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OCTAVIO PAZ AND HIS LEGACY TO MEXICAN DIPLOMACY¹



The Gilberto Bosques Center for International Studies presents the first of a series of Global Insight Reports on what renowned intellectuals have contributed to Mexican diplomacy throughout the 20th century. The case of Octavio Paz is not only of the highest importance because of his imminent place as a poet and essayist, but because of his noteworthy career in the Mexican Foreign Service in several assignments in Europe, the United States, and Asia. While these documents make use of relevant secondary sources, they also benefit from information provided by the Genaro Estrada Historic Diplomatic Archive and the Mexican Foreign Ministry.

¹ Photograph: *Presentación de Cartas Credenciales de Octavio Paz como Embajador Extraordinario y Plenipotenciario de México ante la India*. Octavio Paz Historical Archives, Genaro Estrada Archives of Diplomatic History.



Introduction: A Brief History of The Mexican Foreign Service

Throughout its history, the Mexican Foreign Service has been a space of the greatest importance for the defense of national interests. For decades, officials in diplomatic posts have done an extraordinary job and have been absolutely essential in the construction of modern Mexico.

The history of the foreign service dates back to 1829, shortly after Mexico's Independence.² However, the first records of the service can be traced back to the First Department³ of the Secretariat of the Chamber of the Viceroyalty, which in 1797 acted as a civil service project whose functions were later assumed by the Ministry of Foreign and Interior Affairs following independence.⁴ The history of Mexico has been continuously linked to the diplomatic service. Through it, the Mexican state constructed its position towards the world through episodes in the international arena which provided different perspectives to those in power, forged by their experiences with other states and nations.

Dr. Omar Guerrero Orozco, a recognized academic and author of the book "History of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" (1993), calls diplomatic work during the 19th century "the only possible tool to use under extraordinarily difficult circumstances." Given the context of strong foreign interventionism, the primary goal of diplomats was to "avoid the disintegration of Mexico as a sovereign nation".⁵ Taking into account the difficulties the country went through during the 19th century, leading or serving in the foreign service became an assignment of high importance, requiring great resolve and a desire to serve the nation. From the first years of independence until the end of the 19th century, numerous highly qualified Mexicans remembered by history as distinguished men, served as Mexican diplomats, including:⁶ Francisco Zarco, Lucas Alamán, José María Lafragua, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, and Melchor Ocampo, among others in the political arena. Additionally, other individuals during the 19th and 20th centuries from the cultural and artistic sphere have been part of and helped forge the diplomatic service. Carlos Monsiváis repeatedly mentions those individuals as indispensable and insists that if the diplomatic tradition "wants to prosper as a tradition and not remain habitual or routine," it must choose "those who possess the qualities of treatment and memory over those capable of splitting away and being more persuasive interpreters or translators of reality".⁷ Diplomatic assignments have sought to achieve the goal of representing and spreading the history, traditions and culture of Mexico

² Consulate General of Mexico in Laredo, "Historia del Servicio Exterior Mexicano", *Secretary of Foreign Affairs*, Mexico, 2017. Accessed December 8th, 2016: <https://consulmex2.sre.gob.mx/laredo/index.php/proteccion/historia>

³ It should be noted that the First Department addressed infrastructure tasks and administrative issues of municipalities, but also served foreigners. When the Secretariat of State and the Office of Foreign and Internal Affairs was created by the Decree for the establishment of the ministries of the Regency of the Mexican Empire on November 8, 1821, the tasks of the Second and Third Departments (such as public finances and justice) were also assigned to the First Department. Omar Guerrero, "Las Raíces Borbónicas del Estado Mexicano", *National Autonomous University of Mexico*, Mexico, 1994, p.251.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 251

⁵ Carlos Altamirano, "Historia de los intelectuales en América Latina", *Katz Editores*, Spain, 2008, p.14,

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 348

⁷ Carlos Monsiváis, "Escritores en la Diplomacia Mexicana", *Mexican Journal of Foreign Policy*, p. 369, 1998. Accessed December 7, 2016: <https://revistadigital.sre.gob.mx/images/stories/numeros/n57/monsivais.pdf>



abroad. Accordingly, the selection of its representatives at the highest ranks has been a priority for post-revolutionary governments in order to provide legitimacy and gain support from foreign governments.

The reorganization of the post-revolutionary state factored in the need to professionalize diplomatic work. In 1922, then President Álvaro Obregón issued the Organic Law of the Diplomatic Corps, which established the framework for a professional career in foreign service, created a competitive selection process and called for the professionalization of career foreign service personnel.⁸ Even with the legal and administrative changes that began improvements to the Mexican Foreign Service, the discretion the executive maintained with regard to diplomatic appointments was criticized at the time.⁹ In 1933, Alfonso Reyes, then Mexican Ambassador in Río de Janeiro¹⁰—someone whose diplomatic work will be examined in a future document in this series—responded to a request from Foreign Secretary José Manuel Puig Casauranc by informing him of what, in his judgment, were the deficiencies of the foreign service at that moment.¹¹ In his document, Ambassador Reyes spoke of diplomatic work as a “catalyst”,¹² which was to say that its “lack or absence... produced difficulties and anger”.¹³ Carlos Altamirano, author of *History of the Intellectuals in Latin America: The avatars of the lettered city in the 20th century* compares the work of intellectuals to that of diplomats, given that both measure the concrete consequences of their work “on a pragmatic and intangible scale” which makes them “undeniably necessary”.¹⁴ Alfonso Reyes said then that the “expectations of a diplomatic representation”¹⁵ in 1933 demanded “cultural and spiritual propaganda and not interference in internal politics, nor inappropriate partisan sermons”.¹⁶

Today it is difficult to understand the history of the Mexican Foreign Service without the grand contributions made by representatives of culture and the arts. The relationship of diplomacy to these Mexicans who have gone down in history as illustrious men has helped them to define their work and their interests in the countries in which they were accredited. At the same time, this would define the character of their mission and the type of relationships they would have with officials in their host countries. Since the beginning of the 20th century, appointing Mexican ambassadors who were known around the world for their work generated increased closeness between Mexico and the countries to which they were sent while also improving not just cultural cooperation, but political affinity and possible economic exchanges. In this way, well-known writers—such as Amado Nervo, at the beginning of the 20th century and Octavio Paz, at the

⁸ *Secretary of Foreign Affairs*, “La etapa postrevolucionaria”, Mexico, 2016. Accessed December 8th, 2016: <http://www.gob.mx/sre/acciones-y-programas/la-etapa-posrevolucionaria?state=published>

⁹ *Idem*

¹⁰ Carlos Altamirano, *Op. Cit.*, p. 87

¹¹ *Idem*

¹² *Idem*

¹³ *Idem*

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.88

¹⁵ *Idem*

¹⁶ *Idem*



middle of the century—whose diplomatic missions we will later describe, redefined many of the relationships Mexico was able to consolidate abroad.

The primary interest of this series of documents is to depict the legacy that some of the most important figures of 20th century Mexican culture forged in Mexico's diplomatic service and, at the same time, how this influenced their works. In this first document of the series, the Gilberto Bosques Center for International Studies looks at the life and work of one of Mexico's most illustrious diplomats who also belonged to the cultural life of the country—the great essayist and poet, Octavio Paz, winner of the 1990 Nobel Prize for Literature.

The First Steps of Paz The Diplomat

One of the greatest figures of Mexican literary is, without a doubt, Octavio Paz. “A great figure of this century who illuminated the world with his thinking, his poetry and his writings...he brought Asia closer to Latin America and Mexico”,¹⁷ declared the then President of India, K.R. Narayanan, after arriving at the Embassy of Mexico in New Delhi to sign the condolence book which was on display following the poet's death. In India, Paz represented Mexico from 1962¹⁸ until 1968, when he resigned after students in Mexico City were killed by Mexican police and military on October 2nd in 1968.

Octavio Paz was born in Mexico City in 1914 and joined the Mexican Foreign Service in 1944. In 1943, just before entering the diplomatic service, Paz received a grant from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation in New York to conduct an academic project in Berkeley, California. At that point, for economic reasons he would later explain to those close to him,¹⁹ he began working as a local employee at the Mexican Consulate in San Francisco²⁰ until October 3rd, 1944, when then Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Padilla Nervo granted him entry into the Mexican Foreign Service and sent him to the Mexican Embassy in Paris the following year.²¹

As a diplomat, he was assigned to cities such as New York, San Francisco, Geneva, Paris and Tokyo. At the last three, he acted as *Charges d' Affaires* until President Adolfo López Mateos named him Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary on May 1st, 1962,²² and assigned him to India. However, his internationalist profession and his social conscience, largely inspired by the liberal fervor of figures like José Vasconcelos and José Bosch, led him to combine his literary activity with a notable political militancy. His participation in the Second International Congress of Anti-Fascist Writers in Madrid in 1937, in the middle of the Spanish Civil War, continued to develop his genuine concern with international issues.

¹⁷ Archive of the Embassy of Mexico to India, Genaro Estrada Archives of Diplomatic History, written communication from the Embassy of Mexico in New Delhi, Bundle III PD/131/00296(21/04/98)

¹⁸ Archive of the Embassy of Mexico to India, Telex 50727, April 26, 1962, Bundle III /OD/131/2.02-12

¹⁹ Andrés Ordóñez, “Itinerario y sentido intelectual en Octavio Paz”, *Mexican Journal of Foreign Policy*, p. 14, Special Edition 2014. Accessed December 9, 2016: <https://revistadigital.sre.gob.mx/images/stories/numeros/ne2014/ordonez.pdf> p.14

²⁰ Octavio Paz Historical Archives, Genaro Estrada Diplomatic Historical Archive, Bundle III-2944-1 (1)

²¹ Andrés Ordóñez, *Op. Cit.* p.17

²² Archive of the Embassy of Mexico to India, Office of the President, resolution 709 folio number 0252, May 1st, 1962, Bundle III /OD/131/2.02-12



During his life as a cultural representative, he wrote 34 works of poetry, 46 essays and eight other different works including plays, prose, fiction and compendiums of letters.²³ Additionally, he was awarded 14 prestigious international prizes for his work, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1990. By the time he entered the Mexican Foreign Service, Paz had already published six works of poetry, including *Wild Moon* one of his most well-known literary works, so Paz was already a recognized author.

According to his biographers, his time in France was fundamental to his work,²⁴ because of both the personal relationships he developed there with some of the most important representatives with the cultural world, and for the opportunity it gave him to witness several events that would leave a significant mark in his literary work. During his time in Paris, the diplomat and intellectual published three of his masterpieces: *Freedom under Parole* in 1949, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* in 1950 and *Eagle or Sun?* in 1951. The relationships Paz established and the notions that mark his thinking during his first diplomatic assignment have to do with his encounter with European literary surrealism, with Greek communist dissidents, his solidarity with the Spanish Republican government in exile, and his denouncement of Soviet concentration camps in 1951. Other critical issues during his time in Europe were the reconstruction of the continent under the Marshall Plan, the conflict between communism and liberal democracies and, of course, the Cold War and its consequences for European integration and the transformation of the French political system. In this stage, Paz makes of matters like peace, resistance to totalitarianism and the liberal defense of democracy -especially creative freedom and critical thinking in public debates- crucial issues that accompany his work.²⁵

In France, however, the attention Paz directed towards the promotion of Mexican culture was significant. In April 1951, the embassy allowed him to travel to Cannes, given that a film financed through public funds in Mexico was to be screened at the film festival celebrated there each year. The film was *The Young and the Damned* by Luis Buñuel, and though the government of Miguel Alemán had declared the film “non grata” and “offensive to the dignity of the country,” Paz defended it and promoted it as the extraordinary work it is recognized as today, calling it the fruit of great Mexican artists like photographer Gabriel Figueroa.²⁶

During his time in Japan and later in India, Paz continued his intellectual labor as well as his diplomatic work. Until 1968, the year in which Paz resigned from his diplomatic post, he had published more than 20 works of international renown.²⁷

²³ Instituto Cervantes, “Cronología de obras de Octavio Paz”, Bibliotecas y Documentación, Spain, 2016. Accessed December 9, 2016: http://www.cervantes.es/bibliotecas_documentacion_espanol/biografias/paris_octavio_paz_1.htm

²⁴ *Idem*

²⁵ Froylán Enciso, *Andar fronteras. El servicio diplomático de Octavio Paz en Francia (1946-1951)*, Mexico, Siglo XXI, 2008, 357 pages.

²⁶ Guillermo Sheridan, “Recordando Los Olvidados”, *Letras Libres*, August 7, 2013, Accessed December 15th, 2016:

<http://www.letraslibres.com/mexico-espana/recordando-los-olvidados>

²⁷ Instituto Cervantes, *Op. Cit.*



Paz and Mexican Foreign Policy

In his writings, he only referred to his diplomatic work on a few occasions.²⁸ In *Itinerary: An Intellectual Journey*, published in 1993, the author describes his diplomatic work by saying “...generally speaking, I was almost always in agreement with our international policy. I could travel, see countries and cities, interact with people of diverse professions, languages, races, conditions and, finally, write”.²⁹

With his combined cultural work and a 23-year career in the foreign service, Paz was a very important part of significant events for Mexican diplomacy. However, he always characterized his role in the following way: “My insignificance kept me from having even a minor influence on our foreign policy; in exchange, it gave me freedom”.

What is certain is that as a member of the Diplomatic Service of Mexico, Paz believed his promotions had been “slow and his career, mediocre,” as he told Mexican filmmaker Claudio Isaac in an interview.³⁰ However, his assignments abroad permeated his cultural formation and his vision of the world, much of that worldview reflected in his works, or as Aurelio Asiain³¹ put it: a style that “...cooled and solidified as he exercised an informed diplomatic prose in which precision and reticence go necessarily hand in hand”.³²

In 1951, he was sent to India for six months as part of a team placed in charge of opening the embassy in the country which had recently gained its independence.³³ Later, as ambassador, his influence in the country would be overwhelming. In 1998, Indian Vice President Krishan Kant, called Paz admirable for “...his immense contributions to the world of thought and for having tended bridges of understanding and friendly ties between the people of India and Mexico...”.³⁴

In the Octavio Paz files of the foreign service, one can note the importance his cultural work had for Mexico by the way many Mexican ambassadors in Latin America and Europe noted comments in the press on Paz’s work published in the countries to which they were assigned. The foreign assignments of greatest importance for Paz were determining factors in his thinking and diplomatic work. Although, as an official, he always worried about the administrative work of his diplomatic representations, which were evidently lacking in resources some instances. In Japan in 1952, the poet requested a financial bonus from the foreign ministry, informing of the high cost of living in Tokyo and the difficulties the recently inaugurated embassy was having on his work as a diplomatic representative.³⁵ At the beginning of his mission in Tokyo, Paz said he

²⁸ Andrés Ordoñez, *Op. Cit.* p.38

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 109

³⁰ Aurelio Asiain, “Octavio Paz: Diplomático en Japón”, *Mexican Journal of Foreign Policy*, p.56, Special Edition 2014. Accessed December 15th, 2016: <https://revistadigital.sre.gob.mx/images/stories/numeros/ne2014/asiain.pdf>

³¹ *Idem*

³² *Idem*

³³ *Ibid*, p.58

³⁴ Archive of the Embassy of Mexico to India, Genaro Estrada Archives of Diplomatic History, written communication from the Embassy of Mexico in New Delhi, L 00296(21/04/98) (India’s Vicepresident speech on the occasion of the death of Octavio Paz.)

³⁵ Hideo Furuya, “Memoria del Servicio Exterior Mexicano en Japón”, p.49, *Archives of Diplomatic History*, 1985.



was enjoying his stay, even with the difficulties and described Japanese society in a letter to his friend, French poet Jean-Clarence Lambert, this way: “Japan closed to foreigners? I have never seen more courteous and warm people”.³⁶ The historical archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contain little information on Paz’s short assignment in Tokyo. However, it is evident that two important events preoccupied Octavio Paz and marked his diplomatic and cultural career: the illness of his wife and economic difficulties. During his time in Japan, his wife, Elena Garro, fell seriously ill with myelitis³⁷ which, combined with the difficult economic conditions of the embassy, was an overwhelming moment for Paz which he described as “...one of the hardest moments of my life,” in another letter to his friend Lambert.³⁸

While, as Aurelio Asiain notes, Paz read Japanese authors and Japanese literature ended up occupying a privileged place in Paz’s attention, incorporating elements from it in his poetry, his contact with Japanese reality was late, brief, and limited. It is important to note, however, that his arrival in Tokyo as *Interim Charges d’ Affaires* until the eventual appointment of an ambassador, as someone who had been working as Second Secretary, was full of significance. First, it was Paz’s job to begin operations of the representation just as he had at the Embassy of Mexico in India. In fact, the experience he had accumulated with regard to processing opening documents in India would prove valuable to that end. Moreover, it is important to mention that Paz was the artifice behind a notable beginning of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Two days after his arrival, Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs announces its willingness to receive him. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was Katsuo Okazaki, none other than the man who would sign the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Defense with the United States upon which current security relations between the two countries continue to be based. But beyond that, Paz learns that the belief Japan continues to harbor rampant anti-Americanism is no longer a clear reality:

“My first impressions are very positive. I have been surprised by the courtesy and kindness of officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also surprising is the state—at least apparently—of general prosperity. I see no beggars. The people appear healthy and happy. Contrary to what I expected, I have not seen rancor against Americans...I do not believe I am wrong to affirm that I have found a spiritual state very distinct from that of Europe, especially from France: neither bitterness nor resentment. I do not see any hatred of foreigners”.³⁹

Additionally, Paz played a fundamental role in negotiating some of the first Treaties of Peace and Commerce with both India as well as with Japan, which he characterized as “the search for markets for Japanese producers in Mexico”.⁴⁰

Octavio Paz’s relationship with Mexico’s foreign ministry was tense in the years before he was named ambassador, both in Japan and in France, as well as for continuing his cultural work

³⁶ Aurelio Asiain, *Op.Cit.*, p.65

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 68

³⁸ *Idem*

³⁹ Aurelio Asiain, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁴⁰ *Idem*.



while performing his work for the ministry. As Minister in the Embassy of Mexico in Paris, his intellectual activities were limited on some occasions due to his diplomatic duties. In 1960, in a letter addressed to the then Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Manuel Tello,⁴¹ insisted in one request—which had been denied—on attending the International Meeting of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Washington D.C., reiterating that “...I have almost never been able to use my allotted vacation days due to the needs of the foreign service”. Additionally, he emphasized that the responses to his requests be sent via telegraph—communication methods were limited at the time and a message sent by air mail could take up to one month. The ministry responded to his request via telegram on March 29, denying him authorization, but “...duly noting that the distinctions bestowed on members of the foreign service roundly benefit those individuals”.⁴²

In mid-1961, the poet’s mother fell ill, something which deeply affected Paz. Several requests to visit her in Mexico, sent on his behalf by Ignacio Morones Prieto, were generally denied until December of that year when, after many requests, he was granted 60 days of leave. However, by the beginning of 1962, his mother had recovered and the poet had decided to continue his work to organize the Exhibition of Mexican Art in Paris, which was carried out that year a few months prior to his departure for India.⁴³

Upon being named Ambassador to India, President López Mateos also assigned him the countries of Afghanistan and Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. Upon his arrival, the first communique he sent was to the President of India and is a sign of how his work remained close to literature and his thinking. In the text, Paz writes that “...international peace is like a concert of different voices and harmonies, not like a monologue; for us, unity is not the enemy of plurality”.⁴⁴ Paz concludes by praising the philosophical work of the Indian President, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan: “The work and the man are inseparable, as occurs with all authentic philosophers. Philosophical truths are, after all, human truths. That is to say, ideas that must not only resist logical proofs but those of life”.⁴⁵

During his assignment in India, Paz is remembered for organizing important diplomatic outreach, including the 1962 visit of President Adolfo López Mateos, who visited the country and made pronouncements against colonialism and the significant differences between developed and developing countries which Paz called an “affirmation between Mexico and India to conserve international peace while faced with problems affecting all humanity”.⁴⁶ Octavio Paz’s assignment in India lasted seven years, during which he also paid several visits to Afghanistan

⁴¹ Octavio Paz Historical Archives, Diplomatic Historical Archive of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Embassy of Mexico in Paris, France, Numeral 0325/195, Bundle III /OD/131/2.02-12

⁴² Octavio Paz Historical Archives, Diplomatic Historical Archive of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Embassy of Mexico in Paris, France, Telegram 0327, March 29, 1960, Bundle III /OD/131/2.02-12

⁴³ Octavio Paz Historical Archives, Diplomatic Historical Archive of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Numeral 0218 from the Embassy of Mexico in Paris, France, file 44-0/131, January 10th, 1962, Bundle III /OD/131/2.02-12

⁴⁴ Octavio Paz Historical Archives, Diplomatic Historical Archive of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, File 0324, Letter addressed to the President of India as presentation of credentials.

⁴⁵ *Idem*

⁴⁶ Archive of the Embassy of Mexico to India, Genaro Estrada Archives of Diplomatic History, Written communication from the Embassy of Mexico in New Delhi, Letter to the President of India, Bundle III /OD/131/2.02



and Ceylon, countries which he said faced great challenges because of their respective geographic and geo-political situations.

During Paz's assignment in India, the author was able to maintain an equilibrium between his writing and his diplomatic work. In 1963, he was awarded the International Prize for Poetry for his work. In that context, the Mexican Senate recognized the work of Paz and held a ceremony honoring him, during which then Senator Manuel Moreno stated "the prize he obtained, is the crowning of a literary career that began in 1935." A group of legislators followed those remarks, as did the President of the Senate, Senator Ramón Ruiz Vasconcelos.⁴⁷

Following the President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's entry in office in 1964, Ambassador Paz presented his resignation to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Antonio Carrillo Flores, whose friendly response indicated that [the president] "...saw fit that you continue working with the Mexican Foreign Service, to which you add prestige for both everything you do and everything that you are".⁴⁸ After 1966, Paz grew interested in spreading Mexican relations with Afghanistan and Ceylon with more dynamism. Accordingly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed to him traveling to each of those countries twice per year, particularly because of the good relationship Paz maintained with Afghan King Mohammed Zahir Shah,⁴⁹ whom he described as a "cultured, affable and patriotic person" who "sympathized with the international politics of Mexico...", and "...understood the struggle of our people to defend our sovereignty...", what's more, he believed that Mexico was "a model for other nations...".⁵⁰

During Paz's assignment in India, he was not only interested in developing bilateral relations with the country, but also in improving Mexico's multilateral relations. In 1968, he was invited by U Thant, then Secretary General of the United Nations from Burma, to attend the Seminar on the Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination that took place in New Delhi in September of that year,⁵¹ which was a subject of importance for the author in his work *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, in which Paz recounts the feelings of Mexicans faced with latent discrimination or a "...sense of inferiority" and a "...instinctual lack of confidence in our abilities".⁵²

By that year, Paz's presence in India was something of great importance and recognition for his fellow ambassadors and authorities in that country, and Paz's years in India had validated the warmth the head of the diplomatic corps felt for him. Because of that, his sudden resignation from his post in October of 1968 caused a great commotion and controversy in the country and the diplomatic world.

⁴⁷ *Op. Cit.*, Newspaper sheet, "Honró senado a Octavio Paz".

⁴⁸ Archive of the Embassy of Mexico to India, Genaro Estrada Archives of Diplomatic History, Written communication from the Embassy of Mexico in New Delhi, Resolution 0228, Secretary Office, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Bundle III /OD/131/1-18

⁴⁹ Archive of the Embassy of Mexico to India, Genaro Estrada Archives of Diplomatic History, Written communication from the Embassy of Mexico in New Delhi, resolution 00773, File 54/0/323/66, Folio number 0449, Bundle III /OD/131/126-66

⁵⁰ *Idem*

⁵¹ Archive of the Embassy of Mexico to India, Genaro Estrada Archives of Diplomatic History, Written communication from the Embassy of Mexico in New Delhi, Telex XXI/410.391.6/109, August 12, 1968, Bundle III /OD/131/126-66

⁵² Octavio Paz, "El laberinto de la soledad", p. 1, *Fondo de Cultura Económica*, México, 1992.



The resignation of Octavio Paz

On October 17, 1968, Mexican Foreign Secretary Antonio Carrillo Flores asked the Main Office of the Diplomatic Service to accept Ambassador Octavio Paz's resignation "at his own request",⁵³ and on October 18, through a press release, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed that "...it is very serious that a Mexican ambassador, based on inexact versions [of events], published by foreign media, judge the country or the government he represents". Octavio Paz, after being informed of the events of October 2nd, 1968, in the Plaza of Tres Culturas, where dozens of students were killed, decided to announce his resignation. In a letter to Foreign Secretary Antonio Carrillo Flores he wrote: "The armed forces fired on a crowd composed mainly of students. The result: more than 25 dead, hundreds wounded and more than a thousand imprisoned. I will not describe to you how I feel. I imagine it is what the majority of Mexicans feel: sadness and anger. [...] I beg you to accept my resignation, in accordance with the Law of Foreign Service".⁵⁴

In an interview with the AFP news service that year, he stated that "I am not saying that the students were correct, but that there are other methods that do not depend on the police to end peaceful demonstrations".⁵⁵ Moreover, he admitted that his decision was based on information that arrived from the press in India, France, and Great Britain, although he said "believing those sources to be erroneous is subjective".⁵⁶ In that same year, the Olympic Games were also held in Mexico City, and Paz had decided not to participate in the Meeting of International Poets because, he said, he had been invited to attend the Olympics and write a poem to commemorate the event. However, the poem he sent to the Olympic Committee was more about the problems facing students in Mexico than about the actual games, and he told AFP that he preferred to provide "...a moral, but not political, commitment to the text."⁵⁷

After leaving the Foreign Service, Octavio Paz spoke with international media of his opinions on what had occurred in October of 1968. In November of that year, he gave an interview to the French newspaper *Le Monde* in which, according to the report sent by the Mexican Ambassador to France, Silvio Zavala, Paz opined that in "Mexico the majority of intellectuals have become part of the system and there is an official culture represented by people like Torres Bodet and Martín Luis Guzmán, who are writers of the regime".⁵⁸ His decision to resign his post would later be described by Guillermo Sheridan—Paz's biographer—the following way: "Representing a

⁵³ Archive of the Embassy of Mexico to India, Genaro Estrada Archives of Diplomatic History, Written communication from the Embassy of Mexico in New Delhi, Resolution 5-A356, Folio number 0154, October 17, 1968, Bundle III /OD/131/126-66

⁵⁴ *Idem*.

⁵⁵ Archive of the Embassy of Mexico to India, Genaro Estrada Archives of Diplomatic History, Written communication from the Embassy of Mexico in New Delhi, Newspaper Clip "El Día", October 20th, 1968, Bundle III /OD/131/126-66-

⁵⁶ *Idem*

⁵⁷ *Idem*

⁵⁸ Octavio Paz Historical Archives, Diplomatic Historical Archive of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Numeral 0218 from the Embassy of Mexico in Paris, France, Statements by Mr. Octavio Paz to the Parisian newspaper *Le Monde*, Numeral 2870, File 44-0/870, November 14th, 1968,



government that, through his eyes, had lost its moral legitimacy, he put his essential duty as a citizen above his circumstantial position as an official”.⁵⁹

Final considerations

Mexico remembers Octavio Paz more as an intellectual than a diplomat. However, many forget that he was the principal pioneer behind the friendly relationship between Mexico and India, and one of the first links in the postwar relationship between Mexico and Japan, as much for his great diplomatic skills as for his artistic ability. In 2014, Mexico celebrated the hundredth year of his birth. Then Foreign Secretary José Antonio Meade referred to Paz as a “meticulous, professional and irreproachable diplomat”⁶⁰ who, through his efforts, was one of the individuals who “...build the prestige that accompanies our foreign policy today”. That is true without a doubt, but more than that, Paz began a political and artistic dialogue with India and Japan, two nations that have risen in the international community with extraordinary force, and under the principles that decades later would become an integral part of Mexican foreign policy—self-determination, anti-colonialism, and the struggle for international peace and security.

Moreover, by establishing a constant dialogue with those countries, Octavio Paz helped forge a foreign policy in constant search of new allies in support of international cooperation as one of its central axes. Additionally, his diplomatic work in France was crucial in finalizing the configuration of relative Independence while facing the dynamics of the Cold War as well as the domestic call to project an international policy supporting freedom and democracy.

Without a doubt, his time as a diplomat left lessons for Mexico that remain undeniably valid. In 1979, for example, Paz wrote *Mexico and the United States positions and counter positions*. In the work, he argued that “with regard to our relationship with the United States, it continues to be the old relationship between the strong and the weak, oscillating between indifference and abuse, lies, and cynicism. The majority of Mexicans have the justified conviction that the treatment our country receives is unjust”, and he concluded by saying “faithful to its origins, in its domestic policy and its foreign policy, the United States has always ignored the other (...) Not only are we the majority of the species, each marginalized society, as poor as it may be, represents a unique and precious version of humanity. If the United States wants to redeem its integrity, they must redeem the others: those excluded from the west”.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Jacinto Rodríguez Munguía, “La trampa de Octavio Paz”, *Revista MX*, Mexico, 6 de abril de 2015, p.49. Accessed December 15th, 2016: <http://www.m-x.com.mx/xml/pdf/349/46.pdf>

⁶⁰ Jesús Alejo Santiago, “Rinden homenaje a Octavio Paz en Relaciones Exteriores”, *Milenio Cultura*, Mexico, May 23, 2014. Accessed December 20th, 2016: http://www.milenio.com/cultura/Octavio-Paz-homenaje-SRE_0_304169804.html

⁶¹ Guillermo Sheridan, “Octavio Paz: la paradoja México- Estados Unidos”, *El Universal*, November 22nd, 2016, Accessed December 15th, 2016: <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/entrada-de-opinion/columna/guillermo-sheridan/cultura/letras/2016/11/22/octavio-paz-la-paradoja>



Chronology of the Career of Ambassador Octavio Paz in the Mexican Foreign Service

Enters the Mexican Foreign Service	1944
Chancellor in the Consulate of Mexico in San Francisco, US	1944
Chancellor in the Consulate of Mexico in New York, US	1945
Third Secretary in the Mexican Legate in Paris, France	1945-1951
Second Secretary in the Embassy in India	1951-1952
Interim Charges d’Affaires in Japan	1952
Secretary of the Mexican Legate in Bern, Switzerland	1952-1953
Head of the Permanent Delegation to International Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland	1953
Assistant Director of International Organizations in Mexico City	1953-1959
Director General of International Organizations in Mexico City	1959
Interim Charges d’Affaires in France	1959-1960
Minister of the Embassy of Mexico in Paris, France	1961-1962
Ambassador of Mexico to India	1962-1968
The resignation of Ambassador Octavio Paz is accepted after his controversial statements surrounding the events of October 2 in Mexico City	1968



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