

Monarchism and Liberalism in Mexico's Nineteenth Century.

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Mexico's Second Empire (1864-1867), the three year-long government of Austrian Archduke Maximilian von Hapsburg, supported by French troops, snags at the smooth pattern of the traditional patriotic narrative. The Republic's triumph over monarchism and imperialism is the culminating moment in a story that tells of the heroic construction of the nation. In 1867, liberalism, patriotism and progress vanquished the legacies of colonialism and the evils of Conservative ambition and foreign encroachment. Despite all this patriotic fanfare, ambiguity surrounds the tragic figure of Emperor Maximilian. Young, some say handsome, and romantic, the emperor and his wife have consistently aroused interest and sympathy among a Mexican public with an apparently inexhaustible appetite for all things dealing with their melodramatic lives, from serious biographies to *telenovelas*. The striking and widespread images of Maximilian's death have, since 1867, provoked pangs of guilt and long-winded efforts to justify and legitimate his execution, and to separate the Austrian archduke from the misguided schemes of the Mexican traitors and European aggressors who brought him to Mexico.¹

Saving Maximilian from villain status has implied stressing how incompatible his personality and ideology were with those who promoted the

I am grateful to the Institute for the Study of the Americas, and to Deborah Toner, for having invited me to participate in this stimulating workshop.

¹ See, among many others, some of the first of such endeavors: *Causa de Fernando Maximiliano de Habsburgo, que se ha titulado emperador de México, y sus llamados generales Miguel Miramón y Tomás Mejía...*, México: T.F. Neve, impresor, 1868; *Manifiesto justificativo de los castigos nacionales en Querétaro*, México: Imprenta de Díaz de León y Santiago White, 1868; and Juan de Dios Arias, *Reseña histórica de la formación y operaciones del cuerpo del ejército del norte durante la intervención francesa: sitio de Querétaro y noticias oficiales sobre la captura de Maximiliano, su proceso íntegro y su muerte*, México: Nabor Chávez, 1867.

“Mexican adventure” on either side to the Atlantic: an ambitious, devious and faithless Louis Napoleon Bonaparte in France; in Mexico a posse of myopic, resentful, treasonous, fanatic Conservatives. What is interesting, for the purposes of this workshop, is that finding Maximilian good has usually meant classifying him as a liberal, all while describing the political project he unwittingly headed—setting up a monarchical regime ruled by a European prince—as liberalism’s exact opposite. This unsettles the teleology of nationalist history, which has set up the epic struggle between Liberalism—progressive, republican and good—and Conservatism—reactionary, monarchist and evil—as the fundamental dynamic of historical development from 1810: liberal *insurgentes* vs conservative *realistas* to, at least, 1910, and, if one is to believe Jesús Reyes Heróles and Lorenzo Meyer, to infinity and beyond.

The dissonance introduced into patriotic myth by the fuzzy feelings inspired the “tragedy of Querétaro” and the implication of a more complicated relationship than that of stark opposition between liberalism and monarchy, and even conservatism in general, throws light on this narrative’s inherent limitations and contradictions. In this paper, we hope to further explore the “ambiguous relationship” between liberalism and monarchism in nineteenth century Mexico. In revealing the connections that *historia patria* deemed impossible, we hope to probe the role of ideological currents, such as liberalism, in nineteenth century politics, and, more broadly, in shaping historical processes.

An Uneven Playing Field.

In an essay commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of republican triumph, Edmundo O’Gorman wrote that, at the time of Independence, “the seeds of Mexico’s being contained not one, but two different Mexicos, [...] two possible ways of being”, each originating in “the original constitutions of the two Americas”: American republicanism and European monarchism. O’Gorman saw the political history of the first fifty years of independence as one of violent political *mestizaje*, as the unforgiving struggle between two equally dynamic and legitimate political options, as the “immense prestige of the throne and the enormous weight of colonial tradition” confronted “the sympathy towards

modern democratic tendencies and faith in their excellence as a program for better promises in the future”.² Nevertheless, the clash between these two protean forces—encapsulating tradition and modernity, divine right and popular sovereignty, the past and the future—so vividly described by O’Gorman, becomes blurred in the midst of the tentative, experimental politics of the early independent period. Even though Mexico, unlike the rest of Spanish America, did experience two monarchical regimes (Agustín de Iturbide’s First Empire, 1822-1823, and the 1864-1867 government of Maximilian), perhaps the most remarkable feature of Mexican monarchism is its inconspicuousness, and the defensive, stilted quality of its rhetoric. Except for some exceptional moments which we will examine below, monarchy was, until the 1860s, an object of scorn and derision, the somewhat embarrassing cause of conspirators and a few Indian communities.

The fall of Iturbide in 1823 shattered the consensus that had allegedly surrounded constitutional monarchy as the ideal form of the government for the newborn nation. During the heated constitutional debates of the twenties and thirties, despite frequent references to the pervasiveness of colonial habits and frames of mind, no politician of substance defended the monarchical option. Outside the realm of parliamentary and newspaper politics, very few *pronunciamientos*, such as that of Epigmenio de la Piedra and Carlos Tepisteco Abad,³ speak to the remnants of the popular monarchism which colored the Insurgency during its early struggles against the viceregal government. In the late 1820s, popular demonstrations, virulent pamphlets and alarmed politicians denounced a powerful pro-Spanish, monarchical fifth column, but if such a thing existed, it took great care not to publicize its opinions, with the possible exception of Joaquín Arenas’ 1827 plan to reinstate Fernando VII.⁴

Only in the oppressive political climate of the 1840s did monarchists come to the fore. In a context of increasing confrontation with the United States

² Edmundo O’Gorman, *La supervivencia política novohispana. Reflexiones sobre el monarquismo*, México: Condumex, 1969, pp.12-13.

³ “Plan de la monarquía indígena proclamado por los curas Dn Carlos Tepisteco Abad y Dn. Epigmenio de la Piedra,” February 2, 1834, in *Planes en la nación mexicana*, once libros, México: Cámara de Senadores, 1987, libro II, pp.208-209.

⁴ “Plan del Padre Arenas”, January 21, 1827, in “The pronunciamiento in Independent Mexico, 1821-1876” at <http://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/pronunciamientos/dates.php?f=y&pid=755&m=1&y=1827>

and growing despair over the possibilities of finding a political solution to instability and economic stagnation, the 1836 constitution proved impossible to reform, and the 1842 constituent congress debated three constitutions but was dissolved before it could agree on one. In 1840, politician and diplomat José María Gutiérrez Estrada published a letter to President Anastasio Bustamante, in which he called for a national convention to break the stalemate between Federalism and Centralism. The Convention, as representative of the sovereign people, should have the freedom to discuss all possible forms of government, so that it could decide which was best suited to the country's needs and idiosyncrasies. Gutiérrez Estrada then went on to explain why, in his opinion, only a constitutional monarchy headed by a foreign prince could save the nation. Failing to act decisively at this juncture, he warned, would mean the death of the young nation. In a few years "the flag with the American stars" would wave from the top of the National Palace, and Protestant services would be held in the Cathedral.⁵ Great outrage met Gutiérrez Estrada's pamphlet: journalists and congressmen accused him of wanting to turn back the clock, and throw Mexico back into the dark ages and into the snare of political dependence. Three days after his piece was published, a judge ordered it be confiscated. Gutiérrez Estrada would leave the country shortly afterwards, never to return.⁶

In 1846, in the wake of General Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga's overthrow of José Joaquín Herrera's government, the newspaper *El Tiempo* called for a thorough transformation of the country's politics by setting up a constitutional monarchy. It was published by a group of men led by renowned politician Lucas Alamán. Three years later, these pugnacious politicians labeled themselves "Conservatives", and, from the pages of *El Universal*, denounced the irrationality of modern politics. In 1853, they would support the dictatorship of the quintessential "hombre imprescindible", Antonio López de Santa Anna. Anticipating the Porfiriato's "less politics, more administration", they sought to consolidate a strong national government which would guarantee order

⁵ José María Gutiérrez Estrada, *Carta dirigida al Ecsmo Sr. Presidente de la República, sobre la necesidad de buscar en una Convención el posible remedio de los males que aquejan a la República; y opiniones del autor acerca del mismo asunto*, México: Ignacio Cumplido, 1840, p.58.

⁶ Gabriela Tío Vallejo, "La monarquía en México: historia de desencuentros. El liberalismo monárquico de Gutiérrez Estrada", *Secuencia*, 30 (Sept-Dec), 1994, pp.33-56.

throughout the national territory and foster economic development. They established a ministry of development (*Fomento*) and an Attorney general, but also restricted freedom of the press and persecuted its opposition. The project expounded by their 1846 paper was, compared to Santa Anna's last stand, at the same time more radical, in that it called for a completely different form of government, rather than for the temporary suspension of the republican rules of the game, and more temperate in that it maintained constitutional rule and representative politics.

El Tiempo enjoyed the financial backing of Salvador Bermúdez de Castro, Spain's minister to Mexico, and the sympathies, if not the outright support, of the administration.⁷ The paper promoted Paredes y Arrillaga's image and his policies, which in some cases were authored by Alamán, such as the class-based, proportional representation electoral system set up for the designation of the 1846 constituent congress.⁸ Like Gutiérrez Estrada in 1840, *El Tiempo* provoked a scandal: in the words of *santanista* politician, and future Maximilian supporter, Antonio de Haro y Tamariz, monarchy meant "regressing three centuries to celebrate the entry of Hernán Cortés' army".⁹ A leading liberal daily, *El monitor constitucional*, changed its title to *republicano* to express its rejection of *El Tiempo's* dangerous proposals. Again, the effervescence was short-lived: the monarchical dispute was soon swallowed up, along with the Paredes y Arrillaga regime, by the impending crisis of war against the United States.

The brief debates surrounding monarchy during the first half of the nineteenth century have the stilted quality of a dialogue between those that speak without listening to each other. During the short-lived, exceptional moments when the possibility of monarchy was put on the table, its advocates' arguments were quickly drowned out by the patriotic indignation of the press, and, in Gutiérrez Estrada's case, muzzled by judicial injunction. Public

⁷ Behind the scenes, some of the members of the administration were negotiating to put a Spanish prince on a Mexican throne. Nevertheless, it seems that Paredes y Arrillaga never fully backed the project. Miguel Soto, *La conspiración monárquica en México, 1845-1846*, México, Ed. Offset, 1988

⁸ José Antonio Aguilar, "La convocatoria, las elecciones y el congreso extraordinario de 1846", en *Historia mexicana*, LXI: 2, 2011, pp.531-588

⁹ "Exposición que Antonio de Haro y Tamariz dirige a sus conciudadanos. Y opiniones del autor sobre la monarquía constitucional," in Elías Palti, comp., *La política del disenso. La "polémica en torno al monarquismo" (México, 1848-1850)... y las aporías del liberalismo*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998, p.89.

commentators equated monarchy with reaction, the loss of individual rights and liberties, and the sacrifice of national sovereignty. Defending such a regime was treason, for which there could be no justification. It should then come as no surprise, then, that monarchists spent most of their time trying to explain what monarchy was not—despotic, backward and harmful to independence—instead of spelling out its virtues. This also explains why monarchist politics tended to involve not particularly well thought-out conspiratorial activities: the negotiations of out-of-work diplomats (Gutiérrez de Estrada, José Hidalgo) or exiled clergymen (bishop Pelagio Antonio Labastida y Dávalos) in Europe; the flirtations with the Spanish Court by the rickety Paredes y Arrillaga and Santa Anna administrations in 1845-1846 and 1854-1855.

It was only after 1863, in a city occupied by French troops and with the republican press stunned and muzzled, that monarchist discourse would have a free reign. Mexican monarchism then expressed itself in the hyperbolic, baroque prose of Ignacio Aguilar y Marocho's "Dictamen acerca de la forma de gobierno", with which the *Junta de Notables*, summoned by the French commander to decide on the country's future, called on Maximilian of Hapsburg to occupy the Mexican throne. A monarchical regime would put a stop to the "indescribable barbarism" fostered by republicanism, to the long series of

extortion, violence, injustice, rip-offs, theft, fire and death which are the summary of the system set up by the first authorities and the last, so that everywhere we could taste the delights of freedom, and be forced to march, despite ourselves, down the path of derisory progress.¹⁰

El Pájaro Verde would adopt a similar vengeful tone to demand punishment for the "demagogues" who in their dangerous political experiments had denied the country's Hispanic, Catholic heritage and risked its ruin. On the other hand, the sentimental articles published in *La Sociedad* hailed monarchy as the means to restore harmony between the secular and spiritual powers, without which the nation would surely perish, while *La Razón* explained why the imperial regime made sense in what it hoped were the well-reasoned, modern arguments of mixed government and the balance of power. Since the fall of

¹⁰ "Dictamen acerca de la forma de gobierno," in Ignacio Aguilar y Marocho, *La familia enferma*, México, Jus, 1969, p.174.

Iturbide, monarchy had represented a change so radical, a regime with such negative connotations, that its name could not be spoken without contempt. During the early years of the Second Empire, monarchy became an artificial *status quo* upheld by restrictive press legislation, which forbade the condemnation of the nation's "elected form of government," and consequently, an empty shell which various factions filled with different contents.

Liberalism and Monarchy.

Monarchism was, then, in many ways, the odd man out within the Mexican public sphere, even before the historians of liberalism's triumph began using it as shorthand for treason, reaction and political imbecility. It could be argued that its awkwardness stemmed from its convoluted relationship with independence, progress and liberalism, and how monarchists attempted to graft their project onto the key, and contested, concepts of nineteenth-century politics. The 1840 *Carta* and the 1846 *El Tiempo*, and even the 1863 "Dictamen", despite its flowery rhetoric redolent of providentialism and paternalism, set forth the advantages of constitutional monarchy—"that wondrous invention, unknown to the Ancients"¹¹—not as a means to turn back the clock after the upheaval of revolution, but as an instrument to make the present more livable. Their explicit ideals were the same as those of their opponents: liberty and progress, which they nevertheless felt the need to qualify as "true" or "well understood". Because the modern monarchical regime was "independent from party" it would ensure stability; because it only sought to create "an aristocracy of merit", it would bring into government the most qualified, and not the most ambitious; because it had all sorts of checks and balances built in, through the interaction of representative bodies and royal prerogatives, it allowed "the people" to execute all actions that were to their benefit, but none that would harm them.¹²

Although not particularly democratic, the political positions embraced by these men could be described as "liberal", in that monarchists were committed to a "moderate", balanced, representative government that would protect civil liberties. They also stressed the importance of "public opinion", and, in the 1840

¹¹ Gutiérrez Estrada, *Carta*, p.90.

¹² Gutiérrez Estrada, *Carta*, p.90; "Parte política," *El Tiempo*, enero 25, 1846.

monarchist pamphlet, the unbounded nature of popular sovereignty: if the people of Mexico, where “everything”—habits, language, attitudes, memories—was monarchical,” wanted to set up a throne and invite a foreign prince to sit on it, they had every right to do so. In a world in which the belief that natural hierarchies and the divine right to rule had been shattered, and political legitimacy had become contingent and contentious, they, like those identifying themselves as “liberal”, sought to construct a machine for government that would “bring together order and liberty”.

Yet the monarchists’ interlocutors would consistently deny there was anything liberal about their proposals. They even failed to acknowledge there was anything but bad faith behind them. The monarchists prided themselves on being practical men who rejected dogma; as such Gutiérrez Estrada and the editors of *El Tiempo* complained about the narrow-mindedness and political intolerance of their “liberal” interlocutors. Blind to the examples furnished by a peaceful, prosperous, “civilized” Europe, the republican press shied away from a serious discussion of the merits and drawbacks of constitutional monarchy.¹³ To defend his position, Gutiérrez Estrada would even draw on the most radical liberals’ arguments for freedom of religion, by stating Mexicans’ need to understand that “in politics as in religion, consciences cannot be subjugated by the same influences, the same impressions”.¹⁴ Furthermore, the politician from Campeche insisted that “he had the right to yield before no one as to *liberalism*”:

On the other hand, the meaning of that beautiful word, *liberal*, is so elastic! Who would find distasteful to be a *liberal* with Washington or Franklin in America, or with Bailly and so many other innocent and glorious victims of the demagogic fury in Europe? But, who would not be ashamed to be compared to the many who, in both hemispheres have made humanity tremble, falsely calling themselves *liberal*?¹⁵

Conversely, neither the men of *El Tiempo*, nor those subscribing to the 1863 “Dictamen,” described themselves as “liberal”, and the latter probably would have rejected the label. After the defeat of 1848, the Conservatives

¹³ “Nuestra profesión de fe al *Memorial Histórico*,” *El Tiempo*, febrero 12, 1846.

¹⁴ Gutiérrez Estrada, *Carta*, p.96

¹⁵ Gutierrez Estrada, *Carta*, p.91.

identified the liberals as “the party of destruction”.¹⁶ In the midst of growing polarization, sharpened by intransigent opposition to the 1857 constitution and the outbreak of civil war, the distance between the two parties grew even wider, even if, in the rhetoric of its enemies, “liberal” never acquired the derogatory connotations of “demagogue”. But even in times of peace, there seemed to be little common ground on which to build a dialogue.

If, until recently, both contemporary observers and later historians disqualified any pretense to liberalism in the proposals articulated by those seeking to sell the monarchical project in print, their final, if momentary, triumph—Maximilian's regime—has provoked much discussion as to its political colors. It was said, even in the 1860s, that, much to its sponsors' chagrin, the Empire was a liberal regime. There was, of course, the young archduke's explicit commitment to “wisely liberal institutions.”¹⁷ Also, prominent moderate liberals collaborated with his government, believing, in the face of the French Intervention, that only the Empire could guarantee peace and safeguard “the conquests of revolution”.¹⁸ More substantive was the emperor's ratification of the *Reforma* laws, including the nationalization of Church property and religious freedom. His and Carlota's notoriously bad relationship with the Church hierarchy, and the emperor's vision for Church-State relations led the most intransigent bishop of all, Michoacán's Clemente de Jesús Munguía, to look back on the Juárez regime with wistfulness.¹⁹ Also, in his efforts to reorganize public finances, Maximilian called for the election of a *Comisión de Hacienda* which would include representatives of industry, agriculture, mining and commerce from each of the empire's departments, in what Francisco Pimentel, an enthusiastic defender of the virtues of private property and free markets, described as “an act of liberalism, a solemn *you are lying* to the superficial men of

¹⁶ “Los conservadores y la nación”, *El Universal*, enero 9, 1850.

¹⁷ “Contestación de Su Alteza Imperial y Real el Archiduque Fernando Maximiliano...” in *Boletín de las leyes del Imperio, o sea código de la restauración*, four volumes, 1863-1865, vol. I, México: Imprenta Literaria, p.547.

¹⁸ Juan José Caserta, Jesús López Portillo, Vicente Ortigosa, Antonio Álvarez del Castillo, Rafael Jiménez Castro to José López Uruga, Guadalajara, June 4, 1864, in Niceto de Zamacois, *Historia de Méxio desde los tiempos más remotos hasta nuestros días...*, eighteen tomes in twenty volumes, Barcelona, México: J.Parres y Cía, 1882, t.XVII, pp.353-356.

¹⁹ Pablo Mijangos, *The Lawyer of the Church: Bishop Clemente de Jesús Munguía and the Ecclesiastical Response to the Liberal Revolution in Mexico (1810-1866)*, Thesis (PhD in History), The University of Texas at Austin, 2009, pp.268-272.

bad faith who [...] want the people to believe that *monarchy* and *despotism* are synonymous”²⁰. Conservative historian, and disenchanted *imperialista*, Francisco de Paula Arrangoiz even blamed the Empire’s failure on the emperor’s liberalism, with which he hoped to seduce “liberal Germany” into making him its leader.

Yet, despite the opinions of friend and foe, one would be hard pressed to describe as “liberal” a regime with no constitution save the *Estatuto provisional del Imperio*, which determined the administrative structure of the imperial government, the characteristics of the national flag, and listed a series of “individual guarantees”²¹. The emperor, “representing National Sovereignty”, held both executive and legislative powers. On the ground, the army, much of it under foreign command, administered justice and did much of the policing. Even if, in the minds of both the imperial couple and the *imperialistas*, this state of affairs was to last only until the State’s affairs could be put in order, the empire’s draft constitution, said to have been penned by Carlota herself, did much more to strengthen the emperor’s prerogatives than to restrict arbitrary power. The Council of State and the Senate, the constitution’s two “intermediary bodies”—institutions popular among the *imperialistas* for their moderating influence—were made up mostly of men close to or designated by the “constitutional” emperor. All the members of the Council were to be named by Maximilian, while the Senate would include the empire’s dignitaries (princes of the blood, bishops, university rectors, members of the High Court, etc.), one hundred members chosen by the emperor, and another one hundred elected by the people. The Senate would approve bills of law, taxes and budgets, but the emperor could, “under extraordinary circumstances”, borrow money without its approval.²²

²⁰ “Algunos apuntes sobre la Hacienda pública (art.2º)”, *La Sociedad*, october 28, 1864. The italics in the original. Pimentel, a noted man of letters and large landowner, is the autor of *La economía política aplicada a la propiedad territorial en México* (1866).

²¹ “Estatuto provisional del Imperio Mexicano”, April 10, 1865, in Tena Ramírez, *Leyes fundamentales de México*, México: Porrúa, 2002, pp.670-680.

²² “Constitution de l’Émpire du Mexique”, Bancroft Libray, University of California, Berkeley. Jaime del Arenal, “El proyecto de constitución del Segundo Imperio Mexicano: Notas sobre el manuscrito de la archiduquesa Carlota”, Susanne Iglar, Roland Spiller, eds., *Más nuevas del imperio. Estudios interdisciplinarios acerca de Carlota de México*, Madrid: Iberoamericana, Frankfurt: Vervuet, 2001, pp.41-54.

Is Liberalism good to think?²³

The debate about the liberal nature of the imperial government and the liberalism of its collaborators is open-ended and unresolved. It can also sometimes be misleading. The Second Empire's policies towards the Church can be taken as a case in point. Describing them as a "third Reform"²⁴, and aligning Maximilian with Mora and Gómez Farías, and with Juárez, Ocampo and Lerdo, is meant to enhance the former's historical reputation. It nevertheless does little to reveal the objectives and assumptions behind the imperial project, or to explain the reactions it provoked.

Maximilian's Concordat proposal sought not only to consolidate the radical reforms of the 1850s (nationalization of Church wealth, a civil registry, secularization of graveyards and other public spaces, religious freedom), but to revive the colonial *patronato* and transform all priests into government employees, by paying their salaries so that sacraments could be administered for free. His initiative was certainly anticlerical, and as such it raised the hackles of the Mexican bishops and the papal nuncio. It shared in the regalist ambitions of the 1833 reformers, who, although they abolished civil obligation for tithe payment, wanted to have a say in the naming of parish priests and the use of ecclesiastical wealth. But by hoping to make the Church over into an instrument of the State, the emperor and his collaborators clearly sought to go in a different direction from that of the embattled Juárez regime who, in 1859, after attempting to regulate what it considered were the public aspects of religious practice—the administration of justice in civil cases, mortmain property, tariffs for religious services—had opted, in the midst of civil war, to separate the two entities. Affixing the "liberal" stamp on imperial politics in this case is not necessarily wrong, but it obscures and confuses the issue.

Ascertaining the liberal credentials of nineteenth century political expressions has been the preferred endeavor of historians of ideas. Tracing the origins and transformations of liberalism and, to a lesser degree, the

²³ I am shamelessly plagiarizing Alan Knight's title, "Is political culture good to think?" in Nils Jacobsen, Cristóbal Aljovín, eds., *Political culture in the Andes, 1750-1950*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005, pp.25-57.

²⁴ Patricia Galeana, *Las relaciones Iglesia-Estado durante el Segundo Imperio*, México: UNAM, 1991.

development of resistance to its progress, has for a long time organized historical chronology (the chapters on “Militant Liberalism”, and “Liberalism triumphant” of El Colegio’s *Historia general*, for instance) and articulated historiographical discussion. It has yielded some impressive results, which in many ways constitute the core of what we know about nineteenth-century political history.²⁵ But since we are, hopefully, past constructing legitimizing genealogies, we can leave behind the controversies set out by Reyes Heróles, Zea and Cosío Villegas, which, one could argue, were successfully put to bed by Charles Hale. But even when it is not done with the intent to celebrate it, I would like to suggest that calibrating and qualifying “Mexican Liberalism”—and inevitably, because we are talking about the periphery, judging how it was “received” and usually misinterpreted²⁶—is perhaps not the best way to frame our queries about the politics in the past.

To study liberalism, historians have usually proceeded in three ways. Many have analyzed the writings, speeches and actions of politicians, and gone over them with a checklist, in order to determine how liberal they were. By establishing, usually with great erudition, who these men read and quoted, scholars have classified Mexican liberalism according to its “foreign” models. It is usually agreed that Mexican liberals fall in with (the decisively inferior brand of) French or “Continental” liberals, rather than with those of the Anglo-Saxon variety, although US political thought is seldom considered, unless it is mediated by Tocqueville, or one is discussing federalism.²⁷ This method, dear to the political scientist’s heart, yields disappointing results, as it tends to be based on relatively rigid, timeless definitions of liberalism as it should have been. Mexican

²⁵ See, among many others, Jesús Reyes Heróles, *El liberalismo mexicano*, three volumes, México: UNAM, 1957; Charles Hale, *Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968; *The Transformation of Mexican Liberalism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989; *Emilio Rabasa and the Survival of Porfirian Liberalism: the man, his career and his ideas*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008; Daniel Cosío Villegas *et al.*, *Historia moderna de México*, seven volumes in ten, México: Hermes, 1955-1972.

²⁶ See, for example, José Antonio Aguilar’s provocative but in the end disappointing *Ausentes del universo*.

²⁷ Abelardo Villegas, *México en el horizonte liberal*, México: UNAM, 1981; José Luis Orozco, *Sobre el orden liberal del mundo*, México: MA Porrúa, 1995.

Liberalism, then, in a country that is too “Latin”, too Catholic, too “Indian”, too backward, is always a watered-down, exotic version of “true” liberalism.²⁸

Other historians, such as Charles Hale or Will Fowler, have started out with a broader, more flexible vision of liberalism, grounded on historical experience. They have consequently spent more time exploring what Mexican politicians said and did, and their reasons for doing so, than measuring the distance separating them from the “real” liberals living in Europe. In doing so, they have revealed the complex and varied ideological and juridical traditions from which Mexican politicians drew selectively and they have identified the problems which, in a post-revolutionary context, structured political debate. They have also shown that these men were in the business of politics, and not of producing coherent, theoretically sound political doctrine. However, in acknowledging that most Mexican politicians were liberal, they have diluted the ideological component of the nineteenth century’s political disputes, without necessarily replacing it with something else. With everyone being liberal, political conflict—which included a bloody, protracted civil war—becomes more difficult to explain.

Along the same line, other scholars, including Antonio Annino, Guy Thomson, and Florencia Mallon, have focused on the enthusiastic embrace by peasant communities and popular urban groups of certain aspects of liberal discourse and practice, such as elections and municipal autonomy,²⁹ and on the construction of alliances, in the midst of civil and international war, among national political factions and rural populations³⁰. “Popular liberalism” has thus become one of nineteenth-century historiography’s most fertile paradigms. But it is problematic; even as it provided a common ground and a shared language, and often fostered the transformation of civic and religious ritual and social

²⁸ Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo, “La imposibilidad del liberalismo en México”, in *Recepción y transformación del liberalismo en México: homenaje al profesor Charles A. Hale*, México: El Colegio de México, 1999, pp.13-18.

²⁹ Richard Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens. Politics and the Masses in Mexico City from Colony to Republic*, Lanham: SR Books, 2001; Antonio Annino, “Cádiz y la revolución territorial de los pueblos”, in Annino, coord., *Historia de las elecciones en Iberoamérica, siglo XIX. La formación del espacio político nacional*, Buenos Aires: FCE, 1995.

³⁰ Guy Thomson, *Patriotism, Politics and Popular Liberalism in Mexico. Juan Francisco Lucas and the Puebla Sierra*, Wilmington: SR, 1999; Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation. The Making of Post-colonial Mexico and Peru*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995; Peter Guardino, *Peasants, Politics and the formation of Mexico’s National State: Guerrero 1800-1857*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

organization, popular liberalism could also, depending on particular circumstances, reinforce the most traditional social and political patterns.³¹ With little work having been done to compare and contrast the different versions of “popular liberalism,” or on “popular conservatism,” the logic with which the ideologies of national factions were weaved into village politics and visions of moral economy remains unclear.

In gauging, as does much of the literature, the “liberal” nature of a particular political expressions in nineteenth-century Mexico (like in discussing if the American Revolution was “liberal” or “republican”) there seems to be no wrong answer. This does not bode well for liberalism as an analytical category. But is it to be put aside as an obsolete tool, like “Providence”, “national character” or “modernization theory”? The challenge posed by this workshop—to examine the “antagonistic, co-existent and co-operative” relationships between monarchy and liberalism—helps illuminate why liberalism is something that is still worth thinking about. What do the allegedly implausible links between monarchy and liberalism tell us about nineteenth-century politics?

Drawing from the work of “intellectual”, “ideological” and “conceptual” historians,³² we can suggest that the stilted quality of monarchist rhetoric speaks to the particular shape of the Mexican (perhaps of the “American”) public sphere, which was, apparently, a market place for certain, but not all, ideas. As Gutiérrez Estrada’s frustration at being excluded from the charmed circle of liberalism illustrates, this implies that the weight and currency of political creeds and of concrete proposals have less to do with their doctrinal affiliation, or with the soundness of the proponents’ arguments, than with something else. Viability comes to mind first, when, for instance, one thinks of what it would have taken to identify twelve youths who could “competently prove” that they were descended from Moctezuma, as was called for in the 1835 plan for an Indian monarchy.³³ Similarly, realism was not the distinguishing characteristic of Gutiérrez Estrada’s lonely quest for a European prince to govern a country too stubborn to realize it

³¹ Patrick J. McNamara, *Sons of the Sierra. Juárez, Díaz and the People of Ixtlán, Oaxaca. 1855-1920*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

³² Quentin Skinner and JGA Pocock for early modern political thought, Pierre Rosanvallon for France, Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood for the American Revolution, Elías Palti for Spanish America.

³³ “Plan de la monarquía indígena” in *Planes*, libro II, pp.208-209.

needed one... until he ran into Napoleon III in the midst of the American Civil War.

But feasibility can be the unexpected product of changing circumstances, as is shown by what the author of the 1863 “Dictamen” described as a “series of admirable events that led to the coming of Mexico’s Second Empire. We nevertheless still need to determine why, in the context of confrontation and negotiation that is politics, some fared better than others in turning ideas into law. From this perspective, Liberalism looks less like a cause than a factor. Perhaps, then, we should not think of “liberalism” as a category, engendered by the taxonomic impulse of contemporary social sciences today, or as the unambiguous principles or easy-to-read roadmaps that should have guided yesterday’s politicians, but as a repertoire of challenging problems, which the architects of modern politics had to take on: guaranteeing “liberty” and “rights”; revealing and complying with “popular sovereignty”; constructing “political representation” and “democracy”.³⁴ Rather than gauge how the men of the nineteenth century measured up to an ideal liberal standard, we could study their proposals, and throw light on the characteristics of the space in which they had to maneuver, on the context that both gave meaning to their words and actions, and was shaped by them.

³⁴ Pierre Rosanvallon, *Pour une histoire conceptuelle du politique*, Paris : Seuil, 2003.