Mexico has not been immune to the waves of change unleashed in first world countries. Since the country came into contact with Western civilization through the Spanish conquest in the fifteenth century, it has been immersed in a constant process of continuous change that has had high and varied cultural and environmental costs for their populations and rural areas.

The ideology and the revolutionary movement that arose in the second decade of the last Century has led to radical changes in the power structures and relations of Mexico. The revolutions have attempted to break the hegemony of the elites and ruling classes. Behind these revolutions have been the ideologies and social leaders who have sought to achieve progress and overcome the living conditions of the population they claim to defend and represent. Liberals, conservatives, and proto-socialists, to name a few examples,

have been some of the political actors who have imagined a perfect utopia to overcome oppressive legacies and traditions of the past. Influenced by European Enlightenment, both liberalism and socialism in *Mexican style*, have pinned their hopes for the future as progress through technology and science, liberal spirit, equality or socialist solidarity. All bourgeois, worker and peasant revolutions have participated in the same interest in the future by sacrificing entire generations. At the end of these revolutions, historians have been faced with fraud and deceit, with the meager and nil post-revolutionary results.

These revolutions have brought about a struggle between different concepts of time: some revolutionary concepts have wanted to cut with the past; reformist conceptions have tried to make gradual changes, and conservative conceptions prolong the past in the present and in the future. In every society there is a concept of time, an ideology or a set of values that imagines and rationalizes the prevailing social order according to their interests and political ideology. Thus, the past, present and future are mixed according to the interests and values of any particular ideology. Opposed power groups vying for the control and colonization of the future tense of other social groups, as well as generations (children, youth, adults, and seniors). In that sense, the *public* becomes a struggle for a better future (projects, utopias, development plans) or the conservation of the *status quo* and privileges granted by past and present power elites. Under failed utopias, many revolutions have benefited a hegemonic social sector and harmed the popular sectors of large cities, indigenous groups, and farmers, as was the case of the Mexican Revolution.

In the twentieth century, the social and economic structure of Mexico was transformed. The amounts, proportions, and balances of what Mexicans do for a living: from eating, dressing, spending time together, raising a family and having fun changed: the definition and perception of who we are and where we are headed, “in 1990 almost three-quarters of the population lived and worked in the countryside, 72%. In 2000, rural Mexicans were a quarter of the total, 25.3%. We transitioned from an overwhelmingly agrarian society to a predominantly urban society, while retaining a high proportion of the population in the countryside” (Warman, 2001, p.9).

Between 1900 and 2000 the total population of Mexico increased from 13.6 to 97.4 million; the population multiplied by 7.2 with average annual growth rate very close to 2%. The urban population grew from 3.8 to 72.7 million; it was multiplied by almost 20, with an average annual rate very close to 3%. The rural population was multiplied by 2.5, with an average annual rate of 0.9%. For every new Mexican who remained in the country in the twentieth century, a little more than three joined urban lives. Many of the latter were born in the countryside and migrated to the cities. Rural life and production did not have the ability to retain its entire population despite the dramatic and profound changes that happened in the countryside (Warman, 2001, p.11).

According to the *Special Concurrent Program for Sustainable Rural Development 2014-2018* (2014), in 1980 the number of rural towns was 123,169, in which 22,584,104 people lived (11.4 million men and just over 11 million women). In 2010 there were 188,596 rural towns in the country, where just over 26 million people (13.1 million women and 12.9 million men) lived. The proportion of men and women living in rural areas was 49.7% and 50.3%, respectively. The rural population in 1980 represented 34% of the total population, while in 2010 it was 23%. In 2010, in rural towns, the population under 14 years accounted for 33.4% of the total compared to 28.1% in urban locations. The proportion of the working-age population is lower in rural areas than in urban areas, 64.9%, and 70.6%, respectively. In rural areas, the population over 65 accounted for 1.7% of the total population compared to 1.3% in urban locations.

How and how much has Mexican society changed in the twentieth century? What kind of demographic, social, cultural, and political changes has the country experienced? According to a values survey conducted in 1994, the authors concluded that:

The average Mexican emerges from the survey as a statist and presidentialist citizen, who nevertheless believes more and more in the elections and parties; a citizen who is not a fan of law enforcement; Catholic by religion and secular in politics; gradualist regarding changes and slightly inclined to say goodbye to the ideas of the Mexican Revolution. If citizens do not look to the revolutionary past as a solution, neither do they turn to the neoliberal or global future as a panacea (Cordera & González, 2000, p.283).

For these specialists, evaluative changes in the profile of Mexican society responds largely to a change in basic trends, some of the super-structural order and other structural, or long-term civilizing order. Among the trends of structural order, we mention the following:

- 1) The transition from a rural country to an urban one. In the fifties the rural population still dominated. In 2000 about 80 out of every 100 Mexicans live in cities. However, rural inhabitants are almost as many as the total population of Mexico in 1940.
- 2) In transit from one country built inwards, with the development poles clearly located in Monterrey, Guadalajara and Mexico City, with centripetal tendencies that seem unshakable, highly centralized in flows of goods, people, and resources toward building a decentralized periphery, with centrifugal tendencies, with new development poles in borders and coasts, regional disparities have worsened.
- 3) A new phase of integration to the world that has homogenized consumption and cultural patterns, but at the same time, it has strengthened political dimensions of local and regional character, modifying the task and role of the nation state.
- 4) The transformation of an economy with strong state presence in an open market economy, sharply crossed by new social and productive dualisms.
- 5) The re-emergence of pockets of poverty and inequality spread throughout the physical and social geography of Mexico, which does not seem to fade despite the growth of the economy.

Super-structural trends can be placed in the following two transformations:

- a) The erosion of corporate-popular pact inherited from the Mexican Revolution and the emergence of new combinations: the underlying social logic in that covenant, interventions that we call a liberal citizen and family-community.
- b) The gradual change of the political system and the emergence of pressures and demands for the revision of the legal and political regime. From an authoritarian presidential system, based on historical legitimacy derived from the Revolution, to another "limited" presidentialism, not only by political pluralism but by the economic decentralization of the market and broad public and business demand for a state of credible law, attached to the constitutional order. From a dominating party, almost the only party, to a plurality of parties, where the majority is always to be defined. This is a long transition towards building democratic governance.

To analyze Mexican society of the late 20th century, Rolando Cordera and Enrique González (2000) divide it into urban society and rural society, which have a number of characteristics different from those of Mexico in the mid-twentieth century.

A) *Urban Society*

- a) *Emergence and spread of the informal economy.* Formal employment, whose universality was the image of industrial growth, provided the basis for social integration, etc. It now coexists with forms of occupation on the margin of legal regulations and social security.
- b) *Increasing incorporation of women in work.* Although men continue to have greater economic participation than women, incorporating Women into economic activity has grown markedly in the last 25 years. The educational achievements of women and economic restructuring processes to supplement the family income, among others, encourages their greater involvement in economic activity.
- c) The weakening of basic identities as social classes, unions, and industrialization.
- d) *Organization of civil society.* Given the crisis of corporate representation, society, especially after the 1985 earthquakes was organized to defend their human rights, promote social and productive projects and to promote their rights to defend themselves (gay movements, ethnic pro-defense).
- e) *The emergence of communication and media society.* Mexico has an extensive and technologically modern media network. The country's remarkable expansion and growing influence the shape the formation of one the most important instances of collective consciousness. The presence of the media has become so strong that it not only determines the political culture of our society and modulates our democratic transition but often makes us forget that the media exists and how it works.

B) *Rural Society*

- a) *Concentration of extreme poverty in the countryside.*
- b) *Geographic dispersion of the population.* There are more than 175,000 towns of fewer than 2,500 inhabitants today; almost five times more than the 40,000 recorded in 1970. The dispersion is associated with poverty and with the indigenous dimension.
- c) *Smallholder property.* The smallholding is the most widespread production unit in the Mexican countryside. Three-quarters of the ejidatarios (common land owners) have less than ten hectares, and two-thirds of them have less than five. This results in migration and poverty, to the extent that production is not enough to meet the nutritional requirements of their owners.
- d) *Internal migration and external emmigration.* Almost 3 million people annually made journeys from the south to the northeast; from the marginalized areas of Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, and Veracruz to capitalist agriculture of the northeast, linked to export agriculture.

- e) *Elderly landowners.* About half of the ejidatarios (common land owners) are over fifty years and about 20% are above 65 years. This stimulates migration and constitutes an obstacle for processes of change and technological innovation and development of productive and trade associations, which may jeopardize the possession of the land.
- f) *Deterioration of large organizations representing farmers.*
- g) *Feminization of the countryside.* The product of male migration, women have gained more importance in rural society.
- h) *The landless.* There is a significant proportion of young people without access to land, with the possibility of obtaining almost nil. The pressure for land could become a fundamental feature of rural society.
- i) External openness and cultural globalization have changed the values and community foundations of Mexican rural society.

According to Julio Millán and Antonio Alonso Concheiro (2000), coordinators of *Mexico 2030, a new century, a new country*, Mexico is immersed in several major transitions such as:

- a) A demographic transition, with a population that is growing less rapidly than in the past, which is changing its structure significantly by age group and aging, and is increasingly urban. The demographic transition will open different windows of opportunity, reducing the dependency ratio, and the demand for certain services, such as primary education. However, they will also pose new challenges; in particular, the need to generate about one million new productive jobs per year.
- b) An economic transition, parallel to that which occurs worldwide, which is changing the relative importance of the sectors in the generation of gross domestic product, employment generation, and foreign trade. A transition in which the agricultural sector is likely to continue to lose ground and the service sector will continue to win it, which seems bound to generate higher productivity and competitiveness of domestic enterprises inside and outside the country, where the financial system is weak and in a process of modernization, where the state's role as an economic agent is redefined.
- c) A political transition, in which Mexico seems to move towards an increasingly successful democratic system of representation, more transparent and legitimate elections, fairer partisan competition, a lower content of presidentialism, corporatism, and cronyism, and more vigilant citizen participation. A transition that also includes a new distribution of power among the three federal powers, the emergence of new political actors at federal, regional and state levels, and a growing presence of municipalities.
- d) A social transition, in which Mexicans have increasing levels of education, the Mexican family reduces its size, incorporates new prototypes and modifies values. The transition will also include new avenues to explore in terms of health and social security. This transition will occur in an environment where personal insecurity is becoming a heavy burden and where it has not been possible to eradicate drug trafficking and corruption.

3. Social and media collective imagination on the Mexican countryside and farmers.

“Agonizes the countryside”, “Misery and abandonment”, “The imposition of the executive”, “NAFTA, bad business”, “From abandonment to catastrophe”, “The faltering Mexican countryside”, “The Mexican countryside, a tinderbox”, “poor sowing of free trade agreements”, “Conflicts lurking”, “Shield, a strategy that does not convince”, “March of peasant organizations in Mexico City”. As we approached 2003, January and day 1 of the imminent opening of NAFTA to North American products, the media were turned in unison to cover a generally forgotten subject: The Mexican countryside, one of the great national problems. An infinity of notes, reports, and journalistic essays emerged on the front pages, and political and social analysis on magazine covers.

In late 2002 the farmer mobilization around the renegotiation of the agricultural chapter relocated to North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the center of national debate. During 2003 the questions grew, and farmer mobilization was attended by hundreds of thousands who gathered behind the slogan "the country can't take any more!". This movement managed to sign a National Agreement for the Countryside with the government and later, in January 2004, the Chamber of Deputies initiate a process to discuss the agricultural chapter of NAFTA.

Since the reformed article 27 of the Constitution in 1992 and NAFTA was signed in 1993, farmer mobilization and media coverage as was never seen before was given in 2003. Generally, the media focus on reporting on the events of the cities and the agenda of political elites, underestimating the news of rural areas. Only when they reach frost, droughts, and hurricanes do journalists deign to leave the asphalt to make a note and take a picture of the earth cracked by severe drought or destroyed houses because of a hurricane.

Nobody can deny that the media have reported on what happens in rural Mexico, and the role they have played in preventing some meteorological disaster (hurricanes, frost, drought, floods). However, the treatment compared to the events of other areas of society has been uneven. Most of the time the drivers behind the news have emerged as judges and parties when reporting on the protests by indigenous groups, agricultural laborers or farmers' organizations, distorting and demonizing their demands and claims. From the pulpit of the cameras, a great many stereotypes have been made that have done nothing but devalue rural areas and the cultural identity of its stakeholders.

Thus, when an analyst or journalist (economists and political scientists “city slickers” who have never gotten into a corn field to talk to the farmer) “thinks” about the Mexican countryside and its problems, is to say disparagingly to their viewers or readers that the field is unproductive and that farmers should focus on something else, ignoring farmer and indigenous cultural logic to continue with their traditions and lifestyles; in this way the media contribute to the devaluation of the rural, i.e., discrediting the substantive rationality of the inhabitants of rural areas. It is the substantive rationality of farmers that differs from what some “economic analysts” propose in their diagnoses on the problems of rural areas.

Which is not to say that farmers have no economic interests - of course, they do -, only economic analyses are insufficient to answer questions such as: Why do farmer and indigenous communities cling to their lifestyles and agricultural traditions? What kind of relationship do these social actors have with the land that they inherited from their ancestors? Why are the farmers of San Salvador Atenco still struggling to prevent the construction of the airport in Texcoco? Behind those questions are rationality and worldview, land and heritage, with a very particular history, which differs from urban modernity and clichés from a rural overlook that television news broadcast and build on the social imagination of viewers.

Social imagination is brought up because the knowledge and sociological analysis of stereotypes and ideologies built around rural society and social actors (women, youth, children, the elderly, laborers, farmer organizations, indigenous peoples, artisans, fishermen) is fundamental to understanding the complex relationship between tradition and modernity, between urban and rural, between past, present and future.

On the other hand, according to the *view* of the expert (agronomist, biologist, journalist, historian, economist, anthropologist, rural sociologist or government official) and *interests* with respect to the use of natural resources and the role of social actors in the rural media, will depend on the emphasis given to the public policy measures to address the falling behind of the Mexican countryside. If we talk about agricultural development at any cost it will be understood as a modernizing development, focused on land productivity; if we talk about sustainable rural development from rural and indigenous basis, it is likely to be understood as a process of self-management, people-centered, environmentally-friendly and local agricultural traditions.

What is the Mexican countryside? Input is a question that involves a search for concepts and meanings that are often disparate and contradictory; all depend on the color of the lens of the beholder. In addition, the concept that the expert has on rural studies on the Mexican countryside is determined by its historical context and ideology. The relationships between production and use, management and exploitation of resources that have occurred in the Mexican countryside have been changing with the passage of time.

Moreover, the Mexican countryside cannot only be addressed through the lens of social sciences but also of art. At least the legacy of Diego Rivera and other artists is found through places, symbols, and characters that give us the nationalist mural painting of the 20th century: mother earth, corn, Zapata, the land owner, the hacienda. Through art and its various manifestations, we can trace the evolution of rural Mexico: music, painting, photography, architecture, film, literature, crafts, traditions, and legends.

An example of the images that intellectuals and anthropologists have reconstructed with respect to the rural world and farmers that constitute the Mexican studies (culture and national character), their myths and stereotypes. From Samuel Ramos, Octavio Paz, Santiago Ramírez down to the work of anthropologist Roger Bartra, to name a few examples.

Peasants often project on modern society a long shadow of nostalgia and melancholy. They are the survivors of an era that has not come back and whose memory arouses an intimate sadness but is capable of expanding by society to gestate a cultural and political (...) nor do I want to propose a return to Eden subverted, nor a study of the nature of the rural world. I want instead to pursue a reflection on how modern culture creates or invents its own lost paradise. In Mexico, as in many countries, the re-creation of agrarian history is an essential ingredient in shaping national culture; it is, I think, the keystone without which the coherence of the cultural building would collapse (...) Mexican culture has woven the myth of the rural hero with the threads of yearning. Inevitably, the national imagination has become the farmers in *dramatis personae*, victims of history, drowned in their own land after the great shipwreck of the Mexican Revolution. Literary reconstruction of the farmer is a mourning ceremony, a ripping of garments off the body sacrificed on the altar of modernity and progress. The picture that is taking shape in rural areas is that it is always necessary to immolate the past; For this reason, the image is constructed in parallel and is very similar to that ubiquitous Western archetype that both psychology and literature owe so much to: melancholy (Bartra, 1996, pp.31, 43)

Mexican rural society in the second decade of the 21st Century

Since the 1980s, Mexico has been pursuing a neoliberal economic policy that is part of an organizational model of the world economy that some authors have termed as “corporate globalization” which has caused a series of sociocultural and environmental costs for the living conditions of hundreds of indigenous and farmer communities. This corporate globalization, driven by the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and multinational corporations promote agricultural policies that particularly affect the rural economies of Third World countries.

Corporate globalists intend to accelerate these trends as if it dealt with a great mission. They seek policies and better international arrangements which safeguard investors and private property while removing barriers to the free movement of goods, money, and companies seeking economic opportunity anywhere to be found. They believe that multinational corporations are the most important and effective human institutions, some powerful engines of innovation and wealth creation that everywhere break down the obstacles to human progress and achievements (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2003). Neoliberal globalization has several key features:

- a) Promoting hyper-growth and uncontrolled exploitation of environmental resources to fuel this growth.
- b) Privatization and commodification of public services and other aspects of the global and community commons.
- c) Global cultural and economic homogenization, comprehensive and intensive promotion of consumerism.
- d) Integration and conversion of national economies, including some with a high degree of independence, to export-oriented production, detrimental from a social and environmental standpoint.
- e) Corporate liberation and complete freedom of movement of capital across borders.
- F) A dramatic increase in corporate concentration.
- g) Dismantling health, social and environmental public programs underway.
- h) Replacing the traditional powers of the nation-state and local democratic communities by global corporate bureaucracies.

In Mexico, the government of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1983-1988), Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1989-1994), Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon (1995-2000), Vicente Fox Quezada (2001-2006), Felipe Calderon Hinojosa (2007-2012) and the government of Enrique Peña Nieto (2013-2018), have been characterized by follow blindly and dogmatically this set of neoliberal policies, dismantling departments and rural development programs; stigmatizing farmers as “unproductive and inefficient”; promoting an export-oriented agricultural development model to the detriment of the domestic market, food sovereignty and the rural economy; promoting the privatization of commons such as water, land, native seeds and forests; polluting ecosystems and violating human and cultural rights of indigenous peoples, landowners, small farmers, farm workers, and fishermen.

According to critics of corporate globalization, if globalized energy systems are the primary cause of environmental and geopolitical crises in the world, the weakening of the small-scale, diversified, independent and community-based farming systems, and its replacement by some corporations governed by monocultures, they have been the main cause of the appearance of the landless, hunger and food insecurity (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2003).

Such corporations argue that industrial agriculture is more efficient than traditional, and can better feed a hungry world. However, all the evidence shows again and again otherwise; so-called efficiencies of industrial farming are only thanks to large government subsidies. And it causes more hunger than it solves (...) industrial agriculture is one of the world's largest consumers of scarce fresh water available to our planet. The seeds of hybrid commercial wheat need twenty times more water than traditional varieties of wheat that are developed and grown in India (...) as far as efficiency is concerned, we can say that global industrial agriculture is efficient only if we ignore the extensive list of open and hidden subsidies that industrial societies contribute to agricultural enterprises (...) industrial agriculture also depends on an enormous supply of energy, largely subsidized for the operation of agricultural machinery and production of pesticides and fertilizers (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2003, pp.211-215).

After having reached Los Pinos on 1 December 2012, the government of Enrique Peña Nieto unveiled to Mexican society and the media 13 government actions that would guide his actions as president: 1) National Program on Crime Prevention; 2) promote General Law on Victims; 3) unify the state penal codes; 4) launch a National Day Against Hunger; 5) Create Life Insurance for heads of family; 6) reduce to 65 years the pension age for the elderly; 7) promote comprehensive education reform; 8) create the National Program of Infrastructure and Transport; 9) return to the use of passenger trains; 10) guarantee the right to broadband Internet, and tender two new television channels; 11) reverse the state debt through a National Fiscal Responsibility Act; 12) present an economic package for 2013 with zero deficit, and 13) austerity in public spending. However, actions, programs and public policies towards the Mexican countryside and promoting rural development were conspicuous by their absence.

Currently, four years in to the government of Enrique Peña Nieto, the Mexican countryside does not enjoy good health in the collective imagination of Mexicans, nor on social and macroeconomic performance. A series of, historical, social, political, ecological and demographic structural causes have paved this dark vision. In this sense, and based on the reformist trend of Peña Nieto, some public opinion companies like Parametría, were given the task in 2014 to measure the perception that the Mexicans have on the countryside. Notably, it is motivated by reformist fever, Peña Nieto, announced in January 2014 a reform of the Mexican countryside, with the aim of reviewing the systems and public policies that enable economic development, and increase productivity and competitiveness of this sector. Parametría⁷ conducted a National Survey of Housing and assisted other similar studies. These were the results:

⁷ Parametría (2014). Mexicanos ven un campo sombrío. Available at: www.parametria.com.mx/carta_parametrica.php?cp=4642 (Accessed 2 September 2015)

- 1) Most respondents (77%) associated the Mexican countryside with negative adjectives such as poverty, backwardness, and stagnation, only 7% said the best word to describe the current scenario of the field was developing, while another 5% associated it with modernity, the same percentage who described it as productive.
- 2) Another fact that stands out is that more than half of respondents (59%) said the government is primarily responsible for the situation in the Mexican countryside to improve, only 13% believe that the main actors to encourage improvements are farmers and another 23% felt that farmers are responsible for improving the current situation as much as the government.
- 3) Reviewing the National Agricultural Survey which was conducted by INEGI in 2012, it was found that 83% of the producers of the 33 main agricultural products, noted the lack of support as the main problem facing them at this point, it is important to note that corruption has played an important role in aggravating the situation, data from the Superior Audit of the Federation indicate that federal agencies of the agricultural sector account for 56% of the diversion of resources that the agency detected, pointing to the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA) that received the highest number of complaints. For 81% of the producers, the main problem they face are the high costs of inputs and services, followed by losses due to weather conditions, lack of training, loss of soil fertility, difficulty marketing, etc.
- 4) Some of the features presented by the population living in rural areas are having less access to services such as education, health, housing and general development opportunities. In Mexico, the largest percentage of people in poverty live in rural areas, in this regard, we asked respondents, how much you agree or disagree with some phrases were on the situation facing people in the field. Almost all, 89%, agreed that being a farmer is an underrated activity, just as almost all felt that fewer young people were interested in pursuing farming activities, while 83% “agree” or “strongly agree” that it is more difficult to live in the country as the years pass.
- 5) The outlook is not optimistic, because according to experts, the problems facing the field in Mexico are: low productivity, damages resulting from natural disasters, drought, migration of the farming population, drug trafficking (displacement of corn for marijuana and poppy), lack of social programs of great impact, corruption in the delivery of support for farmers, no training for production processes, land disputes, insertion of transgenic products, among others.

4. Political ecology and socio-environmental conflicts in rural Mexico

The theme of social movements is and has been a key issue for the social sciences to explain the processes of social change. As a type of collective initiative of organized individuals, the category of social movement has earned a series of various theoretical and empirical political and sociological studies. Contemporary societies as a source of conflicts and social tensions have always provoked protesters and anti-systemic movements.

Theorizing social movements is something new in the panorama of European and American social science of late capitalism, where the theories of new social movements take place, to differentiate them from the old social movements. A feature of the new social movements is its international scope, because unlike the old social movements, they operate in alliances and networks in the context of a globalized world. While old (the labor movement, for example) social movements dealt with mainly economic (or material) issues,

new social movements tend to focus on cultural change, issues of identity, or improving the social and natural environment (Macionis & Plummer, 1999).

One of the movements that have questioned the relationship of domination and plunder of nature has been the environmental movement or environmentalism: a local, national and global player, which has played a leading role in building the right to the environment, both in urban and rural settings.

And it is that urbanization, industrialization and excessive technological and social changes that occurred, especially in 1930-1950, originated in the decades of successive unwanted side effects: depletion of nonrenewable resources, deforestation and climate change, environmental pollution, liquidation of entire animal species, degradation of nearby rural areas to cities (...) the environmental movement of the sixties was further reinforced by the collapse of the belief in unlimited economic growth and awareness of nature in danger because of patterns of production and consumption that industrialized countries had established (...) since its inception, environmentalism tried to resist the chaotic extension of the global market, to the infinite economic expansion, the logic of unlimited accumulation, the waste of resources and the conspicuous consumption and the productivist and industrialist ideology, trying to reveal, thus, the hidden side of the dominant economic rationality (Rodríguez, 2014, p.46).

From the questioning of the philosophical foundations of anthropocentrism that sustains the capitalist development model, the social sciences were opened to the interdisciplinary study and multidisciplinary environment, formulating new research areas such as environmental anthropology, environmental history, environmental ethics, environmental sociology, environmental economics and politics, among others, focusing on rural and regional development studies of Mexico and the world.

From this perspective, Victor Manuel Toledo (2015) has pointed out that the entire planet, and particularly Mexico, are going through a crisis of civilization:

This civilizational model, which today reaches maximum historical concentration of capital, not only orders and guides the world economy under the domination of giant corporations, including banks and financial firms, but affects much of the national and international policy by controlling and the cooptation of governments and institutions as well as the media, scientific and technological innovation and cultural patterns. This civilizational model has been built on several dogmas such as the principles of neoclassical economics; a Manichean idea, unique, development and progress; the technoscientific optimism; the supremacy of individualism and competition; the supposed inferiority of traditional cultures, and the subjection of nature, which is conceived as a system that should be studied in detail, analyzed and exploited (Toledo, 2015, p.15, 16).

To analyze and account for the complex social and environmental issues affecting the national territory, Toledo uses the conceptual tools of political ecology. Which it is based on three theses: a) the current world and its slide toward chaos or collapse the double exploitation come from making the capital over the nature and work; b) The second argument has to do with the spatial expression of the double exploitation, i.e., the scale determines current processes, from local to local and vice versa, and c) the succession of crises in recent decades responds to a crisis of civilization, that is, based on the modern world capitalism, the ideology of progress and development, we are not leading to a steady state but chaotic state (Toledo, 2015).

The situation in the country in the last decades of neoliberalism has deepened the crisis and dramatic rural, natural resources and social actors; in that sense, “Mexico has become an extreme experiment in what happens to the world-system experiment. Contrary to popular belief, the country has been destroyed, its borders dissolved, its institutions dismantled, to lead to a war of surreptitious and hidden extermination” (Toledo, 2015, p. 20). Now, who is responsible for this state of affairs? According to Toledo it is a parasitic and predatory elite of nature and the vast majority of Mexicans,

It is a few dozen mining, hydraulic, tourism, roads, energy, banking, biotechnology, financial, and housing corporations, who are shattering the country's resources and extracting surplus value from the effort of millions of workers, for outsized gains by services offered. The political class, including virtually all parties, has become part of that elite and has made its executive, legislative and judicial work opening padlocks, dissolving barriers, reducing or exempting taxes, oiling the machinery of double exploitation (Toledo, 2015, p.21).

This neoliberal context of labor exploitation and natural resources, has led to the emergence of so-called socio-environmental conflicts, an area of interdisciplinary research that has been consolidated in universities and research centers over the last twenty years, whose educational programs and lines of investigation seek to promote research cooperation between agronomy, social sciences, and environmental sciences.

For Toledo, territorial struggles have become a major counter-battles in the world, for political power (political parties, governors, and mayors) has weakened the social power or citizen. In that sense, the map of the country has become a scene of battles between the citizen forces and hundreds of mining, water, energy, tourism, agriculture, forestry and biotechnology projects aimed and implemented without taking into account their negative social and environmental effects (Toledo, 2015). Toledo identifies a number of environmental problems currently affecting Mexico:

- a) Water. In Mexico, more than 100 of 635 aquifers are overexploited, and two-thirds of the more than 700 watersheds are polluted. The water is overused by industrial agriculture or polluted by industries and cities. Moreover, the picture is complicated by a water privatization trend, and lack of implementation of systems for capturing rainwater is observed by governments.
- b) Coasts and seas. The coasts and seas of the country are permanently threatened by the expansion of large tourism projects in states like Quintana Roo, Baja California Sur, Jalisco, and Nayarit. These projects threaten mangroves and coral reefs.
- c) Mining. Mining has become the most predatory activity not only natural resources but rural cultures of the country. Mining contaminates water and soil through emissions and leaks of cyanide, arsenic, cadmium, lead, chromium, among others. Socio-environmental conflicts caused by mining are multiplied by all states. Concessions have reached more than 56 million hectares, a quarter of the national territory.
- d) Forests and jungles. In Mexico, 70% of forests and 80% of woodlands are managed by communities and the social sector. Therefore, the country forestry policies must be designed to ensure communal property. On the other hand, deforestation remains an unstoppable phenomenon. Between 2000 and 2010, Mexico lost an average of 195,000 hectares of forest per year as a result of the change in land use, fires, and illegal logging.

- e) Conservation. The country has made progress in preserving biodiversity, because after two decades of policies for conservation, more than 20 million hectares of forests, equivalent to one tenth of the national territory, have been decreed natural protected areas. However, a narrow view still persists that obscures much of the biological wealth that has historically been preserved by traditional cultures for thousands of years.
- f) Energy. In Mexico, fossil fuels represent 90% of energy sources; this is despite studies indicating that national oil reserves will be exhausted in an estimated 10-year period. Moreover, the oil shortage is added to environmental problems caused by their extraction, and the lack of interest of the government for control. Power generation and public transport in large cities are responsible for over 50% of emissions of greenhouse gasses. Only companies such as *Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex)* and the *Federal Electricity Commission (CFE)*, generate about 60% of these emissions.
- g) Healthy foods. Mexico faces two problems in terms of food production on the one hand, there is no policy that seeks food sovereignty, i.e. the food of Mexicans is supplied by domestic production, and on the other, the agricultural, livestock and fishing practices are carried out under environmentally destructive models that offer food with low nutrition value that may even be harmful to health.
- h) Corn. Mexico should avoid planting of transgenic maize when corn has persisted as a product with more than 100 species and with a tradition of over 7000 years.
- i) Climate change. A recent paper argues that although Mexico contributes less than 2% of the gasses that cause the greenhouse effect, it is particularly vulnerable to climate change: 15% of the territory, 68% of the population and 71% of gross domestic product are at permanent risk. The issue of climate change is key to Mexican society, as has been confirmed by the events of severe drought and extreme rainfall experienced in recent years.

In Mexico, there are major environmental problems involving socio-environmental conflicts and political ecology is responsible for investigating them. According to Toledo, the causes of these conflicts are industrial activities carried out by companies or corporations both domestic and foreign, against which organized citizens or rural and urban communities oppose and resist. In response, government agencies, usually, oppose the side of the corporations or remain neutral (Toledo, 2015). According to Toledo, you may recognize nine types of environmental conflicts, which are listed below:

- a) Conflicts of an agricultural character. They are closely linked to contamination by agrochemicals and pesticides and articulate with other modalities related to water use, the introduction of transgenic crops and soil erosion.
- b) Biotech conflicts. They are mainly caused by three corporations: *Monsanto*, *DuPont*, and *Pioneer*, with the authorization of the government, they have made planting experimental fields of genetically modified corn in Mexico, the area of origin of this cereal. This represents a high risk because it endangers the numerous native varieties of this grain, which is the food base of Mexicans.
- c) Energy conflicts. These arise from the presence of thermal power projects, hydroelectric dams, wind farms and nuclear power plants. Among the effects that this type of project cause is the destruction of ecosystems, death of wildlife, drying aquifers, flooding of land with human settlements, land dispossession, etc.

- d) Hydraulic conflicts. Projects that originate these conflicts are the construction of aqueducts and dams. In this category, the problems of contamination of bodies of water, overexploitation of aquifers and the maldistribution of water are included.
- e) Tourist conflicts. As for tourist conflicts, the most affected states are Baja California Sur, Campeche, Chiapas, Guerrero, State of Mexico, Nayarit, Quintana Roo, Sinaloa, and Veracruz. These conflicts affect mangroves, coral reefs, and marine wildlife. Tourism projects in these areas stripped of their land to communities or threaten their access to springs.
- f) Urban conflicts. Generally, arise by road construction projects, real estate mega-plexes, and even supermarkets. Most of these conflicts occur in the center of the country, and more recently in Cancun, Quintana Roo, with the Dragon Mart Project using Chinese capital.
- g) Mining conflicts. During the two presidential administrations of Vicente Fox Quezada (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderon (2007-2012), mining concessions increased irrationally. These concessions and permits have been granted to almost 200 Canadian, British, American, Chinese, and Mexican companies to take gold, silver, copper and other metals practically free while usurping and affect community territories, and polluting water, land, and air.

5. Conclusions

From 1900 to date (2016), 116 years of transformations of Mexican rural society, spatial, demographic, sociological and ecological entity, which has undergone a series of changes which tend to significantly reduce the number of inhabitants have passed, production food and raw materials, availability and quality of water resources, soil, botanical and wildlife, as well as the history and cultural traditions of hundreds of indigenous communities, farmers, artisans and fishermen across the National territory.

Mexican rural society underwent several technocratic surgeries throughout the twentieth century, as was the case with the modernization of agriculture in the period 1940-1970, a development model which laid its foundations in the paradigm of the green revolution and the modernization theory, manufacturing from the first world countries. This paradigm, however, that increased production and productivity of farmland, brought high social and environmental costs for rural communities such as pollution and over-exploitation of water, soil degradation, loss of native species and indigenous farming traditions, as well as migration from the countryside to the big cities of the country and the United States.

On the other hand, as a result of the above, Mexican rural society was separating from its counterpart, urban society, modern Mexico, whose spokesperson, i.e., the media have contributed, with their values, prejudices, and ideology to stereotype and stigmatize farmers and indigenous people for being unproductive and for clinging to their rural way of life. If the socio-demographic and economic situation of the Mexican countryside has intensified, social imagination produced by means of urban communication, not paid for by society and governments opt for the rural development policies of long-term social actors, identities and natural resources of the Mexican countryside.

In 1994 the neoliberal government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1989-1994) signed a Free Trade Agreement with North America (NAFTA) with Canada and the United States, which has had detractors due to the perverse effects that have caused the farming economy and food sovereignty, it also has its apologists and defenders, who deny the devastating effects that NAFTA has had on hundreds of rural and indigenous communities. However, with the coming to power of the nationalist businessman Donald Trump in the presidential elections of the United States, Mexico faces a number of threats to its economy and social stability, if Trump expels from US territory up to 3 million undocumented immigrants, builds a wall, and remove his country from NAFTA actions may materialize that would provoke a social, economic, and geopolitical disaster in Mexico, affected by economic stagnation, corruption, and insecurity: three of the major national problems that the government of the “New PRI”, represented by the government of Enrique Peña Nieto (2013-2018), has been unable to solve.

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