

Urban topography of political exile in Mexico City



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<http://www.ihila.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/712.html?&L=1>



This project aims to explore the urban topography and spatial experience of exile in Mexico between the 1930s and the 1950s. Cutting across national sub-communities of exile the lived experience of exile is followed from street level up: places of residence, political and cultural activities, internal and external conflict as well as sites of politicized and private sociability will be explored from the microscopic focus on buildings and neighbourhoods up to the metropolitan level of networks of transnational interactions. In this way, the metropolitan context of the lived experience of exile will inform a detailed analysis of urban space, but also its relationship with peripheral arenas of the experience of exile, e.g. the smaller centres of Morelia and Cuernavaca and the curiosity expressed by many for indigenous communities in the provinces. The metropolitan fabric of left-wing political exile will thus be approached with a sharper sense of its complex construction out of European notions of urban life-styles, the encounter with the social and cultural complexity of Mexican society and the politicized imagination of the wider geographical context of exiled life in an urban setting.

Empirical research thereby focuses on distinct, but interconnected aspects of the spatial experience: the social geography of private life and sociability, spatial patterns of political activism and cultural interaction, perceptions and engagement of exiles with the politics and practices of urban life vis-à-vis the Mexican host society, its institutions and cultural texture, the politicization and zoning of urban space, symbolic and physical conflicts over urban space, the cultural coding of spaces in terms of class, gender, and ethnicity. Finally, the urban experience of exile must be seen against the background of the protagonists' engagement with the imaginary of post-revolutionary Mexico, particularly with regard to perceptions of ethnicity across the city as well as the nation as a whole. The transnational fabric of the experience of exile was also influenced by the interference of outside actors such as foreign governments, their political and cultural activities, and foreign clandestine agencies. Special attention to the different sites of interaction, exchange and conflict will link these levels of empirical research with political, social and symbolic performance in private homes, cafés, bars, restaurants, as well as institutionalized meeting places, theatres, cinemas, and hotels, their situation within the geographic fabric of the city as well as in relation to one another. The aim, therefore, is to reconstruct the lived experience of exile in its urban and pragmatic context.