

Everyday Forms of Democracy

I will as an anthropologist leave the global outlines for a moment and move to the micro political level and focus a municipality in the Central Mexico in order to figure out if and how the democratisation process is taking place in these local spaces very there apparently aren't any political change seen as a shift from the old political party that until the presidential elections in 2000 had governed Mexico for more than 70 years to a new political party as PAN or PRD.

This paper is based on my fieldwork realized in Mexico during the electoral campaign for governor in the State of Mexico in 1999, and during the presidential elections in 2000, and a four month stay in 2001. Furthermore it is based on an article published with Mario Velázquez in *Estudios Sociológicos* the Journal of Sociology at the Colegio de Mexico.

In the Mexican presidential campaign in 2000 Vicente Fox' slogan was "Cambio Ya" which means "Change Now" of course at first he was referring to a governmental change, that the people had to vote for another party than the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (also called PRI) in order to break with their 70 years at the presidential power. Vicente Fox won the presidency in the elections in 2000 which then was perceived as the most democratic elections ever seen in Mexico; this also indicates or gives us the impression that the only way of a real democratic change can only be present by political alternation.

But I believe that this is only part of the truth because if it is so, then in the municipalities where the old political party, PRI still governed after the elections in 2000 there are still a long way to go for the democracy. **Aren't these municipalities experiencing the democratic process then?**

As I said I will focus on the micro politics in order to get a grasp of the democratic process and identify some interesting characteristics that indicates how and if the Mexican democratic process is embedded in the different everyday practices.

I will try to go beyond this type of perceptions that perceives the electoral process as the ultimate symbol of democratisation, of course they a necessary for the democracy but they aren't enough. That's why I will take a closer look at the local political level in the municipality known as the fiefdom of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in order to see how and if the democratisation is part of the everyday forms in a space that apparently haven't lived the political change from PRI to PAN or

another political party as the PRD but is still voting for and electing PRI (even in the elections three weeks ago in 2006 PRI won once more).

This particular municipality I would like to focus on we find about 70 km from Mexico City, in the State of Mexico. The State of Mexico is also called the Mexican political laboratory because of the special constellation. It is the Mexican State with the most numerous populations, there are various huge industrial parks which mean a lot of capacity of investment, and it has some of the richest municipalities in the country. What happens in the elections in the State of Mexico has always been seen as an indicator for what will happen in the rest of the country in the periods of elections.

The municipality called Atlacomulco has 77.000 soles where twenty percent is indigenous people mainly from the ethnic group called Mazahuas although this past doesn't have a particular importance for the collective memory, and in the capital of the municipality lives 40.000 people. Atlacomulco isn't special because PRI has governed there since 1940 but because a teacher, Hank González in the 50's informally formed a group of business people the Group of Atlacomulco which mainly has business within the transportation. They are outspoken PRIistas it means belonging to the PRI political party. According to my interviews they just see it as another challenge to enter the political arena. BUT when analysing it even further it is obvious that they have a huge interest in entering this political space to legitimise and influence the politics to their convenience. During the years this group has gained considerable political influence both at regional and national level and succeeded in creating a myth about them selves that is very much alive even today!

Atlacomulco is the heart of this "Group of Atlacomulco". And the municipality receives apart from a considerable amount of national resources because of its influences it also attracts a lot of investment therefore their business is concentrated in the very same city, Atlacomulco. It also means that the members of this group now have important political jobs at all governmental levels. Just to mention an example in the eighties when United States and Mexico agreed on repairing parts of the Pan American Highway that I suppose you all know about that should cross all Central America to Panama. Well the most logic would be a straight line from the US border to Mexico City but Hank González and his group that as mentioned are into transportation of course could see the advantage of having a highway just outside the door in stead of driving hundred kilometres on dirt roads before you get to a decent road, so they started their lobbying and relations within the PRI in order to get the Mexican government to make the highway make a huge turn in order to pass right outside Atlacomulco.

In this municipality the mayor is priista as all the former mayors. In the late eighties and beginning of the nineties the PRI had to implement the decentralising politics as a consequence of pressure both from external actors as the international organizations as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and certainly because of internal pressure from the civil society. This opens new spaces for new actors to negotiate a place in the political area.

The opening gave rise to implement same rights to other political parties in this municipality. The PRD (the left wing party) and the PAN (the right wing party). I will though in this exposition ignore a little the movement or political strategies of these two political parties because I believe that one of the most important indications of the existence of the democratic process is to be found within the PRI itself.

Although this opening in the rest of Mexico seemed to impact very much the democratisation, Atlacomulco just seemed to stay the same, no change at all the same politicians, the same disputes and the same clientelistic system and relations taking care of the necessary governmental issues. All within the control of the Group of Atlacomulco.

As I said the democratisation isn't just a governmental issue on the contrary as we also just heard from Mario it does require a profound intervention from the civil society in the decision making processes in the political institutions. As argued within the majority of research done on democratic theory the citizen's participation in the decision making process is essential to legitimize the governmental programs and on the contrary the decisions makers respect towards the ones that these decisions affect.

Well, in Atlacomulco even though apart from the political party PRI other political parties are represented in the political arena. The two national political parties PAN and PRD and they all participate actively in the campaigns and elections even though they still aren't well established as a real political alternative to PRI among the population which is mainly because of the strong patron-client relations and traditions in the area. That would indicate that there isn't any change or sight of democratisation in this municipality or the others as long as PRI is in power as government.

As part of the democratisation the transparency is a important factor: each political party has to realize internal elections between the different candidates to elect the one candidate running for the elections,

it is done by voting between the members in the party and that way PRI also implemented the transparency politics required as part of the democratisation.

Within PRI in which I will focus this paper there are two fractions or groups. One which has very close connections to the Group of Atlacomulco and is promoted, financed by this group, and another which is headed by the Cronista or historian in the municipality and its members counts several recognized intellectuals. In various levels they represent very distinct ideologies within the PRI. These two groups sort of divide and has almost always done the regional power, they agreed on rotating the job as mayor. It means that whenever one group has the political power as mayor for three years, the other group is in charge and has its representative as president in the regional PRI political party. This kind of rotation between these two groups has been going on since the sixties.

Then in the municipality elections in 2000 -the same year as PAN or Vicente Fox won the presidential power in Mexico and broke with 70 years of national PRI government – the municipality elections in Atlacomulco made a radical turn.

It was supposed to be the Group of Atlacomulco who should be in power as mayor when the Cronista group, the other group, decides to launch a candidate for mayor as well and decide to use their democratic right to challenge the official PRI candidate by proposing another candidate for the PRI candidature.

The Cronista group takes this decision basically because they suddenly see a lot of opportunities: the candidate from the Group of Atlacomulco is not known at all within the politics, he is a hard core business man and now very rich which doesn't exactly is a positive aspect in the electoral campaign and I believe basically well he would like to see his name in the list of politicians, AND another important point is that in these elections the national pressure is quite hard on PRI because of the increasing support to the competing political party, PAN and Vicente Fox. Although the Group of Atlacomulco makes a deal with the Cronista Group after a couple of weeks of intensive nasty campaigns. The Atlacomulco group accepts contracting two members more for the local government from the Cronista group and this group will leave the Group of Atlacomulco in power as mayor as first originally decided. Of course this just didn't happen overnight but lead to a lot of nasty accusations within the political party itself and between the different candidates from the other political parties as well. All though the

interesting point is that another candidate emerge as a consequence. A few people see the opening of the political space and benefit.

A little group of only five people to begin with decided, formerly belonging to the Cronista group to promote a third candidate even though they didn't had the economic resources to a big campaign compared to the other two. Their candidate was a local well know doctor, he had been practising for twenty years, very kind in all sense of the word, helping the marginalised and needed people in the municipality, a PRIista all his life. For example he is the only doctor (of fifteen) that attends the ethnic group, the Mazahuas, which is twenty percent of the population in the municipality and therefore very important votes in the end if the made it to the poling stands!! As the other candidate he didn't either have political experiences or any political formation but he was well known and furthermore very much into justice criticising the existing way of how politics where realised by PRI, as said the people knew what he was standing for by his everyday practises and way of life.

From the very beginning of course the two Groups just ignored his presence; they didn't even take him into account in debates, official meetings and for interviews with the Medias.

But he made his own campaign; attracting a lot of people, minor organisations as the women's associations and the more marginalised organisations that never had any space for or possibility for influence in the existing political space. After a month also some intellectuals and other impresarios from the originally Cronista Group joined his campaign and even financing part of his campaign. Then he suddenly succeeded in representing more than just the marginalised traditionally understood as the persons without real influence but also people without a lot of resources. He then quickly became a symbol of resistance towards the existing system and the local caciques represented in the two groups. A lot of the people that had felt ignored in the last elections and didn't even bother to vote now suddenly had a candidate with who they can identify.

All too late PRI realises the joker candidate's power and possibilities. They cannot negotiate with him at the same conditions without loosing control and showing weakness. The dispute ends in the regional PRI institutions that try to reject the joker candidate but for two weeks the different organisations and the Mazahua people etc.. organise demonstrations and here I am not only talking about the Mazahuas but also the different groups and organisations of women at a regional level saw an opportunity to be heard and get influence through this joker, they start organizing first demonstrations in front of the

municipality, and for weeks they demonstrate in front of the offices in State's capital demanding justice and transparency. They cause a lot of problems for PRI because the Media starts to get interested in the case.

The PRI has to allow the joker candidate in the campaign. In the internal elections of course he doesn't win at all but it isn't either the important element. The point to make is in the presence and possibility to create spaces for new actors in the political arena and that an politically and economically important group as the group of Atlacomulco also needs to play by the rules within the civil society that they themselves are dependent of the society and their decisions that they need to take into consideration is quite surprisingly which I have tried to show by this brief analysis.

Another important aspect of the analysis is the everyday forms of life and practices essential influence on how the democratisation process is slowly and silently taking shape and forms the citizens. By participating in the everyday practices they challenge the existing power structures. And in this particular case and in the other municipalities where PRI still is in power and has majority the civil society and its participation are making the governments change and listening to satisfy a more demanding civil society.