

# SOCIAL CHANGE, UNIVERSITY AND URBAN MIDDLE CLASSES: THE CASE OF UNAM

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The evolutionary scheme of the Latin American state university is closely related to the great political and social changes in these nations.

In the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), as in its Hispanic American counterparts, great changes have taken place that first reflect the transition from a pre-industrial and agrarian to a predominantly urban developing society later the transition resulting from globalization. The first kind of society corresponds to a university for the elite, with a handful of faculties, and study plans that are rigidly directed towards the formation of the liberal professions. The goal of this university is the professional degree.

In the last century, with the rise of the middle classes and the industrialization of the Latin American countries, the elitist university no longer answered the educational needs of the masses (Trowe 1970). The large national universities underwent an uncontrollable numerical expansion corresponding to the growth of the middle classes and new degree courses were developed that were adapted to the needs of a more complex economy and a more dynamic society. In Mexico, large university campuses were built containing all the faculties, schools and institutes that previously functioned in different parts of the city, with the consequent concentration of large student masses. Institutes were founded dedicated to scientific research, artistic creation and cultural diffusion. These existed as parallel organisms that were independent of the original faculties and assumed functions of growing importance for national development. Employment in the world of academia became a profession apart and was no longer merely the responsibility of former graduates of the liberal professions—such as doctors, engineers and lawyers—who dedicated a fraction of their time to university teaching (Brunner 1985). Parallel to this evolution, the large national Latin American universities, while maintaining their functions as centers of criticism and study, had become ideological battle grounds (López Cámara 1974: 3).

In this paper we put forward a dynamic model of the internal process at the UNAM, vis-à-vis its connection with the national socio-political system. We start from the basis that the functions of the university within the national system are not limited to strictly academic concerns, such as teaching, research and cultural

diffusion, but also include some more important implicit functions. These allow the control of social mobility, stimulate and channel social criticism and create the ideological, ethical and political bases of the Mexican nation. Some of these functions may interfere with others, especially in the case of explicit and implicit functions, and cause conflicts between various groups or currents with contrasting ideas about what the University should be. We propose making a description of the dynamics of the UNAM in terms of the contradictions produced between the different functions performed by the University vis-à-vis the national system.

#### THE ORIGINS OF CONFLICTS

Internal conflicts within the University can be interpreted as (open or latent) struggles between several currents personifying different University projects. These different projects can be summarized in two main currents: the first promotes a type of university that is productive and the transmitter of knowledge. It is “the territory for study, critical reflection and discussion... an interpersonal community concentrating on truth as a fundamental value, and the organization of professional preparation that is to form and specialize groups in society”. The second, in contrast, sees the University as a place for public training and social criticism (Pérez Correa, 1974, 375).

This conflict of goals tends to take the form of a struggle between political forces. What Pérez Correa has referred to as “projects” are not only abstract ideals but also real and present functions that the UNAM is already carrying out. They are the components of this “political-academic duality; this internal tension between the academic objectives of the University. They define a specific form of rationality and specific political characteristics and their call for a growing amount of attention (from the university authorities).” (ibid)

What are the functions of the National Autonomous University of Mexico in relation to the national system? Its explicit functions are easily definable, since they are stipulated as an obligation in Organic Law. These are to give classes, carry out research and diffuse culture. These functions primarily include the training and preparation of professionals. A very high percentage of the leaders and bureaucrats in the public and private sectors, in national politics and in the liberal professions are graduates of the UNAM. Over time, work in scientific research and cultural diffusion has increased in importance, to the point that the UNAM is now the most important cultural and scientific center in the country.

As for its implicit functions, these include all of the University functions that are not otherwise stipulated either in Organic Law or in the University Statutes but that respond to the pressures or needs of the national system. Among these, we would particularly like to emphasize the following:

- a) *Social mobility*. The University is considered to be the main force in upward mobility for thousands of young people who want to join the middle classes or improve

their position within this class (Lopez Camara 1974: "Las voces del CEU: 1987). The social mobility offered by the university is not merely contained within the degree qualification itself, but also in the huge opportunities for social contact with fellow students and teachers. The social networks established by the student in the course of his period at the UNAM represent a very important socio-economic resource for the graduate. The same thing occurs in the vast majority of Latin American state universities (Brunner 1985: 49-62; Garcia Salord 1998)

- b) *Control of the urban labor market.* The postponement for several years of the entry of large numbers of young middle class people into the urban labor market is a function of control over access to occupations with a high demand for labor, and of regulation of the growth of the middle class itself. (Pérez Correa op. Cit. 1974)
- c) *Political and social criticism.* In a political system which has only recently permitted institutionalized forms of dissent, the function of the University as a source of criticism has acquired an essential importance. In its most constructive aspects, this function represents a very valuable mechanism for fostering social change and an integrating element for the national conscience of Mexico. In the years following the Mexican Revolution, when the country was fragmented into various ethnic, political and regional groups, the National University played an important role in uniting outstanding exponents of Mexican culture in its classrooms as part of a conscious effort to create new national values (Madrazo Garmendi 1970). During the central decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the most important function of the National University was expressed through the intellectual productivity of its members and through the criticism expressed by this group. According to Monsivais (1973), in Mexico, social criticism could still serve as an escape valve allowing for the relatively inoffensive liberation of tensions generated within the national system and which could otherwise pose a threat to it.

Since the political and economic reforms that have been carried out over the last few decades —and which have introduced reforms aimed at a greater democratization of society and simultaneously changes to its economic structure (neoliberalism)— the parties have mainly absorbed criticism received at the national level, while in the universities it has been the students who have criticized the economic direction of the country, defending their work prospects and possibilities for social mobility.

- d) *Battle ground.* The UNAM has frequently been a political battle ground, as much in the figurative sense as in the real sense of the concept. The particular conditions of student coexistence offer numerous opportunities to professionals and students to participate in party activities connected with university life. For example, the transformation of the elite university into a university for the masses has produced the need for changes with regard to such practical matters as budgets, entrance requirements, fees, the offer of professional studies, and the quality of teaching. All of this has produced student reactions which have regularly developed into

large-scale movements that have frequently overflowed beyond the university boundaries and affected urban life both physically and politically. The political struggles of the UNAM are rather like mediaeval tournaments, in which enrolled champions with different motivations publicly mediate their differences. The UNAM territory was, and still remains, an ideal forum for this type of struggle due to its relative political and geographic autonomy, even when the city itself is now often used as a battleground.

- e) *Trainers of political leaders* Apart from its function as a battlefield on which different national and university political currents can test their strength, the UNAM also serves as a training ground for political leaders of every leaning. A high percentage of Mexico's political leaders are graduates of the University and gained their first political spurs there (in 1999, the four pre-candidates for President of the Republic for the PRI and the PRD were all graduates of the UNAM).

The internal dynamics of the University therefore occur within a territory characterized by a series of conflicts involving the divergent, and sometimes frankly contradictory, functions that the national system has explicitly or implicitly imposed on the UNAM. These functions are sustained by opposing forces that fight for and defend their own separate views of what a university should be. For example, the UNAM is at present the main center for generating the country's scientific research (Malo y Garza 1987). There is a need to create a solid scientific and technological basis with which to successfully face up to pressures and demands from the large technology-generating centers. Free expression is given to all types of internal political opinion within the UNAM, even though some of this may oppose this need and indeed interrupt and distract the scientific and teaching teams from their work. Another example, in its dual role as a melting pot for the national conscience and a source of critical sentiment and spirit, the UNAM has become a *sui generis* political factor whose control is coveted by several external forces. If they achieve their aim, some of these forces could endanger the very autonomy of the university as they have designs over many of the implicit functions that this institution currently performs.

#### THE FORMAL STRUCTURE

In 1997 there were 268,615 students at the National Autonomous University of Mexico which is one of the largest universities in the world. The academic personnel totals 29,979 of which 4,890 are full time teachers and 1,929 are researchers. There are also 27,477 administrative workers. Apart from the "bachillerato" (high school), it also offers technical preparation, undergraduate degree courses, postgraduate courses, masters and doctoral degrees. It includes 4 independent professional schools and 15 high schools, Preparatory Schools and Colleges of Sciences and Humanities. Each of these bodies has its own campus and establishments located in different parts of Mexico City. In other words, apart from the University City, which houses 150,000

students, faculties and institutes, there are another 4 university campuses and 15 preparatory schools. In 1997 the annual budget for this institution was 6,483,262,268 million pesos (Statistical Agenda, 1997, UNAM).

Since 1944, the internal organization of the UNAM has been made up of the following authorities: the *Board of Governors*, which appoints the Principal and the Deans. Its 15 members are elected by the *University Council* or by the Board itself. The University Council is a collegial body whose members are: the Principal, the Deans of the schools, faculties or institutes, UNAM teachers and students' representatives, representatives of the continuous university centers, representatives of the University employees and the General Secretary. The *Principal* represents the UNAM and presides over the University Council. There is also a *Board of Trustees* that administers the University's patrimony (3 people) and the Deans of the faculties, schools and institutes, who are proposed by the Principal and assigned by the Board of Governors. There are also *Science and Humanities Coordinators* (assigned by the Principal), and their respective *Technical Councils* that function as consultative organs. Finally the organs that constitute the *College of Science and Humanities* and the *National Preparatory School* are as follows: coordinators, directive committees, technical councils, directors and the internal council for each site; the organs of the Open University, with their academic commission, coordination and the divisions of the system (Valades 1974).

With the growth of the UNAM, this administrative structure has become even more complicated. In the faculties, schools and institutes there are heads of departments, internal councils and other functionaries assigned by the Dean or designated by the teachers and/or students. Faced with the growing internal complexity, the authorities and the academic-administrative functionaries particularly concentrate on conciliating the opposing interests of successive hierarchical levels and of the different academic and political groups. It is a political system that seeks to balance forces and thereby ensure stability in order to safeguard institutional values.

#### “CAREERS” WITHIN THE UNAM

We use the term “career” to designate a functional specialization in relation to the national system. Every individual who passes through the University undertakes a training program that is not limited to the contents of a plan of studies but rather embraces a series of activities and experiences that enable him to carry out a determined role within the national system. So, as in ancient Tenochtitlan, where there were well-defined “careers” for priests, warriors, traders, workers and craftsmen, in the UNAM we can distinguish between the formal academic careers that tend to coincide with the University's explicit goals and other careers related to implicit functions, such as more political activities.

Those who follow a specific “career” tend to defend their group interests, which normally contrast with those of other careers. For example, pressure from different

political groups may paralyze the University for certain lengths of time, which in turn tends to affect academic levels. On the other hand, the traditional resistance of academics (researchers and full-time teachers) to any kind of political participation places a barrier of inertia between the political groups and their objectives. In this article and with the aim of simplifying references to this kind of conflict, we shall limit our analysis to four main “careers”: *academic*, *professional*, *political*, and *shock troop* careers.

Each of these tends to form a social group with its own characteristics, internal structure, initiation rites, norms and values. In other words, each has its own mechanisms for integrating new members into a specific role of national life. All of these “careers” coexist in the UNAM and have developed to a greater or lesser extent according to the historical moment of the University.

### *The academics*

We call “academics” those members of the university community who show an inclination for research and teaching as a way of life during their student years. Academics are specifically related to the explicit functions of the University and, on finishing their formal studies, tend to join the academic personnel of the UNAM or of other universities and/or centers for higher level studies. There are 6,819 researchers and full-time teachers at the UNAM (Agenda Estadística 1997, UNAM).

The scarce resources and the various conflicts that prevail in the UNAM have not impeded the formation of small nuclei of students with a good academic formation, and these are absorbed by the country’s universities and higher education centers, including the UNAM itself. This has been made possible by a rather efficient, if extra-official, semi-tutorial system. Some of the best students, particularly those interested in scientific education and who catch their teachers’ attention during the last years of their degree studies are effectively recruited as academics. Their teachers supervise their theses, help them to obtain scholarships and take them on as assistants. The majority of the present researchers at the UNAM (and many of the most outstanding professionals in the country) have passed through an informal period of apprenticeship, directed by a research professor, who has subsequently recommend them for an academic position (Lomnitz, 1976).

When he is promoted to become a member of the academic personnel in an institute or faculty, the new researcher or teacher confronts the realities of the academic career at the UNAM. He also plays his part in creating the scientific and technological infrastructure of the country. There are nuclei of researchers pledged to laying the foundations of a scientific tradition, with all the ups and downs that this involves (Fortes and Lomnitz, 1991). On the other hand, due to the dominance of vertical relations in the University structure —and in the country— the personal career of the academic leads him to occupy academic-administrative positions, since

it is here that the main form of material recognition and prestige lies. Paradoxically, to progress as a researcher one has to stop doing research.

Originally, the hierarchical positions within the University, including that of the Principal, were occupied by members of the professions. However, during the last few years, with the rise of the academic career, it is the researchers and full-time teachers who have become predominant in the university administration. When an academic becomes the head of a department or dean, he automatically becomes a member of the circle of authority that controls the destiny of one of the largest universities in the world. Among other attributes, he must be capable of obtaining the budgetary resources and the institutional support of his superiors and distributing this in the best possible way among his subordinates. In practice, this role turns the authorities into mediators who resolve conflicts of interest, through the concessions given to both sides. They represent their subordinates before higher authorities and vice versa. In other words, they are the links between the successive hierarchical levels of the university structure, absorbing an administrative weight from above and cushioning the aggression and unrest from below in order to ensure the normal functioning of the system (Lomnitz 1984).

Academics appointed to administrative posts are leaders who often develop their political skills in a rather improvised fashion due to the demands of their position. In accordance with their performance, they may be promoted to more elevated positions, which require increasingly more demanding political talents. In some cases they may even become part of the state technocracy.

The academic leaders' work has become increasingly difficult, not only because of the growth in numbers at the UNAM, but also due to the rise of informal types of power groups (that is, of groups not initially contemplated by the Organic Law) whose leaders base their power of negotiation on the importance of the potential problems that they could cause the authorities. As Caso explained in 1945, "The university authorities have always had this double character of political authorities. On one hand they need to be able to rely on popularity and group support, while on the other, they have the character of technical authorities who resolve the problems of teaching and scientific organization from a purely objective point of view (cited by Pérez Correa, *op. Cit.* 1974: 379)

### *The Professionals*

Due to their orientation towards the outside world (from the perspective of the UNAM), the professionals are perhaps the group that has most suffered the consequences of conflicting objectives and functions in the University. Although demands for an effective reform of professional formation in Latin American Universities date back to the Córdoba Movement in 1918 (Portantiero 1978: 30, 58-102), these continued throughout the past century in almost all Latin American universities.



The Córdoba Manifesto included complaints about the following problems relating to teaching: absenteeism, lack of punctuality and irresponsibility on the part of the teachers; deficient preparation of classes; negligence on the part of the teachers with respect to keeping up with their assignments or in maintaining a relationship with the real world. All of this continues to a greater or lesser extent in some professional schools in the UNAM (Carpizo, 1986). The high proportion of part-time teachers, whose occupations outside the University stop them from dedicating the necessary time to their teaching, may produce a fossilization of the study program due to a lack of teacher contact with research centers, which are where new scientific and technical findings are produced and diffused. On the other hand, the part-time teachers are frequently outstanding professionals whose practical knowledge of their profession is indispensable for the student. These teachers both stimulate professional ideals through leading by example and identify and attract the best students to train in companies, doctors' surgeries, legal firms, and the public administration. This type of tutorial supervision represents an important complement to teaching and at the same time a form of selective recruitment to the profession. From the period of studies onwards, professionals are directed, above all, towards a career outside the UNAM. Nevertheless, they maintain important relations with it through teaching and professional associations and represent important political pressure groups. The political weight and influence of professionals, such as doctors, engineers, architects, and economists is felt at the national level as well as within the UNAM itself.

In general, these groups reflect the tendency of professionals to mainly identify the University with their own technical-administrative objectives (with the possible exception of those professions that contain an important proportion of professional politicians, such as lawyers and economists). The great majority of undergraduate students belong to the technical-professional faculties<sup>1</sup> and their part-time teachers represent a large group that has a considerable influence within the academic community. The professional careers offer a contrast to the current that aspires to a greater politicization of the UNAM. On the other hand, the group of professionals that eventually join the academic personnel of the UNAM as researchers or full-time teachers is relatively small. The professional faculties offer the main route to social mobility and entry into the middle class, although there is a high level of desertion during the undergraduate years. There is evidence of "implosion" in the majority of these faculties; students take a long time to graduate and some never fulfill all of the requisites to do so. Among these requisites is the presentation of a professional thesis (Carpizo 1986). Theoretically, these sub-professionals continue to be students of the UNAM, but in practice they join the professional work market as "*pasantes*" (who

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1. In the 1985-1986 cycle, 136,870 undergraduate students were registered. Of these 51,046 belonged to the following faculties: Accountancy and Administration, 15,286; Engineering 12,104; Law 10,426; Philosophy and Literature, 7,022 and Medicine, 6,609.



have completed their course work, but not written their thesis). This phenomenon tends to create a mass of sub-professionals in Mexico, who have an incomplete or deficient preparation, who join the ranks of the public or private bureaucracy and generally perform technical-type work.<sup>2</sup> It has been observed that the professional faculties that offer the worst employment perspectives for their graduates are also the ones characterized by the highest degrees of political unrest.

### *The politicians*

The “politicians” are those members of the university community who, from their student days on, show an active interest in politics and participate in demonstrations either in favor of or against the present political system, or who represent different factions within official or university politics. The politicians are connected with that current that considers that a primordial—or even essential—function of the UNAM is its commitment to the country’s political reality.

Within the University there are different kinds of political action. On the one hand there is political “activism”, characterized by a range of activities such as attending assemblies and meetings and distributing leaflets. Another form of political action, which is less conspicuous but more in accord with traditional Mexican political culture, is that of “amiguismo” (the utilization of friendship) which is exercised through personal connections. Neither style is necessarily connected to the idea of class struggle, but rather to more local scale “struggles” between leaders, middle class strata or different generations and professional groups.

Some new undergraduates already have already had some experience in political organizations within their high schools. Others are attracted by political activity and gravitate towards group participation of various different types. The university preparatory schools, including the College of Science and Humanities (CCH), were represented in elections for student societies and in public speaking competitions. From these came leaders and political nuclei involving the whole political spectrum, from the extreme left to the extreme right. For some years after 1968, the main breeding grounds for leaders were the Combat Committees of the different university faculties. Thereafter, there followed a period of student passivity (García Salord, 1985: 52-55).

Once in the great melting pot, that is the UNAM student mass, the “politicians” are influenced by contradictory forces: the ebb and flow of national politics, the demands of academic life and their intellectual and affective evolution itself. Connections

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2. These tendencies to sub-preparation and market loss by UNAM professionals (the dispute at the UNAM 1987) have become more marked in the last few years, as can be seen in numerous company advertisements that clearly indicate that “UNAM graduates need not apply”. This has produced a boom in private universities, and particularly in the preparation of the traditional professions (Medicine, Veterinary Studies, Medicine, and Law, etc.). However academics and politicians still continue to come from the UNAM, as indeed do members of the state bureaucracy (Meyer & Lomnitz, 1987).

with the past are continually broken and new loyalties are created. Eventually, only a small group constitutes the “politician’s” field of action, and from here are recruited the activists, who are mobilized according to the situation (specific problems). It should be pointed out that the career of “politician” is as demanding as that of the “academic” and that, on the last rungs of either career, there is rarely enough time to dedicate to both at once. Leaders, whether academic or political, completely devote themselves to their respective vocations. We can therefore observe that the political movements greatly reduce the University’s academic demands.

The structure of the political groups generally produces a leader (although there have been exceptions in mass movement situations) surrounded by an upper layer of confidantes and supported by activists who meet and work together regularly but are not exclusively dedicated to politics. Progress within these groups depends on loyalty, the level of their dedication and their capacity for leadership. The political leader should have certain specific characteristics and qualities. Apart from being smart and charismatic, he should be well-informed, which is an essential attribute in a system of restricted information where rumor is frequently the basis of political life.

One of the functions of the traditional political leader consists of maintaining personal relations with the university bureaucracy, which enables him to intervene in conflicts between students and the authorities on such affairs as registration, rights to examinations, career changes and complaints concerning various academic problems affecting students. Eventually the leader becomes a mediator who is well-known to both sides and acquires a personal niche within the university power structure. Through dealings with the faculty and school’s management his prestige grows and this in turn attracts more followers. From the authority’s point of view, the political leader ensures student tranquility which is a basic resource and an important negotiating card for the leader. Within the university and the national political context, the leader also participates in the game of tactical analysis and strategic confrontation between rival groups that constitutes the most visible part of UNAM political life. But the most essential quality of a leader is his talent and ability to capture and channel the real unrest among the bases and to translate the aspirations and objective problems of the students into words and actions.

According to Smith (1979), 70% of Mexican higher level political leaders are UNAM graduates and some political groups that are initially formed by students later form “camarillas” (networks) within national political life. “If a young Mexican were to ask me what the ways of maximizing his possibilities of entering politics were and of joining and remaining within the system as it is, I would recommend the following: first make sure that he has a university degree and preferably that it is from the UNAM. A university degree is an almost indispensable condition for admission to the national elite, particularly at its higher levels, and the UNAM is an appropriate territory to establish contacts with other political aspirants and to form camarillas (networks)” (Smith, 1979).

On the other hand, politicians opposed to the traditional regime have assumed important positions in the new opposition parties such as the Party for Democratic Revolution (PRD), thus repeating the traditional pattern of the political career.

### *The shock troops*

Since the 1960s, there have been small groups of UNAM students organized into juvenile gangs who stand out, in spite of their reduced number, as representatives of a life career that is quite different from those already described. The best known example is that of those commonly known as “porros” (unsuccessful students who have become infiltrators) and who make themselves available to circumstantial pressure groups who give them resources and assignments. The activities of the shock troops are essentially criminal. When they are not acting on behalf of one or another political group they dedicate their time to assault and theft. Nevertheless, they are more than mere delinquents since they are connected with an implicit function of the university: that of serving as a battlefield for certain political struggles. As such, the shock troops often achieve a disproportionate degree of notoriety with respect to their real force in specific crises within the UNAM.

Because of its complexity this subject can only be treated in a very superficial way here. Generally, it can be said that these groups are connected with the University’s implicit functions. They reflect the different political styles which have been used within it. Thus, since 1968, for example, we can observe a greater use of populist left-wing vocabulary among shock troops. This has contributed to the disorientation and political passivity of the student masses, generally due to the confusion of symbols. Originally the shock troops were used by the university authorities themselves. Later, they were managed by politicians outside the University. Since the 1970s, a new generation of politicians has appeared that combines the use of shock troops with a language corresponding to more modern ideas. Finally, there are gangs that have preferred not to be connected with politics but rather with drugs or delinquency in general.

Until 1970, the “porro”-style shock troop usually appeared in the preparatory schools and their socio-economic composition was predominantly poor (Guitain Berniser 1975: 115-118). Their members were young rebels, whose value system tended to accompany crime with an attitude of challenging the bourgeois values of the middle class, and they were generally respectee by the rest of the student population. This attitude was based on the “machismo” ideology and frequently made the “porros” cultural heroes, even against their will, amongst many middle class preparatory students.

The “porro” leader came to the fore in disputes that generally involved the use of force. He was characteristically intelligent, well-informed, skilled and shrewd. He controlled discipline and the distribution of booty and until recently was effectively above the law. Due to his contacts with other gangs (not necessarily within the

university, since there are other very similar gangs in poor areas) the leader could mobilize quite a considerable shock force when necessary. Within the university, or in preparatory schools, shock troop leaders presented themselves as mediators and their power was usually predominantly based on explicit intimidation. The leader's power was transferred to the organization's base in the shape of "favors" that he could confer at will and these favors were later repaid when, for example, a meeting or an event was organized.

The eventual careers of shock troop members depended on their hierarchical ability within the group. Some ended up in the police forces or performing subordinate functions in politics. Others followed the path to crime and its sequel of prison, exile and death. Some "porros" have been rehabilitated, but for the majority it seems to be a rigid "career" with few options from the moment of recruitment to the termination of their function in the system.

Since the 1980s, the porros have effectively ceased to operate as political shock troops. Even so, they remain a part of other public universities and reappear at moments of crisis since the vertical structure of the gang with its leaders and followers continues among the young people at the high school level. We therefore saw unidentified groups of pseudo-students who apparently functioned as shock troops, and who were associated with power groups external to the University appear during the 1999 student conflicts alongside the traditional leaders and political groups. Thus, even when we might say that the "career" of "porro" has now been phased out by the growing academic demands of the University, this group is still one that has to be taken into account, especially due to the influence that it has at certain national political junctures, its consequent instability, and its effect upon the student body.

#### SOME STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The significance of the four careers described above; academic, professional, politician and shock trooper, is to be found in the implicit and explicit functions of the UNAM. Each of these careers supports, and to a certain extent personifies, one of the two main currents of opinion as to what the UNAM should be: a community for study and preparation, or a base for political action, either to transform society or to support the dominant system.

Until now, the UNAM authorities have worked on the assumption that these two currents or plans of action are fundamentally compatible. Even when the Organic Law appears to favor only the first of the two currents, the stability of the system imposes conciliation between the two. As a consequence of the system of mediation prevalent in the University and the country (Lomnitz, 1985), formal and informal leaders participate in this process of give and take at many different levels: among successive hierarchical steps of the academic ladder; among different interest groups; and in contacts between leaders of different "careers". Within the system,

it is possible to observe both vertical intermediation among different level power grades and the interplay of alliances and horizontal exchanges.

There are internal structural parallels among the different careers. In each case, we observe the formation of groups with similar interests that spring from the confused and non-differentiated mass of politically and academically disorientated students. The University is like a large melting pot, containing this amorphous mass that cannot understand what is happening nor decide with whom to identify. With the great majority of UNAM students, the habitual reaction is passivity. In periods of conflict, for the majority, the University represents a tangle of confusion and contradiction in which there is not enough available information to distinguish between the different symbols and those who wield them. A "student movement", as such, only truly crystallizes on exceptional occasions.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1929, the mass has generally mobilized only for passing contingencies liable to be translated into short term negotiable positions for its leaders. The concrete achievements of these movements have been considerably reduced by the time that they reach the mass level, which partly explains the skepticism and apolitical attitude of the student "silent majority".

Once a group is formed, its structure is very similar, no matter which career it is identified with. There is a leader with characteristics that meet the demands of the specific career and generate loyalty. Immediately below the leader, we find the first level of trusted aides, followed by a second level, and so on. Social proximity to the leader is a basic factor for solidarity, whether we are talking about a research work group, or a professional, political or shock troop group. We could therefore describe the University as a structure composed of several pyramid groups, some of which are formal and some of which are not, that coexist within a mediation system and compete for the resources available to this system. It also reflects the power structure and the political culture of the Mexican system (Lomnitz, 1982).

The formal authorities of the UNAM spring from the academic and professional careers. They are representatives of the main current and implement the explicit function of the University. But their implicit functions also include ensuring the system's political stability and because of this they have to meet with informal leaders on a transitional level. Political stability, as a previous condition to teaching, research and cultural diffusion, which are the UNAM's explicit goals, finally becomes an end in itself and the cardinal principle of both the university and national system (Reyna, 1974).

If the primordial aim of the formal authorities is to ensure the system's stability, the informal leaders' aim is to fight to obtain access to the system's resources for

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3. In the last 35 years there have been four large movements; 1966, 1968 and its sequels in 1987 and 1999.

groups that do not initially have it and to thus obtain social mobility for the new ascending groups of the middle and working classes.<sup>4</sup> The main card that informal leaders hold against the authorities is their capacity to de-stabilize the system through their previous training in exploiting deprivation and focuses of social unrest.

These sources of perturbation spring from real problems, which is why the behavior of the informal leaders can bring results and provoke changes which later help to preserve the system itself. If the result of negotiations leads to a transaction, the formal and informal functions of the University will have been simultaneously realized and leaders on both sides will have contributed to the consolidation of power within their respective groups.

For example, the rise in university trade union activity in the 1970s reflected a movement on the part of the administrative personnel and part-time teachers who were fighting for regulation of the work conditions of the growing mass of administrative personnel. At the time, they challenged the formal and academic leader, whose almost sacerdotal leadership, based on scholastic values, was perceived as authoritarian. The political leaders —at that time informal— picked up on objective work problems and politicized these through their union representations.

The result was an eventual negotiation between the university authorities and representative leaders. It culminated in the creation of two trade unions (that of the administrative personnel and of the academics). At the same time, it led to the creation of parallel structures through which the informal leadership was formalized i.e. with its formal inclusion in the university bureaucratic system.

In the following years (until 1968) the UNAM followed its course of growth (as a university of the masses), growing bureaucratization, academically-originated leadership and political passivity. However, the country's socio-economic problems, crises, growing unemployment, reduced prospects for social mobility among the middle classes, and constant demographic growth, all produced new conflicts. The 1986 movement, which mobilized more than 150,000 people in repeated public actions, posited the dilemma of maintaining an open and populist university with a very low level of academic preparation or trying to maintain the University's role in the formation of elite and middle professional groups, which the University had managed to maintain, albeit with increasing difficulty. In this conflict, the two traditional currents returned, representing a political (populist) university or an academic-professional university.

Structural neo-liberal style changes were introduced in Mexico from 1982 onwards, associated with a foreign debt crisis that implied a reduction in the state

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4. The 1986 movement arose principally out of the possible abolition of the 'automatic pass' of students at middle level high school (in grades 10, 11, and 12) belonging to the university system: this effectively endangered the access of thousands of UNAM undergraduate students. This immediate threat permitted the mobilization of thousands of 'bachillerato' students. In 1999, the student unrest was a consequence of the modification of the General Payment Regulations and an attempt to increase fees.

apparatus and a consequent reduction in jobs for UNAM graduates and a greater demand for the liberal professions and the production of knowledge applicable to the new needs created by globalization. The UNAM has now lost its prestige as the trainer of professionals for industry, which now recruits its personnel from the private universities which have increased in terms of campus numbers and student registrations in recent years. At the same time, this tendency has also been reflected in a change in the status of the elite, which now looks for technical specialists in economics, administration and international law, which the UNAM generally does not offer, rather than in politics (Lomnitz 1999).

These changes demand reforms in the UNAM, if it wants to continue being the “country’s most important center for studies”. Over the last few years, reforms have been introduced to restrict the massive growth of the University, decentralize its campuses and raise teaching standards and give more support to research. Among these changes, reforms were also introduced that affected university entrance and the duration of studies, limiting the automatic pass from high school into undergraduate studies. In 1999 an attempt was made to increase fees, up-dating them in line with inflation levels over the previous 40 years. This was what sparked off the present student movement which, in defense of free public education, rejects the “privatization” of the university and the government’s neo-liberal policy in pursuit of formal entry into the world of globalization. In this conflict we again witness the struggle between the political university and the academic one. On the one hand, society requires a university that offers a better quality of professional training and at the same time that continues to support high quality research. On the other, the student movement, now supported by new political parties from outside the University, is fighting to create a new more critical and open type of university, which is no longer only for the middle classes but also for those previously excluded. In other words, it has become a social movement that extends outside the University itself and whose demonstrations and political stances affect not only the campus but the entire city.<sup>5</sup>

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5. The 1999 movement lasted 8 months. The striking students took control of the main university campus (university city) and others installations by force: this included the 4 ENEPS and the 15 CCH. All classes were suspended with the consequent loss of the academic year for all students and some of the research institutes that were also closed. There were more than 40 student assemblies of 15 to 20 hours per assembly and some 20 marches to the city center with the consequent paralysis of city traffic.



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