

Responsibility and the Irresponsible

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How we Mexicans conduct ourselves has always caught my attention, such as blocking traffic by double parking, a political party advocating absurd and counterproductive bills, or a hotel entrepreneur destroying a wilderness area to add more rooms for guests. Why are Mexicans so endowed with behaviors that openly appear to be irresponsible, harmful to everyone, except to the immediate person engaging in them?

The essence of human freedom lies in each deciding according to his or her individual interest, whenever this does not affect third parties. Among the thousands of examples of irresponsible behavior or those patently injurious to the collective interests that can be observed daily in the country, the big problem is how to define that collective interest and who decides it. In a society where the rules of the game are perfectly delineated and establish what is fair and what is not, the third-party interest is plain; however, in a society in which those rules of the game are not clear or are styled so that there are no possible definitions, the collective interest is always diffuse. The key question is why Mexico does not have that unmistakable statement of meaning of the statutes or, expressed another way, what is it that drives and facilitates the adoption of irresponsible postures.

Another manner of posing this query is: What is it that renders it possible for no one to have to be responsible for their actions? It seems to me that there are two ways to respond to this, one generic and the other specific. On the generic side, there is no doubt that the country had changed a great deal in the last four decades: in that period there have been innumerable structural reforms, liberalizations, treaties, political pacts, electoral reforms and negotiations of all types that have transformed the economic, political and social panorama. Some approve of these changes, others decry them, but the change is real.

What is interesting from my perspective is that, despite all of those changes and transformations, the basic paradigm of the country's governance has varied little. Allow me to explain: many of the changes undergone have modified the structure of power through the electoral system and altered the economic system through the liberalization of imports. Notwithstanding this, the criterion that incited all of those reforms, and that continues to orient decisions to date, is up-to-down vertical control. Regardless of the fact that many hard-fought elections are held, the form of governing continues to be that of imposition; the economy has been liberalized, but not for all things. An example speaks more than a thousand words: the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the main engine of the Mexican economy, constitutes an exceptional regime in the country because it is perfectly regimented in terms of the Rule of Law, but it only applies to companies that comply with certain criteria. All the rest of us Mexicans live under a regime of changing occurrences according to who is in power.

With regard to the specific, but derived from the logic of control, the system of government was designed from the beginning in the thirties of the past century so that only the individual in control would be

responsible. That is, the government that emanated from the PRIist system was in charge of security, economic progress, social order and the future. Thus, the government was (is?) responsible for the country's entirety. That responsibility was derived from the nearly absolute exercise of power that characterized the Calles-Cárdenas system; power and responsibility go hand in hand: the greater the concentration of power, the greater the responsibility of the government. No wonder Ayotzinapa fell on the president's lap.

Seen from the other side of the fence, the Mexican has no reason to be responsible. The government orders, the government imposes and changes the rules: therefore, no one outside the government is responsible and everyone is free to do what he likes. And, furthermore, does.

The case of Ayotzinapa is the consummate case-in-point; had it happened during the Fox presidential term, the affair would have stayed in its place, where it belongs: in the municipality of Iguala. Fox did not attempt to control everything, thus he washed his hands of all responsibility. The present government attempts to control everything, which makes everything end up being its responsibility.

It is obvious that in this era no one can control everything, the reason why the mere pretension is preposterous. The sole possible solution lies in a paradigm shift.

The recent change of view in the matter of drugs unleashes a rare opportunity because it entails a new paradigm that can extend itself to the whole governmental system. When something is prohibited, the responsibility for compliance with the law falls to the government; when it is permitted, each person is responsible. In the case of drugs, from now on parents will have to be responsible for their own lives and for those of their children: for educating the latter and for showing them the costs and risks of drug addiction. This implies that, at least in the issue of drugs, individuals will have to take charge of their acts and respond to the consequences of these.

Well orchestrated, this novel outlook could become the beginning of a new political paradigm, one that sets out from the principle that each is responsible, in politics as well as in the economy and the society; that each has to pay the price of their excesses and that the authority is there to institute clear rules and enforce their adherence. An enormous opportunity.

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