



Meeting in Washington D.C.

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SOCIAL CHARACTER

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## WHY MARKETING CHARACTER IS REJECTED

Salvador Millan

### ABSTRACT

This <sup>PAPER</sup> ~~memo~~ attempts to explain how a certain type of social character - accumulative-productive - reacts to socioeconomic changes determined for the group by a detached élite who do not take into account the development of that society which has sustained itself by means of a certain type of production which does not depend on market conditions and its rules of exchange, but is the product of individual labor, although maintaining social bonds and demonstrating a definition of its own and a collective identification through its rites, customs, beliefs and myths.

An example of this is to be found in my country, Mexico, where the feudal character exists officially, sustained by a system of regional political bosses (caciques), where authority relationships are in force, in spite of characteristics of neighborliness and personal interest on the part of the leaders, and a relationship of dependence is established with the authority. At the same time, an independent craft group quite outside this relationship also forms a part of the society. This group is characterized by spontaneous artistic production which arises from and corresponds to each one of its members, while at the same time each one defines his own role within the group. These people show a type of character, in my opinion, which is even more conservative than the expected response to any change: A kind of extreme defensive attitude which also allows them to maintain their group identification. This attitude and behavior are quite distinct from that existing in a linear top to bottom structure of dependence typical of the feudal character which submits to authority. Moreover, this craft-oriented group promotes a close horizontal relationship among the community members and succeeds in avoiding direct involvement in official religious activities, for they have their own interpretation. The group has traditionally maintained its cohesion since prequest times through an oral heritage transmitted and repeated in rites and customs which give relevance to community festivals. I have called this the silent society.



## A SILENT SOCIETY The Contrast

The term feudal corresponds to the pre-renaissance period where it implied a small kingdom and his subjects. Harmony between rulers and subjects was due in part to the benevolence of the prince or duke. Treatment of the subjects was typically based on a paternal protection. In Mexico, the equivalent would be regional bossism (cacicazgos): Land owners who determine the type of production and, at the same time, exert a kind of authority over the workers and their families. The hacienda of the past century may be an equivalent. Under such social conditions there exists an authority relationship with a kind of owner-chief, showing graciousness toward his subjects, who in turn speak of his virtues and consideration for them, all of which is quite different from a domineering totalitarian regime.

It should be pointed out that this feudal nature is only one component part of Mexican society. Other part, which we are trying to emphasize is precisely a conservative society devoted to its traditions and ways of living, where the relationship between individuals and nature has its time and place acquires its meaning.

Ricardo Pozas in Juan Perez Jolote described the clash between a foreign tourist with ideas for marketing labor and a native craftsman attending the village's market day festival, where he shares the time and space with the other members of community, when the craftsman refuses to sell his production in spite of an offer to buy everything he has on display and an even more attractive offer which would guarantee him work for some time. Pozas describes the two types of thinking occur in this situation: The foreign tourist was thinking of mass production and marketing of the product on a large scale and Juan Perez was thinking that if he sold everything then he would have nothing to do on market day. The craft worker produces his work with the collaboration of his family, who helped him gather the necessary materials and organize the final product. Each of his produce, although similar, were original creations.

## THE SOCIAL STRUCTURES

An important part of Mexican society is sustained by pyramidal structures, defined as institutions, which have originated in the post-revolutionary period. The workers and peasants became a part of Mexican society thanks to the revolutionary movement and for seventy years they have shared space in the new post-revolutionary society with the previously dominant bourgeoisie, which was fundamentally of Spanish origin. However, this now formation of the society did not take into account or rather was not intended for the indigenous population, which was still to be excluded.

The most clearly defined and important social structures are the labor unions. The strongest of them were consolidated through affiliation with so-called "Centrales", unions of unions, such as the CTM, Confederation of Workers of Mexico, or the Revolutionary Worker Farmer Confederation CROC, or the National Farmers' Confederation CNC. There also exists a union representing elementary teachers The National Education Workers Union SNTE, with more than a million teachers affiliated. All these labor groupings tend to coalesce and form civil structures which turn out to be not very different in form from military structures. That is to say, a hierarchy is set up over the rest, who acquiesce.

The greatest merits are acquired by submissiveness, which turns into abject servility. Those who aspire to scale the pyramid pass through this, waiting for their time, their turn to come. The country's political regime is also an example of those social structures. So it is understandable why the president becomes the top political figure in the country. On a smaller scale, the associations or civil societies also conform to this pattern and that is the way they are run. This describes a society based on the relationships of authority, command and submission. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that an exploiting authoritarian character and a passive exploited one should be in play and should be the predominant characterological elements.

I have mentioned that the native (Indian) population was not taken into account in arranging the redefining of the society beginning in 1910. This implies that for the modernizing sector they either did not exist or were not recognized. Such blindness is no different from that of any colonizer. This native group, which fluctuates between 15 and 25 percent of the present population and forms the base through its descendants of up to 65 percent or more of the total population, plays a blind and silent yet important role.

Its silent presence breaks forth during the year in the central, ~~and~~ southern and other regions of the country in multiple and characteristic ceremonies, rites and traditions representative of each region. In this way, they reveal their tenacity, their steadfastness and with their persevering actions they leave their mark. It is a form of survival and at the same time a way of defending themselves against the assaults of the colonizers.

Is this not typical of accumulative character: The fear of change? The fear of letting go of what one has? Of being different? Yet, by revealing themselves in their social behaviors through repeated periodic acts with a high mythical or symbolic content, they also leave the mark of their presence.

This part of the population, working in silence, has shared space with the other part within the social structure. Their silent existence has caused the Western mind to ignore them or to say they do not exist. The writer Malcolm Laury (Beneath the Volcano) points out an example of this. He tells how, in Tepoztlan, while standing in the doorway of his home, he hears



the noise of footsteps on the dry leaves in his back yard and calls out, "Who's there?" to which his employee answers, "Nobody, sir...it's me."

It is not strange that we should find among the Indian population a strongly accumulative type of character. (Terms used now from Fromm's earlier usage). The explanation given by Maccoby and Fromm to the question of why they had not found a marketing character in the peasants population asserts that this was in part due to the fact that it was a young society in transition and that time was required to establish this character. From the modern point of view, after the revolutionary movement, it does not turn out to be totally strange to continue finding the same absence of marketing character even in the suburban populations. The population studied corresponds to a type of peasant produced by the Revolution, not those most rooted to the land, as they themselves state, and these new peasants, although of a low economic level, were not totally Indian. They formed part of that class who has defeated the bourgeoisie, "Los de Abajo" as Mariano Azuela describes them. Aspiring to something better, who, wresting from others what they themselves have never had, join the society and takes a place in it, in a kind of retaliation, as may be seen in the "soldiers" who accompanied Villa and other revolutionaries. In the case of the state of Morelos, where the study was made, it is important to remember that the traditionalists and conservatives, rooted to their land and their customs, like those of the population of Tepoztlan, did not take part in the Revolution. They did not join "la bola", as Womack Jr. references in his work on Zapata. The Indian peasants without any tradition and their descendants did participate but the traditionalists did not.

#### SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AS A PHENOMENON OF REPETITION.

A clear oppositional behavior may be taken as an example in order to understand a repetition of an ancient Nahuatl tradition, when a group of Indians in the sierra of the upper Balsas River turned against modernity. (San Juan Tetelcingo, Ing. C. Molina 1992 y La Jornada dic.1994) With their rejection they displayed in their behavior the repetition, in a certain sense, of an old Nahuatl Myth. Their antagonistic behavior showed their real interest by hanging onto their land and their ancestors buried in it and consequent by maintaining their customs and way of looking at life alive and continuing to repeat them.

The population comes to life with their myth, through the identifications and acting which those very individuals perform each time the myth is repeated. The individual response obeys the individual's character type, in accordance with Fromm.

Emotions are displayed when confronted with possibilities for a change. Fear converts action into paralysis (Fromm). A brief example of the permanence of the current Mictlán was the battle unleashed by the Nahuatl community on the upper Balsas



River. The lords of Mictlán, all the inhabitants of the riverside towns, reacted against the official declaration offering the path to modernity; the construction of hydro-electric dam. Their reaction transformed into contention.

From the emotional point of view, this meant separation from their land. The defense of the area involved the changes which would arise once the construction began, including changes in habits and customs. What was really serious would be their having to abandon their ancestors, who were buried there. Not only was it an act of rebellion. The emotional factors which unleash the change, the social character features and the social conviction or belief in the myth were in jeopardy.

The profound fear, fear of change, included the fear of abandoning their ancient belief as well. This provoked their rejection. As a result of the project being abandoned, the region did not become modernized. The Indians kept the place, their Mictlán. And Quetzalcoatl failed this time to achieve his objective: Separated from this social identification of origin and challenge the Myth-Faith of his history, break with her. It would make them guilty, traitors to their belief.

The myth is over 500 years old. To live repeating the story, the history, may be understood as man's inherent fear of change. Thus, the myth sustained by an irrational faith continues, -a belief deposited in external, supernatural forces, more than in their own strength. The fear represents the opposite of separating, disobeying, growing. Emotions gain their place and make sense of this "rooting force."

The features of the social character which are at play explain to us how the inhabitants respond to the group's needs and how they hope that they will act. Similarly, each individual obtains his own personal satisfaction. Character, a form of temperament and society, a concept proposed by Fromm, involves assimilation and socialization processes. This partially explains the phenomenon of social integration. This theoretical framework permits us to interpret structural and emotional factors in the dynamics of a social group.

The features of social character, as a dynamic phenomenon, also allows us to appreciate how it or the individuals adapt to new social circumstances, through the representative role which they have to perform and which the social group expects of them. They individually obtain satisfaction through the actions, defining their own character.<sup>2</sup> These are emotions which may be the same as those in any period of human life and which reflect the problem of the individual's adaptation to society.

The accumulative-creative character of the Indians partially determines the actions related to this rootedness. They contain an alienated meaning, where most of the weight is located precisely in that which is conservative. Alienation, which means to live a foreign life, to live a life which is not one's own, - Marx quoted in Fromm- is also a demonstration of the sacrifice of the self for the "form of being" within the group. This represents a contradiction implicit to human existence and



particularly repressed by philosophers who champion individualism as the essence of progress.

#### CIVILIZATION IS ENOUGH

These general considerations are valid for establishing and redefining traits of the accumulative conservative character of the Indians, which are manifested in relation to defense: Defense of land, of their patrimony, traits which in turn establish, by means of their traditions, a culture, a myth.

This is a type of character structured in a different way from that which can develop within the phenomenon called globalization or the rupture which it causes in feudal structures and which the third world has experienced as a result of arrangements and redefinitions in the first world's economy. The NAFTA is only one example of this influence. With the globalization of the market place, the pyramidal structure has been broken into and there has been an attempt to break down this feudal structure, particularly in the political order.

This globalization has also provoked a reply from the conservative mind, characteristic of the old-fashioned conservatives, that is to say, the owners of local capital, who have been able to confront this change, this globalization and who have profited from it. One may see this in the case of Chile, which, with some fifteen years more of globalization than Mexico, has found a point of equilibrium marking more severely the division within its society, dividing it into two groups: A few very wealthy and prosperous and a vast majority in poverty.

In the case of Mexico, the situation is no different; the class separation can be brutal. The typical model of labor-unionism with its pride is beginning to break down and so is the state which it supports. But here there has emerged a new reaction, still small, in which part of the society constituted by liberals, leftists and independent group not yet consolidated are beginning to speak up hesitantly. However, the silent presence appears anew. The armed protest of January 1, 1994, the day globalization began, attracted attention and, although the shots fired were few, this outbreak has been very significant. The rebels propose an intended autonomy independence and an economy of their own, an idea which is gathering more and more strength. An interesting response to this social mosaic.



## 1. A Nahuatl Myth of Origin

Once the gods, black and red Tezcatlipoca, Huitzilopochtli and Quetzacoatl, all brothers, had created fire, the earth, water and their deities, as well as the land of the dead, the moon and the sun, they asked one another, "who shall inhabit the world?" They had previously attempted four times to create a good sun, without achieving it and man had disappeared four times as well. The brother gods persisted and attempted one more time. Quetzacoatl spoke, "Given that the fifth sun has been created, lightens the day, moves followed by the moon, which lightens the night, and the earth's foundations have been created, it is not good for man not to exist." And he added, "I am going to the land of the dead to see the Lord of Mictlán and his wife so that they will give me the bones which they hold and with them we will give life to man for the fifth time. Then they will enjoy the earth, the sky and will protect us." He arrived cautiously at the region of Mictlan and courteously said to the Lord of Mictlan, "I have come to retrieve the bones which you have, since we are worried and want someone to live on earth." "It is good", he answered. "I will give them to you only if you sound the conch shell." Quetzalcoatl realized that the conch shell had no holes, and that it would not emit a sound, and called the worms to perforate it and the bees to sound it. The Lord of Mictlán and his wife had to relinquish the bones. As soon as they could, they demanded their servants to follow them and force them to return the bones. "I am not going to return them", replied Quetzalcoatl. He simultaneously asked his twin Xolotl to go and scream "yes, return them" and thereby distract the messenger. Meanwhile, the Lord of Mictlán had ordered a large pit to be dug so that while fleeing, Quetzalcoatl would fall and thus drop the bones. Despite his fall, he flung the bones and these were gnawed by partridges. He was able to carry them to the gods' abode. Once there, a goddess ground the bones and delicately placed them in a container where Quetzalcoatl shed a drop of blood over them. That is how the men who populate the earth were born. They are all different sizes because the bones had been gnawed by partridges.

2. See the thesis of Character y Caracter Social in Fromm y Maccoby Socio-psicoanálisis del Campesino Mexicano. F.C.E. Also work by several researches in the Seminario de Sociopsicoanálisis, published in Anuarios y Cuadernos I to IV, 1990 to 1993 in the library of the Instituto Mexicano de Psicoanálisis, A.C., Odontología 9, México, D.F.