Twentieth-Century Mexico: Revolutionary Myths and Their Critics

Recent events in Mexico have dramatically revived debates over the various meanings of revolutionary mythology. As contemporary political officials dismantled the structures put in place by the revolutionary process, and reneged on the promises originally made by the first postrevolutionary governments, rebels in the southern state of Chiapas rose up in the name of revolutionary hero and icon Emiliano Zapata, echoing many of his original demands for land, social justice, and political democracy.

What is the meaning of the "new" Zapatismo in the context of Zapata’s long genealogy in revolutionary myth? What does the contemporary political crisis and the implementation of NAFTA mean in the context of longstanding debates over "lo mexicano"? Were critics right in searching for post-nationalist and post-Zapatista forms of emancipatory projects? What is new, what is old, and what is still missing from the present picture?

Course Requirements:

1) Active participation in class. The seminar’s success depends on it!

2) A weekly journal recording reactions, questions, analysis suggested by the readings. Each student will be asked to read from their journal twice during the semester as a prompting for class discussion. A schedule of journal readings will be made up the first week of the class. Journal entries will be shared with me by the Tuesday of each week.

3) A "course portfolio" containing final versions of the journal entries, as revised from my comments and the direction of class discussion.

4) a 10-15 page paper, due no later than the Monday after classes end, but you can hand it in anytime, depending on its subject. The purpose of the paper is to reflect in greater depth on the issues contained in one of our readings or groups of readings, and to expand the discussion to include the equivalent of 4 additional books in related materials. PLEASE COME TO SEE ME EARLY IN THE SEMESTER TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE TOPICS AND APPROACHES. THIS IS NOT A RESEARCH PAPER, BUT AN EXTENDED CONCEPTUAL REFLECTION ON A TOPIC.

5) Grading:
   Class participation will count for 35% of the grade. I will evaluate participation not only in terms of number or length of interventions in class discussion, but also in terms of willingness to engage the comments of others, and willingness to move the discussion forward even if it means asking a "stupid" question.

   The journal, as revised in the course portfolio, will count for 35% of the grade.

   The paper will count for 30% of the grade.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Week 1–Sept. 1–Introduction
UNIT I- Will the Real Mexican Please Stand Up?

Week 2- Sept. 8- Enter "Lo Mexicano"
Reading: Samuel Ramos, Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962).

Week 3- Sept. 15- Of Solitude and Wounds
Reading: Octavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1985), esp. pp. 7-212 (The Labyrinth itself); but also 215-398. Note: If you’ve read the Labyrinth just too many times, can participate in a discussion of it, but can’t stomach reading it again, concentrate on the rest of the book (pp. 215-398).

Week 4- Sept. 22- Mestizaje: Horrible Curse or Cosmic Race?

Week 5- Sept. 29- Of Solitude, Wounds, and Corruption

Week 6- Oct. 6- A Critique of Primeval Mexicanidad
Reading: Roger Bartra, La jaula de la melancolia: Identidad y metamorfosis del mexicano (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1987), or The Cage of Melancholy: Identity and Metamorphosis in the Mexican Character, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992). and

UNIT II- Will the Real Revolutionary Subject Please Stand Up?

Week 8- Oct. 20- The Rural Subject: Zapatismo
Reading: Jesús Sotelo Inclán, Raíz y Razón de Zapata (Mexico City: Editorial Etnos, 1943), pp. 8-18, 169-214; Xerox Packet.
*Robert E. Morsberger, "Emiliano Zapata: The Man, the Myth, and the Mexican
Week 9- Oct. 27- The Rural Subject: Zapatismo’s legacies

For Non-Spanish Readers, in lieu of Armando Bartra (optional for the rest):

Week 10- Nov. 3- Other Rural Subjects

Week 11- Nov. 10- Can we bury the rural subject?

Week 12- Nov. 17- The Urban Subject (I)
Reading: Joseph and Nugent, Everyday Forms of State Formation, pp. 301-52.

Week 13- Dec. 1- The Urban Subject (II)
Reading: Elena Poniatowska, Fuerte es el silencio (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1980).
Week 14- Dec. 8- The Woman
  *Poniatowska, "Hasta no verte Jesús mío: Jesusa Palancares,"* Vuelta, #24 (Nov. 1978), pp. 5-11; Xerox Packet.

Week 15- Dec. 15- The Woman Wreaks Havoc with Established Subjects