Presentation

> "Jerónima Alba dedicates this altarpiece to Our Lady of San Juan de los Lagos for the release of her son, Manuel Núñez, from death at the hands of the huertista soldiers who beat him and took him to the garrison for sequestering a young woman; she commended him to this miraculous image, promising to bring an altarpiece if he was not taken from San Luis to war, and after she indulged the government with $63.00 [pesos], a few days later he was freed in November 1913. San Luis Potosí, December 1914".[1]

This woman's offering (*exvoto*), and the text that accompanies it, is a clear example of what is understood here as "everyday corruption", as a corruptor (Doña Jerónima) comes face-to-face with the corrupted (the authorities), though in all likelihood neither one considers that they are taking part in any kind of illegal act. This is what might be called, with some accuracy, "white corruption".[2] But this term does not appear, nor is the action reproduced in the pictograph: "She indulged the government with $63.00". Is that all? Just another "bribe" that were it not for the offering would have remained undetected amid the revolutionary maelstrom?

But what exactly does this altarpiece signify? First, it is an individual act, private up to a point, but one exposed in the public sphere of a church. Is it therefore an accusation? As far as Doña Jerónima is concerned —accompanied by her emaciated son and two daughters, captured in an act of thanksgiving— it is essentially an expression of

[1] Exvoto no. 493 in Thomas Calvo and Marianne Belard, *Mexico en un espejo. Los exvotos de San Juan de los Lagos,* CD-ROM, Mexico, UNAM-CEMCA, 2000.

[2] As opposed to "black corruption", clearly recognized by all, and the "gray" variety, which is ambiguous.

thanks to the *Virgen de San Juan* for a miracle or, at least, an act of protection. Undoubtedly, her comments on the brutality of the "*huertista* soldiers" and the 63 pesos expended are a thinly-veiled criticism that comes, of course, after the fall of the dictatorship. But this donor sees nothing more than that.

But an additional circumstance makes this offering exceptional. Usually, written accounts (dictated mainly by the donor) and painted versions (elaborated by a believer in miracles [*milagrero*]) go hand-in-hand, telling the same story. But this is far from true here, as there is no visual reference to the sequestering of the young woman, Manuel's imprisonment, or the bribe itself. Rather, the painted scene shows an urban landscape (San Luis Potosí?) with a splendid carriage surrounded by threatening guards. Inside, several people look out towards the crowd (*i.*e., ourselves). Only one woman (the young lady in question?) does not avert her gaze. What are we to think of this scene with its apparent disconnection from the events of the miracle itself"? Is it another allegory "of the car of the State" loaded with the well-off (and corrupt), protected by "public authority"? This is what the *milagrero* denounces in a veiled way, with the –apparently tacit– agreement of the mother/donor. While the authorities have their guards, she, a humble corruptor, has the protection of the Virgin.

As often occurs in such offerings, this document takes us beyond good and evil; corruption can also be studied in this way, by posing queries related to these forms of "discrete corruption", whether "bribes" taken by some subaltern official, frequent absenteeism by functionaries, stealing or adulterating property that belongs to the public treasury (medicines…). Instead of vituperating against corrupters and corrupted, who are often just links in a chain of circumstance, the event and its consequences must be denounced: *i.*e., the 63 pesos that passed from hand-to-hand and contributed to weakening the trust of citizens in their institutions.

But some will say that the negation of justice that acts of corruption constitute actually allowed a faster and more efficient ending to a first act of injustice (?), young Manuel's arrest. Seen in this light, it just applies a little oil to society's wheels. This is a timeworn argu-

ment, one long espoused by the wisdom of nations: there is the Anglo-Saxon expression *grease-the-wheels*, similar to the French *graisser-la-patte*. Classic Spanish (17th-18th centuries) is more ambiguous with its "*dar para guantes*": is this just exquisiteness on the part of the donor-corruptor… a means of freeing the receiver-corrupted from dirtying her/his hands?

Perhaps the wisdom reflected in Mexican refrains holds the answer. Given that bribes, the most common form of corruption, are a significant and longstanding social fact, it comes as no surprise that sayings contain invaluable testimonies that are reflected in every culture. Roman civilization, influenced by Greek philosophy, gave us this to ponder: "*corruptio optimi pessima*" (the corruption of the best is the worst of all). Having grappled with this phenomenon since the dawn of time, Moroccan society has become pessimistic: "that which is corruption will diffuse though it be bound in iron chains". The following saying shows cynicism and distrust in the face of social mechanisms: "the wheat the ox has plowed is eaten by the ass". These lapidary phrases bring us back to another traditional society (at least in its elder generations): the Mexican.

While the culture to which refrains refer is ancestral, it is one that rests upon a more or less measured experience and contains much subjectivity; even more in the face of something as destructive of collective trust and societal foundations as corruption. It is in this vein that Evangelina Tapia and Genaro Zalpa[3] present figures gleaned from the NGO *Transparencia Internacional*: Mexicans confront "a serious problem of corruption" that is becoming increasingly accentuated: the current index of distrust in the country ranks it 98th in a sample of 178 nations, in a group that includes many other Latin American nations, but not too distant from Italy (#67). So this is not just a question of development and wealth.

The relationship between refrain and corruption is so strong because both are associated with popular culture: 76% of Mexicans who regularly utter such sayings belong to so-called "subaltern" groups, those that because of their weakness and lack of protection

[3] Genaro Zalpa was the coordinator of the *Thematic Section* of this issue.

become victims, in their daily lives, of the abuses of those who hold power or authority, no matter how modest. Though immersed in the opaque and gray universe of bribes, nepotism and collusion, it is not always easy for them to identify and, above all, put a name to the reality of these manifestations. For this reason it is so important to analyze their language and unmask the corruption "camouflaged" in jargon and coined in the bronze of refrains. This verbal concealment or alchemy is clearly necessary: corruption must be legitimized and accepted as a recognized social mechanism, "he who does not cheat will not advance" ("*él que no transa no avanza*").

This set of general ideas is confirmed by a survey answered by 500 people, for whom the most recognizable refrain was precisely the one just mentioned, whose announced cynicism legitimizes. Perhaps it is this saying's unabashed posture that explains its preference among the youngest respondents, those who yearn to progress in this society, ethics be damned. Here, the question is this: are we witnessing a behavior that is characteristic of youth at all times, or an attitude propitiated by our world in which material success is the only thing that counts? But such an absence of ethics cannot be allowed to go too far: which is why the popular saying "braggarts don't fight" ("*el gandalla no batalla*") is rejected by most interviewees, especially because of the antisocial ("unfriendly, callous") nature of the aforementioned braggart.

Another oft-repeated refrain, one perhaps more subtle than others, says: "Leverage is worth more than money" ("*más vale tener palancas que dinero*"), though apparently it contradicts others: "The dog only dances for money" ("*con dinero baila el perro*"), or "When money talks everyone shuts up" ("*cuando el dinero habla todos callan*"). But to continue, we need a broader definition of the term "*palanca*", translated above as "leverage". In this context, *palanca* could be interpreted as friendships, relationships, or more-or-less recognized privileges. This all means intermediation (more-or-less informal agents) but, when all is said and done, it all comes down to money, more or less directly. Curiously, those in higher positions, those with the most powerful forms of "leverage", adduce less identification with this saying. Should we take their word on that? Here, in

all likelihood, we are on the boundary between white corruption (accepted or not recognized by some) and gray (considered illegal and rejected, at least apparently, by others). Hence, as a social phenomenon, corruption must be studied in its temporal and social contexts.

Though certain phrases appear in many spheres of corruption –like the ever-present, "Can't we work this out?" ("*¿Cómo nos arreglamos*?"), the "open sesame" for Ali Baba's cave– it is the frequency of their use that may betray the degree of corruption of a society; in Italian, its "*combinazione*" (rotting). When uttered by the corruptor or the corrupted, respectively, this phrase reveals trust, or distrust, with respect to the different authorities. Italians and Mexicans (as well as Spaniards) have a keen perception of the corruption of their political elites. In Mexico and Venezuela the image of the police is deplorable, and not much better in Colombia, while Peru's judicial system is characterized by the highest known index of discredit.[4] So it is time to examine these realities more closely, as they are portrayed in the two articles that follow.

Since at least the epoch of the picaresque novel, the corruption among traffic police, sheriffs and other officers of the law (*corchetes*, to use an old Spanish term), has been a *topos* (commonplace), one that Hady Fink and Frederic Boehm take up here in reference to the Colombian case. Certainly, police forces are especially vulnerable institutions, even moreso in Latin America.

Solutions can be complex, as it is illusory to try to convince litigants to play by the rules, or to appeal to their sense of ethics, because in this game everyone "wins", except society as a whole. And implementing bonus systems that reward police officers for their efficiency can easily transform a simple bribe into something much more harmful: extortion. In a sense, it all comes down to calculations, which is why it is important –if we are to construct effective anticorruption policies– to have a concrete understanding of the mechanisms involved. To do so, from 2005 to 2010 these authors adopted the method of interviewing "experts": Colombian taxi-drivers, the

[4] Transparencia internacional, 2010, "Impacto de la corrupción en diferentes sectores e instituciones".

most common victims. It is important to remember that because corruption is by definition clandestine, it is notoriously difficult to analyze, especially directly or using quantitative means.

Moreover, the Colombian experience has certain specific complications: in the case of Barranquilla, the transit police was a private force until 2008 (in Bogotá, a similar force was abolished shortly before); the fines imposed are very high and thus propitiate the temptation to evade them; and, finally, there is the fact that the risk involved in insinuating an illicit solution is virtually nil. Potential frictions are resolved through a kind of ritualized interplay in which the corruptor (the cabbie) tries to personalize his ties with the corrupted (the cops) who, after all, come from similar social strata. This *approchement*, however, is less evident when the officer is a woman, as cabbies consider them less corruptible; leading one to ask whether feminization might be an effective anticorruption weapon.

While the allegory of Justice as a woman, and the fact that judges wear long robes (*gens de robe*, to use a French phrase) might be taken as symbols of the incorruptibility of both, this is not exactly what one finds inside Lima's Palace of Justice. As Jaris Mújica leads us into its labyrinths, we learn that the first step consists in getting to know the fauna that wander its halls. Then we discover several *Monipodio*[5] patios outside the Palace where pickpockets, software pirates, forgers, lawyers without diplomas and printers rub elbows with, and exploit, the clientele at this huge market of Justice.

Within this realm of informality, the most formal figures are called *tramitadores* and *tipeadores* (*coyotes* in Mexico), a species of unofficial attorneys who are perfectly well acquainted with the networks both inside (lawyers, security personnel) and outside (forgers) those hallowed halls. These latter are famous for their boldness, as some dare to offer their products inside the building itself; indeed, many lawyers have forged titles and are quick to offer litigants satisfaction.

The litigants who turn to this informal sector are not necessarily the most helpless, but ones who seek efficiency and speed and those

[5] Translator's note: This refers to *Novelas Ejemplares,* "Rinconete y Cortadillo" from Cervantes, where Monipodio is a character known for his shady dealings.

who are convinced that they have "right" on their side. Their objective is to assure victory for a good cause as quickly as possible and in accordance with the rule of law; which is why it behooves the *tramitadores*, forgers and others to become intimately familiar with the labyrinths –both physical and legal– of the Palace.

Like an enormous snowball, other personages are also integrated into this universe, some of whom seem to emerge from a 1950s Italian movie: street vendors and stallkeepers, people announcing mobile telephone service, and others who hang around the Palace offering minor services and publicizing those of others. So, who imposes a veneer of order upon this conglomeration? The Palace's own security personnel, of course –its guardians– but they are also the people who know it most intimately and, therefore, are the best informants, They are veritable masters of articulation, as they are the link through which one can obtain direct contact with the formal administrative sector and the ministries. But it is also through them that bribes insinuate themselves into the Palace, if one has a deft touch, that is. In spite of everything, this system is highly functional and entails little risk, so prices are accessible. The networks pre-date the litigants and their middlemen activate them, thus drawing their clients into the system. Corruption is like a long black thread that penetrates into the very heart of legality, though it has no firm or definitive structure.

We find ourselves in Lima in 2011, in the presence of a complex, but flexible, system of networks that are time-proven and include a diversity of actors who can perform a variety of roles. Everything is organized by, and for, corruption, a form of cultural practice that leads to the judge's chambers (*Ádyton*): the researcher could not penetrate into this mysterious space where everything seems like a dream, a 17th-century survival in the early 21st.

From a broader perspective that these three articles allow, it is clear that in Hispanic countries where personal relations still predominate, corruption follows such channels; which explains how it penetrates so deeply into the very tissue of society that it comes to form part of everyday practice in which many different agents intervene. Such individual ties appear to be less extensive in northern

countries, and this may well be the reason why corruption is not so apparent or pervasive there. However, in that world –cold and seemingly neutral– the private sector picks up the slack through other mechanisms, other dimensions.

The archaism and modernity of corruption… sure, but today's archaism may be yesterday's modernity… We must not lose sight of the fact that we speak –more or less appropriately– of the "modern State" of the 17th century, but anyone who scours the documents bequeathed by Juan Díez de la Calle, an official of the *Consejo de Indias* around 1650 –as Guillaume Gaudin has done with great patience– will surely come to question the "modernity" of that Council and its administration. For what allowed that bureaucracy to sustain its dominion (by remote control) for over three centuries was a whole series of concrete relations that were effectuated and reproduced with great economy of effort. More than anything else, the Catholic Monarchy succeeded in maintaining its hold for two reasons: loyalty and negotiation. A letter written in 1647 by a minor official (*medio racionero*) named Cristóbal Millán de Poblete and sent to Díez de la Calle reveals all these implications.

Religious and political loyalty are essential in that they converge upon the person of the sovereign through the almost mystical reality of "royal grace" (*gracia real*) that as king and head of the Church of the Indies he is allowed to grant to any of his subjects, and that may take the form of resources, offices or other privileges, both civil and religious. It is a kind of enormous manna to which the beneficiary (*prebendado*) refers repeatedly, after being thus rewarded by the *cursus honorum* of the Cathedral. The bounty that flows from the sovereign's hand is so important that maintaining control over it is indispensable. Thus it was that the Count-Duke de Olivares took for himself the prestigious position of Grand Chancellor of the Indies, an appointment of great political and economic weight. Clearly, as a simple official or *prebendado* of a far-off kingdom one had little recourse to the king or his representatives, but there were lesser 'saints' who might prove more efficacious, or one could turn to a mid-level bureaucrat, like Díez de la Calle, though this approach did not always prove effective, as in the case presented here.

Negotiation is another medullar concept of the "modern Sate", especially in the case of a compound Monarchy like that of Spain. There, negotiations first took place between the Crown and the conquerors, followed by arrangements with their honorable sons, and then with Creole society; *i.e.*, the elite. But negotiations about what? At that time (1647) what was in play was precisely access to the "manna" of positions, as the sovereign, through his *Consejo de Indias*, reserved the right to appoint men to the highest civil, religious and military offices, while delegating responsibility for the other 15,000 to 20,000 positions in America and the Philippines to his governors In the Indies. In Madrid and the different capitals of the Indies all of this was negotiated, contested…

Another important point that emerges from this letter concerns what the *prebendado* could offer to his peninsular administrator in exchange for a promotion: up-to-date information on the personnel of the Cathedral of Mexico, including their salaries. Also apparent, though, is Millán de Poblete's prudence, as the calculations of income that he presented were below the estimates that circulated in Madrid. It must be remembered that the royal treasury was always on the lookout for resources, especially around that time.

Beyond sharing Hispanism and a universalist contextualization, we shall seek no additional signs of continuity between Millán de Poblete's text and the journal *Ábside* analyzed by Jesús Iván Mora Muro. Founded in 1937 by Gabriel Méndez Plancarte (Zamora, Michoacán, Mexico), this journal's success was largely due to its quest to establish means of dialoguing with the different currents of modern humanism and Mexicanness during the so-called epoch of "socialist education". After Vasconcelos' experiment it asked, could a different path be chosen? It was after yet another revolution that liberal Catholicism was born (a form that would later turn almost libertarian), thanks to Robert de Lamennais, or the Marist Order, with its social concerns that Méndez Plancarte knew so well, having studied at its *Colegio Francés* in Mexico (before Octavio Paz and others).

Father Gabriel's time in Lovaina, a boiling-pot of renewed ideas (neo-tomism) is also key to understanding the currents expressed in the pages of *Ábside*, with its modernizing tradition based on such

influences as Greco-Latin classics and their successors during New Spain's "classic age" (Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Cabrera and Quintero). *Ábside* attempted to reconcile "love for Horace with love for Mexico" via humanism, recalling the "precious gifts of Castile". While the journal maintained a certain coherence, it also showed deviations; for example, it defended the obtuse traditionalism of Franco's cause, calling it "a basically good and laudable movement".

If modernity can at times revert to tradition, it can also take a line that admits no compromises. To some degree this is the case of medicine and biology, which made fundamental advances in the 19th century; even seeking to penetrate the very mystery of life, or at least the ordering behind its formation, through embryogenesis. For this reason, as Hilderman Cardona describes precisely, those sciences were obliged to deal with "severe anomalies […] and other deviant configurations" (Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire). It is true that every new theory supersedes the ones that came before, so those 19th-century scholars argued that the stifled development of "monstrous" organisms simply could not be integrated into Darwinian evolutionism.

By the same token, however, new hypotheses, descriptions and technologies tend to become intertwined. Thus it was that in the late 19th century photography came to function as an essential support for teratology (the study of monsters or "freaks of nature"). However, traditions soon become fixed, and efforts were made to bring "monstrous" representations into the normality of classic studio (portrait) photography, as in the case of images of convicts and prostitutes from that period in Mexico (and probably other countries as well). In both settings –the clinical and the social– the goal was to explain the abnormal and integrate it into the rules of grammar and biological order. In a sense, this constituted a way of negating the exceptional due to an "obsession with the normal" that may be associated with the neodarwinist racism that spread among Latin American elites at that time (with contributions by western travelers). To a degree, science and society need the abnormal in order to define and legitimize that which is normal.

Because of these limits, the scientific apparatus separates itself more and more from the *vox populi*: while the latter might have seen

a "freak of nature" as the gestation of an Antichrist, physicians serenely described phenomena in which monstrosity did not necessarily lead to an additional, and similar, stigma, as the case of premature menstruation in young girls. They considered accelerated development just as topical as the underdevelopment of an embryo. The broad and precise descriptions of the cases recorded are another facet of positivist modernity: they are just part of a demonstration that may limit itself to such simple material, biological facts.

With *Notes and Debates* we introduce a section that will appear intermittently when editorial opportunities appear. This issue inaugurates this addition with a text by Phil Weigand on Russian soldiers in World War II. Little would be gained by including a synopsis of a text that is so suggestive, tightly-written and full of rich passages. But then a question arises, one seemingly anecdotic but imperative for understanding this text and, above all, certain characteristics of that conflagration. It is based on a comparison: why did World War I produce innumerable published testimonies by soldiers, as well as literary works of great value from both sides of the front, while the many testimonies of World War II that exist center essentially on the victims of that great conflict; *i.e.*, the survivors of the death camps, or isolated fighters, whether guerrillas or *maquisards*? It is because WW2 was an ideological war, complete with all the horrors that go hand-in-hand with fanaticism and the oppression imposed by totalitarian States. Thus, it was best to cover up the atrocities (committed by both sides, though in different degrees), and to conceal unconformities. This is what makes the frieze of the dramas described by Vasili Grossman in his *Vida y destino*[6] so terrifying: its breadth, emotion and precision. It is hardly surprising, then, to learn that it was suppressed in the USSR, and only published in Switzerland in 1980, 16 years after its author's death.

But allow me to complement the text presented here with brief quotations from Grossman, who personally witnessed the events of which he wrote, including the "war of rats" in Stalingrad:

[6] Mexico, Editorial Debolsillo, 2010.

> The most difficult days had come for the defenders of Stalingrad. Amidst the confusion of street fights, attacks and counterattacks; the battle to control the House of the Specialist, the mill, the Gosbank building (the state bank); the struggle for basements, yards and squares […]
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> While in the sky, the whine of German bombers from dawn to dusk, diving to blitz those blighted lands with devastating bombs. And hundreds of heads reverberated with the cruel, piercing thoughts of what tomorrow would bring, and the folowing week […] (pp. 35-36).

During combat all sensation is altered:

> More complex still is the deformation process that affects the perception of the brevity and duration of time among men in combat. There, things go more slowly; there, even the most basic individual sensations are deformed, altered. In combat, later ones broaden, but hours are compressed. This sense of long duration intertwines with convulsive events: the shrill whistle of projectiles and area bombs, the fiery bursts of gunfire and explosions.
>
> In battle, all sensation is so profoundly distorted that it manifests itself in complete indetermination, disconnected from both duration and brevity (p. 52).

Fatalism and dismay weigh heavily amid the massification and mechanization of war. Listen to this dialogue between two combatants: "–You know, when I went to school I saw a painting that looked like this night: a moon over a plain strewed with the bodies of soldiers dead in battle. –Where do you see the similarity?, the other laughed; those guys were heroes, while we're just cannon-fodder" (p. 766).

But something is also constructed: combat becomes sacrifice, defeat becomes victory, and the battlefield expands to include all of Russia's motherland: "Sentiment was so convoluted and complex that not even a grand artist could paint it; it emerged from the fusion of the powerful military force of the people and the State with that obscure and miserable kitchen, full of gossip and pettiness; from a union that melded the mortal steel of weapons with kitchen pots and potato peelings" (p. 139).

But this union could threaten even an oppressive State: "Victory in Stalingrad assured the eventual outcome of the war, but the tacit dispute between the people and the State, both of them victors, was not yet over; the destiny of man, his freedom, depended on that" (p. 837).

History has given us its answers, in both the medium and long term.

This issue of *Relaciones* has fulfilled the promise of the journal's polysemic title: to recount and relate, taking us from popular Mexican culture to the soul of Russia in the years 1940-1945, it narrates the craftiness of the informal sector of justice in Lima and the reality of "bribes" in Colombia. Despite the fragmentation inherent in publications of this nature, it is easy to detect a point of continuity: in this case, the movement from tradition to modernity smoothes over the ruptures and indecisions of the former and the later. In the 21st century, we have witnessed the corruptions of the *ancién regime* (perhaps), and traced the advances of biology while documenting the impossibility of separating science from timorous social behaviors. The modernist, conciliating Catholicism of *Ábside* came to defend the West's most reactionary regime.

But one lesson remains to be learned, one more material in nature, but perhaps essential: this issue includes contributions by authors in Mexico, Colombia, Peru, France and Germany, and this does not include the score of reviewers, also writing in different places. Nowadays, this is no great feat. Fifteen years ago, when editors had fax machines at their disposal, it would have been possible, but much slower and complicated. Half a century ago it would have been difficult indeed –even impossible– given the short time inherent in the exigencies of modern life. This is another point to ponder and perhaps discuss some day: new times, new opportunities, new challenges.

English translation by Paul C. Kersey Johnson