1. Introduction

Man’s rationality allowed him to adapt and add certain devices to any space that gave him the opportunity to survive; thus, man transformed them into territorial shelters; this is the starting point of humanity’s road to high state of civilization. When these spaces stopped being natural physical environments and became artificial environments; that is, human territory; the latter became subject to men’s institutions: norms, rules, incentives, restrictions, values and structures. After a long time, this territory –physically and socially- becomes urban space.

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2 Lewis H. Morgan mentions six ethnical states humanity went through to achieve high state of civilization; savagery and barbarism were previous and necessary stages mankind had to experience to overcome the difficult conditions posed by nature and survive (Morgan, 1980:77-98).
4 March and Olsen emphasize rules derived from institutions in order to understand better how they work and how they determine or affect individual behavior (Peters, 2003:37).
5 Soja mentions that urban spaces include geohistory –because it emphasizes the inseparable bond between geography and history; as well as their necessary and often problematic interrelationship-. Urban space refers to cities, a historical-social-spatial phenomenon which determines social relationships, construction forms and human activity within the city and its geographical sphere of influence (Soja, 2008:36).
These physical transformations (urbanization), the antithesis of rural environments, turn everything into cities, taking advantage of the environment’s biotic and abiotic resources in such an irrational manner that it puts the entire world at environmental risk.  

“Mankind are the only beings who may be said to have gained an absolute control over the production of food. Without laying the basis of subsistence mankind could not have propagated themselves into other areas... and ultimately over the whole surface of the earth…” (Morgan, 1980: 90).

The long progression of human evolution and the fact that it lived, between savagery and barbarism, a variety of geographical situations allows Morgan to record several technical and cultural advances which ends up with the domestication of some animals –besides fishing-, cereals and vegetables (Morgan, 1980:92-93). This lead man to the control and construction of territories like Gilberto Giménez says; this is why it is important to analyze it through the geohistory Soja proposes.

Man’s transit to civilization:

“The adoption of agriculture does not have to be confused with the adoption of sedentary life. It is customary to compare the farmer’s sedentary life with the nomad existence of the “homeless hunter”. This comparison is quite artificial. Last century the hunter and fishing tribes of the coast of Canada, in the Pacific, inhabited permanent villages of wooden, important, adorned and almost luxurious houses (…). Even though nomad cultivating of vegetables is the most primitive one, it is not the most simple or the most ancient (….). The conditions of natural irrigation allowed farmers not to be nomads. To grow all year long in the same plot which is flooded in between harvests.” (Child, 1992:92-94).

This gives us a good idea of the diversity of situations man lived when transitioning from being hunter-collectors to primitive farmers and depending on the habitat their choice to be sedentary or not according to environmental conditions of the territory and the activity chosen to develop in said place to survive.

Robert Lowie (1920) speaks of the political development of territory and mentions Ancient Greece was the first Western society, when it transitioned...
from its last stage of barbarism to civilization society it started recognizing individuals as part of municipalities, districts or bigger political and spatial nucleus and not part of a lineage or group of relatives unlike previous stages of barbarism (Lowie, 2001:268).

According to Child, what happened there was the most advanced from of urban revolution there had ever been; the valley of the Nile, Mesopotamia, Athens, Rome and several other cities proved the Neolithic Revolution, where the first forms of agriculture sprung, had been surpassed. The next step was the sociopolitical construction of spaces known as cities (Child, 1992:173-218).

In fact, it wasn’t until the fifth century that Ancient Greece overcame the clan organization, typical of barbarism. Cleisthenes (509 B.C.), a very distinguished Athenian legislator established the “second plan of human government” which can still be found in modern civilizations. The bases on which he created the Athenian political system lasted until this independent state ended. His legislation stripped the gentes, phratries and tribes of their influence; their power was given to the demes, local tribes and the state which have been the sources of political power since then.

“Clisthenes divided Attica into a hundred demes, or townships, each circumscribed by metes and bounds, and distinguished by a name. Every citizen was required to register himself, and to cause an enrolment of his property in the deme in which he resided. This enrolment was the evidence as well as the foundation of his civil privileges. The deme displaced the naucrary. Its inhabitants were an organized body politic with powers of local self-government, like the modern: American township.” (Morgan, 1980:301).

The deme was organized into greater geographical districts; the highest one in the State or Republic was made of ten local tribes or districts. The Citizens’ Assembly gathered in the Acropolis where the emblematic Parthenon was constructed during the times of Pericles.

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8 The naucrary was the incipient deme or township which, when the idea of a territorial basis was fully developed, was to become the foundation of the second great plan of government. When this institution reached its peak, it gave an organic embodiment to the political system created by the people, exercising democracy to govern themselves. Twelve naucaries formed a trittys, a larger territorial circumscription, but they were not necessarily contiguous. It was, in like manner, the germ of the county, the next territorial aggregate above the township (Morgan, 1980:295).

9 Hippodamus of Miletus (498-408 B.C.), was in charge of the construction of Athens and created a new urban planning. According to Aristotle, was a pioneer of urban planning; most Western cities were constructed in the Renaissance.
Athenians then based their “second plan of human government” on territory and property. The invention of municipalities and the organization of its inhabitants into a political body was the starting point for the territorial organization of said city-State (Morgan, 1980:302-304). This was the regime (politia, government by many people) which Aristotle favored; he also thought the constitution was the structure which gave order to the civitates “establishing the management of every position and above all, the sovereign authority” (Rosique, 2007:8).

The foundation of Rome in approximately 753 b.C. was carried out by tribes with very poor political ideas, even though they had federalist backgrounds; the confederation of those agricultural tribes which owned herds of domestic animals, made of gentes that lived in separate areas never achieved enough unity or strength to accomplish anything more than independent existence.10

According to Morgan:

“Following the example of the Athenian tribes and focusing on cities; they worked for five generations and achieved a change similar and complete of their government plan; from a gentile organization to a political one” (Morgan, 1980: 309).

Common ownership of land was a thousand-year old custom of those tribes in their previous stages of barbarism; the Latin ones also had land for every tribe, gens and home. They also had private property since Romulan times until “absolute private property” appeared; an institutional monstrosity consolidated in the stage of civilization. Despite this, the home kept its field and the village too and cultivated it as heritage field which was later recognized as part of the elements of the political body (civitas populus). All of these elements paved the way for a new political regime: a government based on people and personal relationships (social) gave way to another one based on territory and private property (political-administrative). This way Rome entered civilization and left behind barbarism. Romans consisted of two distinct classes, the populus and the plebeians. Both were personally free, and both entered the ranks of the army. The plebeians, did not belong to any gens, and consequently were without the government. Obviously, gentes were reluctant to acknowledge their entire equality; thus, Rome’s social organization was based on people and not on territory or property (Morgan, 1980:328 y 344).

10 “Between the 10th and 7th b.C., central Italy was populated by two main groups: Osco-Umbrians and Latins. Latium Vetus (the former Lazio territory) was populated by Etruscans, Volscians, Sabines, Aequi, Rutulians and Ausones. They came from different areas of central Italy, including Tuscany, March and Liguria.” Fundación de Roma (2013, July 24th). Retrieved from: http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fundaci%C3%B3n_de_Roma
This situation of social inequality was politically risky; thus, Servius Tullius implemented the new regime based on three main changes: the substitution of classes, formed upon the measure of individual wealth, in the place of the gentes; second, the institution of the comitia centuriata, as the new popular assembly, in the place of the comitia centuriata, the assembly of the gentes, with a transfer of the substantial powers of the latter to the former; and third, the creation of four city wards in the nature of townships circumscribed by metes and bounds and named as territorial areas, in which the residents of each ward were required to enroll their names and register their property; and subserve all the purposes of a military as well as a civil organization (Morgan, 1980: 355).

"Under it, Rome became mistress of the world. The element, of property, now rising into commanding importance, determined its character. It had brought aristocracy and privilege into prominence, which seized the opportunity to withdraw the control of the government in a great, measure from the hands of the people, and bestow it upon the men of property." (Morgan, 1980:355).

Due to its functional character, the municipality of Rome conquered a central position in the Republic’s government, to which all of the other areas were subordinate to; in fact, as time went by, Rome became a huge municipal government with power all over Italy and military, political and administrative tentacles that stretched all the way over to the three conquered provinces of Europe, Africa and Asia.11

This way, “arrogant Rome” became the dominant voice of the Republic's new government plan and the center of the State which kept the people organized through the army, which was formed by all citizens and by all of the other institutional relationships the State held with other peninsular municipalities. Rome became central metropolis and had enough cohesion to keep the Republic united (Morgan, 1980:359-361).

Rome’s main problem was ruling based on the interests of rich proprietors without taking into account popular needs which were left aside like the barbarian migrant tribes established on the outsides of Rome. All of this happened thanks to the power and alliance formed between the Senate and Rome’s central government.

11 Subsequently, the city-commune in the full meaning of the word appeared as a mass phenomenon only in the Occident, since the first millenia b.C.; to develop into a city-commune, a settlement had to be of the nonagricultural-commercial type, at least to a relevant extent and to be equipped with the following features: a fortification, a market, its own court of law, and at least in part, autonomous law, an associational structure and at least partial autonomy and autocephaly which includes administration by authorities in whose appointment the burghers could in some form participate. (Weber, 2002:949).
Aristotle had already foreseen that oligarchy was a terrible form of government, whereas Polybius (2nd century b.C.) thought mixed forms of government could achieve stability through both violence or consensus. However, from Plato to Polybius, everyone thought every regimen was subject to three phases: “growth, development and decadence” (Rosique, 2007:11-12).

Rome closed this last phase of decadence when in 410 b.C., Alaric and his barbaric soldiers destroyed Rome in three days; even though the administration and emperor Honorius had not been living there since 404 b.C but in Ravenna (Montes de Oca in San Agustín, 1978:x).

2. Theory and practice in modern territories

Like Ancient Rome, Ancient Greece's system of territorial division was very similar to the one current nations have; for example, municipality, country or province, city-state. Each one of them have an organized political body with their own local government powers; we can find this in England, the United States, France or Mexico. Ever since societies achieved a certain degree of civilization, the politically and administratively delimited territories became the place man made a collective commitment to build spaces, territories, environments, collective habitats, ceremonial centers, public squares, streets, parks, neighborhoods, cities, metropolis, megalopolis, etc. (Soja, 2008:33).

When the industrial revolutions hit Manchester and Chicago during the 19th century, these cities became the first urban spaces which were “socially produced, almost totally, due to socio-spatial practices of industrial capitalism”; with modes of production based on absolute private property instituted in Rome and amply questioned by Marx but supported by the ruling liberal ideology in England and the United States:

“Chicago changed in the second half of the 20th century, whereas Manchester did it in the first half: an urban laboratory, relatively ideal to examine the formation of the industrial capitalist city and its reflexive urban space” (Soja: 2008:127 & 135).

The aforementioned is important, latterly we talk a lot about the factual powers which determine the way “intelligent territories” are strategically produced to achieve the highest levels of productivity, competitiveness and innovation in globalized information societies (Castells, 2000:66).

Speaking of cities, especially industrial cities with chimneys which sprung all over the planet during the 20th century, besides putting into circulation millions of cars with internal combustion engines. Graizboard tells us something that can be very important regarding the irrational management of human territories ruled by “total urbanization” foreseen by Lefèbvre:
“A place of unmistakable anthropogenic features is one which has materials which have been drastically altered in a physical and biological way by human action. This can be a way of describing cities, massive artificial products that have been produced throughout man’s history. The impact these have had in space and time on the environment; positive or negative, have not only been caused by human actions, but also by natural or abiotic (geological or meteorological events) activity”. (Graizboard, 2013).

What I mean, although it seems obvious, is that if we see territory solely as human production, it becomes the central object of the study of human geography which we learned from our teachers when we were young. Its post-modern version is less descriptive and more analytical and critical.

We can introduce ourselves into the study of (urban) territory which is the historical scenario for the foundation of emblematic cities such as Mexico City12 and learn about the approaches of new institutionalism13. This is one of the ways to understand the symbolic sense of space, territoriality, and the space where the things that matter to men and society happen. Cities spring from natural rural environments which become subject to institutions designed by men to meet its needs (Lindón, 2010:66).

Before becoming human territory, a natural space serves as a habitat for wild plants and wild animals, far from human institutions; once it has been chosen to become a place where humans settle, this rural space will gradually turn into an environment used by men. Man molds the environment surrounding its settlements into a territorial functional unit full of institutions, rules and economic, political, social and cultural obligations; it becomes property of the human group which takes over everything that can be distributed, allotted or possessed and use it in usufruct to the group. Taking into account some technical and architectural adjustments -even though they might be primitive- transform said territory into an urban space.14

Thus, territory is made up of three main ingredients: appropriation, power and border which sometimes coincide with the immediate natural geographical accidents (rivers, oceans, mountain ranges, the edge of a

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12 John Julius Norwich in his marvelous illustrated book “The Great Cities in History” mentions Mexico City. The pages dedicated to this city include Felipe Fernández – Armesto’s painting and the introduction reads: “Behind the main square of Mexico City, painted in 1695 by most fashionable painter in all of America at the time, there is a volcano which reminds us that the city’s splendor was at the mercy of God”(Fernández en Norwich, 2010:192).

13 B. Guy Peters book: “Institutional Theory in Political Science: The New Institutionalism” mentions some concepts and theoretical approaches which are used in this essay.

14 Alicia Lindón states that urban geography is knowledge dedicated to the study of the space-society relationship “in” and “of” cities (Lindón in Hiernaux, 2009).
forest or desert, etc.); its essential elements are plane or surface, lines and points and moments of plane where cities and means of communication are set up. Social practices of *production of territory* are based on limiting surfaces, creating “nettings” to set up limits, instituting “knots” (population centers that symbolize actors’ positions) and drawing “nets” (means of communication between the “knots”) to link, control, bring closer or move them away (Giménez, 2000: 22-23).

Territory ends up being their safety zone and means of subsistence, source of resources, geopolitical strategic area, political-administrative division (municipalities, provinces, countries). It also becomes the favorite landscape of the inhabitants because of the natural beauty and privileged ecological environments which spark up the feeling of being home, having common history; referring to collective memory, becomes a “geosymbol” (Giménez: 2000,24).

3. Synecism, urban space and city

Recent discoveries of ancient cities like Katal Küyük in Turkey (11 thousand years old) and Jericho in Palestina (9 thousand years old) hold the answer to the following philosophical question: why mankind realized this urban space made up of buildings, squares, streets, rooftops and balconies; dedicated to cult, religion, exchange of products and organization of defense responded to the gregarious needs that allowed him to survive and transcend after millions of years of wandering through forests, jungles and savannahs in its stage of barbarism?

The first groups of humans left their architectural footprint by building their cities, even before they had writing systems. Within those cities they were capable of building a complex work division which gave them sustenance besides agriculture or domestication of animals. This urban space allowed them to initiate exchange relationships with other groups of hunter-collectors which had rudimentary knowledge of mirrors, leather pouches, obsidian knives, spearheads, religious talismans, ornaments, arrows, bows, tools, grains and seeds which they exchanged; they also intently collected and grew plants and raised animals for the number of people who lived in those cities.

Soja supports this hypothesis, this cities were built far from fertile lands where agriculture or animal domestication was impossible; however, commerce allowed them to develop people dedicated almost exclusively to activities related to the new *urban space* they lived in. Thus, these were cities which had regional-metropolitan economy and their territories measured between 30 and 40 kilometers (Soja, 2008:82).

Once these first primitive cities were built (*first urban revolution*) and there was a need for rural products to sustain urban populations, massive
agriculture and stockbreeding was developed, as well as other activities that benefited the city; this shows cities came first and agriculture and stockbreeding second.

The agglomeration of humans was named by Lefèbvre and Soja as synecism, that is, man’s wish or desire to collectively commit themselves to create spaces, firstly bedrooms, kitchens and houses; secondly, streets, squares, churches, neighborhoods, towns, city-states, kingdoms, empire and so forth until reaching confederations.

Synecism is the raison d’être and sense of the city which was seen by Greek philosophers as something inherent to mankind; the Aristotelian concept of Zoon Politikon directly refers to man of the polis. In our time, Henri Lefèbvre put forth the hypothesis “complete urbanization of society” (Lefèbvre, 1980:7); Jordi Borja and Manuel Castells agreed and said: “if urbanization is the usual form of spatial settlement of the human species”, then by the 21st century “everything will be urban” (Borja & Castells, 2000:11). Thus, Borja also agrees with Lefèbvre and thinks the right to belong to a city is a universal human right.

According to Mexican experience, living in a space considered as urbanized does not guarantee urban-like behaviors; the first one refers to physical environment (city) and the second one to the socio-cultural quality of the inhabitant that has to do with adherence to prevailing rules, knowledge and values within each urban or specific space. Even when people do not follow general rules of urban coexistence, cities (urban spaces) seem to be the place where humans can fulfil their dreams.

Henri Lefèbvre has made four hypothesis in regards to urban space:

The first one is:

“empty and pure, the ideal place for numbers and proportions, golden number, for example is visual and therefore drawn, spectacular; it belatedly fills itself with things, inhabitants and “users” to the extent that this demiurgic space has a justification; next to the abstract space of philosophers, epistemologists” (Lefèbvre in Vázquez, 2009:4).

Second hypothesis. Social space which is defined as:

“a product of society, above all depends on contrasting, on empirical description before all theorizing”. This is “consequence of work and labor division; the meeting point of produced objects, the set of things that occupy

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15 Henri Lefèbvre’s work uses synoecism with an “o”. Soja adapts this concept from the Greek sinoikismós, which literally means “dwelling together” it refers to the formation of Greek polis thanks to the amalgamation of previous populations (Soja, 2008:41).
them and their subdivision, effective, objectified and therefore works” (Lefèbvre in Vázquez, 2009:4).

The third hypothesis mentions that space is a political instrument deliberately targeted and limited.

“It is a procedure in the hands of “someone”, individually or collectively; that is, some power (for example, a state), ruling class (bourgeoisie) or a group that can on certain occasions represent global society and have its own objectives, for example technocrats. (Lefèbvre en Vázquez, 2009:5).

The fourth hypothesis allows Lefèbvre to suggest that space:

“becomes a place of said reproduction, including urban space, leisure spaces, educational spaces, everyday ones, etc. this reproduction is done through a relative scheme of existing society whose essential characteristic is not-united, disassociated unity which maintains unity, force within fragmentation”. (Lefèbvre en Vázquez, 2009:5).

From this perspective, space is first built abstractedly and then physically thanks to objects added to it, this makes it concrete human space; that is, he makes it his own, his territory. Later on, limits, valleys and borders are politically added and finally places that make it up –streets, neighborhoods, bridges, parks, buildings, restaurants, movies, theaters, etc.-. And this is how it is symbolically reproduced in the imaginary of the social diversity which inhabits and visits it; Parisians see Paris one way and tourists another way; poor people one way and rich people another way; young people also have a different perception from old people.

In my opinion, this is why it is important to conceptualize urban space which have become human territory, city, inhabited, ruled, planned and invaded places; because all of them are territory. Times of democratic governance means government, private or social agents end up building it by using public policies, government programs, infrastructure works to benefit themselves and transform it; thus, they cause environmental impact in various forms.

4. Basin of Mexico turned into Aztec territory

The geographical position of Mexican territory, its complex mountainous system, its natural evolution and variety of climates promoted the formation of a mosaic of environmental conditions and great biodiversity. One of the most important mountainous regions is the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt which runs across the national territory from coast to coast, from Nayarit to Veracruz, passing through Jalisco, Michoacán, Guerrero, State of Mexico, Morelos, Puebla, Tlaxcala and obviously the Federal District (Delgadillo, 2001:10-13).
This mountain formation can be found where two great biogeographic regions meet: the Neartic and Neotropic; this location has a special biodiversity determined by the rock mass where the basin of Mexico is located. This area is a privileged one due to its mild climate, it has served as human habitat for more than 11 millennia; the main problem is that men—with higher abilities than other animals- soon developed techniques to alter the natural environment, climate and natural cycle of plants and animals; this has been an environmental tragedy for the basin, which is currently the territory that houses the Mexican megalopolis.

The basin of Mexico received human groups which came from the Bering Strait which settled near its 5 lakes fed by 45 rivers (Legorreta, 2008:219), various indigenous cultures developed until the Aztecs arrived and founded Tenochtitlan in 1325, making it two centuries later the center of the empire that ruled almost all of Mesoamerica. After the Spanish Conquest, Hernan Cortes also chose this place to be the capital of New Spain; three centuries later, in 1821, Mexico won its independence and created the Federal District there.

The loss of the only stronghold the Aztecs had destroyed their government body (institutions of territorial control), they were soon forgotten and replaced by the new Spanish regime. This is important because it meant a paradigm shift in environmental management and territorial organization of the New Spain which grew to the north until it reached the North American states of California, New Mexico and Texas.

16 Basin of Mexico refers to the four valleys found in the central portion of the Mexican territory, located in the 26th hydrologic region named Pánuco and the 13th region called “Valley of Mexico and Cutzamala System”, near the following cities: Pachuca, Tizayuca, Amecameca, Texcoco, Apan, etc. And nearly all the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City; except the area of Huixquilucan. This basin is politically divided among four states: State of Mexico, the Federal District, Hidalgo and Tlaxcala and a little area of the state of Puebla. (Wikipedia, 2013, June 27th).

17 Mesoamerica is the south-central region of Mexico and the northern area of Central America where the most important Pre-Hispanic civilizations flourished. This includes the Olmecs —present-day Southwestern Veracruz and Tabasco-; Mayans — present-day Yucatán peninsula, Chiapas, Guatemala, Belice and Honduras- Mixtecs and Zapotecs - present-day Oaxaca- and Totonacs - present-day northern Veracruz-; Toltecs and Aztecs -plateau-, etc.” (Gárate, 2013). The term “Mesoamerica” was first used by Paul Kirchhoff in 1943: area of human interaction which shares cultural and technological characteristics such as corn cultivation, use of pointed stick for sowing seed, construction of stepped pyramids, hieroglyphic writing, use of years consisting of 18 months, 20 days and 5 additional ones and centuries lasting 52 years, religious beliefs including: sacrifices, self-sacrifices and many gods, specialized markets, merchants and military orders with well-defined traditions (Florescano y Eissa, 2008).
According to Morgan and Gibson, the Spaniards arrived when the American indigenous cultures were in the mid-barbaric stage; they did not know iron or tools, they had no currency, they bartered and practiced human sacrifices. It is important to mention that their centralized and military background allowed them to subjugate almost all of the surrounding villages within the basin and finally outside of it. When the Spaniards arrived, they found a confederation of three tribes –Aztecs, Tezcucans and Tlacopans- which has been formed in 1426 thanks to the common language they shared (Nahuatl). The Aztec government was administered by a Council of Chiefs and a General Commander of the Army Corps; this government had two powers: civil and military ones (Gibson, 1967:23-34).

The Aztec tribe was the last one of seven who came from Aztlan –present-day Nayarit- to the basin guided by their god Huitzilopochtli in the late 12th century (1275 a. C.). When they arrived they discovered the Xochimilcas had lived there since the 10th century, they also had to cohabitate with the Chichimeca tribes which had emigrated from Teotihuacan; after the 11th and 12th century the Chalcas, Tepanecas, Tezcucans and Tlahuicans arrived and the Tlascalans settled in the valley of Tlaxcala (Morgan, 1980:234-235).

The Aztecs were few and poor and all of the best places of the Valley of Mexico are already taken, they had to start living in a little piece of land surrounded by marshlands, rocks and natural ponds. This place was borrowed from the Tepanecans from Azcapotzalco who ruled the region.18 This valley was a narrow ravine in an elevated mountain range without a way out and an oval shape. Besides Tenochtitlan there were thirty minor villages living there in an area of approximately of 120 km (north-south) and 65 km (east-west) (Gibson,1967: 5).

The first century of Tenochtitlan’s existence did not have any important events regarding territorial expansion. When the triple alliance sprung and after wars and conquests, the Aztecs started taking control over the different regions of Mesoamerica.

The important thing is that the Aztecs –being in mid stage of barbarism- left the Spaniards a territory which had been built in such a way that it still exists nowadays; although the Spaniards implemented significant technical changes from the West. Things that we can still find: the communal land (ejidal) system which is still constitutionally recognized is very similar to the calpulli; their political centralism which gave the “great tlatoani” absolute power to distribute land and his capital was the main urban concentration in the valley of Mexico (Rosique, 1984:15-26).

18 Conquests made in the valley until 1427, approximate date of the death of Lord Tezozomoc, where made by Tepanecans and not the Aztecs, the latter helped them in various wars against other tribes (Gibson, 1967:20-21).
The Aztecs’ special way of controlling and dominating the Mesoamerican territory is called *Asian production mode* or despotic-tax system which was also found in some regions of Asia and Africa (Egypt, Persia, Indonesia, etc.); their main characteristics are: a sovereign (despot), collective exploitation and oppressive and oppressed class. According to Karl A. Wittfogel’s studies on oriental despotism, Marx stated that this mode of production also existed in some Mesoamerican cultures where the hydraulic government was forced to develop some kind of tax domination through a despot sovereign, an army and a semi-professional bureaucracy which collected the taxes of the subjugated states and forced them to work to control the water from their surrounding rivers and lakes (Derecho del Estado, 2013).¹⁹

Under this regime, “the great tlatoani” (military chief) represented the highest decision maker regarding the use and property of land in all of the territory. Roger Bartra recognizes seven forms of ownership according to who used them: 1. Temple; 2. War; 3. Palace; 4. King; 5. Communities; 6. Communal lands and 7. Nobles. After the Spanish Conquest, lots of peaceful communities and indigenous tlatoanis kept their lands in exchange for services and products which were considered tributes (Rosique, 1984:22).

5. The building of Colonial territories

During Colonial Times, tax institutions favored holder of duties (encomiendas), the Spanish Crown and the Church for over three centuries; religious orders took advantage of this and offered protection to the people from the holders of duties. This is why Colonial geography of the Mexican territory is plagued with cathedrals, convents, haciendas and urban palaces which reflect work done by the indigenous people since the 16th century.

We also have to take into account the environmental impact that started with the arrival of the Spaniards and their new means of ground transportation, technical changes in agriculture, stockbreeding, exploitation of forests to build the new city, drying of canals and the initial attempts to build an exit for the basin’s storm water which flooded the city’s downtown. As time passed, the Spanish Conquest was strengthened; squares, markets and the city’s zocalo (main square) became important axes of everyday life. Indigenous and Spanish cultural elements overlapped and caused changes in the lake-related scenery; drying it has always been a permanent urban strategy.

¹⁹ In my cited work I wrote a chapter which exclusively dealt with duties, taxes and the origins of the hacienda, all of these institutions contributed to a specific way of controlling and building this territory; favoring Spanish conquistadores (Rosique, 1984:27-47).
From the start it was clear that the new planning of the city was incompatible with the surface wetlands, in 1550 the filling of canals to build elevated roads became fairly common; the superficial drainage was blocked and great bodies of stagnant water were formed. Grazing and the cutting down of trees lead to flooding during dry seasons; this is why the Spaniards dried the lakes which rarely happened before the Spanish Conquest.20

Due to the Northern mountains low height, the Colonia government built the basin’s drainage system near the lake of Zumpango and the area of Huehuetoca. The first drainage canal was 15 km long and in 1608 this canal connected the basin to the Gulf of Mexico through the basin of the Tula River. Continuous blockages of the gallery lead to the construction of the «Tajo de Nochistongo» -two centuries later-, an open canal. The aquatic environment provided the Pre-Columbian cities cultural, military and urban strength; thus, “its suppression was essential to Colonial domination” (Legorreta 2008:209-210).

Drainage work in Huehuetoca continued until the 20th century. Initially, the canal worked solely to dump the basin’s excess water; however, the construction of the Guadalupe canal in 1794, the system of water elimination into Tula, the connection with the Lake of Texcoco made the lake-related areas of the basin start to grow smaller. In the late 18th century there was a proposal to totally dry all of the lakes, an idea that seemed technically impossible for that time; however, huge migrations from Puebla and Oaxaca, in mid-twentieth century and this idea became a reality when the «City of Neza» sprung and is nowadays populated by millions of inhabitants (Legorreta, 2008:211).

We can state that the Spaniards second battle to control the territory after the conquest of Tenochtitlan was fought against the valley’s lake system, an area of over 1000 km2. Problems that arose during the rainy season included flooding which is still a common problem for the governments of the Federal District and the State of Mexico. It is possible that the New Mexicans faced a mythical problem because they never overcame the psychosocial implications of the Mexican legend that stated that there was a predestined place for the people who were to found the city; “an eagle standing atop a cactus eating a snake”.

Even though Cortés tried to overcome Tenochtitlan’s centrality by creating Coyoacán and its first city hall within the valley, he soon realized the attraction caused by the market of Tlatelolco and the place where the Main Temple had been erected and which had been destroyed after the conquest of this square. He then ordered the construction of the first government buildings and the cathedral of what would become the greatest square of the capital of the New Spain.

20 See “Historia de las Inundaciones en México” (El ombligo de la luna, 2013).
Origin is destiny and if we speak about early institutions those are historically the most important ones; this new capital allowed conquest and colonization expeditions towards all directions. Ergo, the map of the New Spain was created, it included territories from Guatemala to California, New Mexico and Texas which were lost to the United States by independent Mexico in 1847-1848.

6. Independence and secularization of the national territories

Once Mexico gained its independence, in 1824, the first federalist governments made Mexico City officially the capital of the nation by creating the Federal District; however, the fight between centralists and federalists did not end; the capital was centralist somewhere between 1847 and 1857. Federalism only returned after arms were used. Thus, the Federal District was born thanks to a political decision, child of the conflict between conservatives and liberals. Centralists thought that if they copied the Anglo-Saxon Protestants’ model implemented in the city of Washington “nothing good could happen; it would be best to follow the example of our indigenous and Spanish ancestors”.

The establishment of the Federal District was an arbitrary action, a decision made thanks to a factual power executed through an interim decree, it included the abstract idea of a Federal Republic, a territory made up of 19 states and 4 territories. Up until that moment, Mexico City had remained as the main organizing center of the economy, politics and national society since Colonial times. These trying circumstances solved the Federal District’s borders “with the turn of an imaginary compass which drew a circumference of two leagues” which cut the lake of Texcoco and the Guadalupe Mountain range in half (Pino, 2012:95-103).

As a result of this geometric capriciousness, the first deputies of the State of Mexico protested and the towns which had been split into two by that perfect circumference followed suit. Thus, the perfect circle started to take the irregular polygonal shape it has nowadays after lots of border conflicts for summer pasture lands between towns and bodies. Those changes were made thanks to amendments and trials which identified themselves with the sociocultural, economic and identity-related reality of this historical territory.

The early creation of the Federal District turned it into an urban policy of the State, a decisive factor to give historical continuity to a settlement

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21 Google offers some maps of Ancient Mexico which reflect the territorial extension of the country before General Santa Anna’s wars with the United States (Google, 2013).

22 Jorge Legorreta presents the map of the Federal District’s territory of 1824 by that 2-league radius circumference: 222 km² (Legorreta, 2008:43).
which has already been for five centuries the economic, political, military and religious center of that rising country.

The War of Reform and the liberal development paradigm brought on changes for the country and the cities; in this sense, we pay special attention to land use and natural resources. When the Church stopped being the ruling institution and the State took over the national territory, the secularization and liberalism of development policies had important environmental effects, especially for the basin of Mexico. A change was made from extensive and idle use of land to an intensive one and territorial changes brought on by the introduction of the train system throughout the country, the extensive urbanization of the city, the industrialization of the suburbs and the new agricultural technology in the fields and the city.

The rest of the country followed this road of transformations imposed by the ruling liberalism; firstly, they seized properties in “mortmain” held by the Church and indigenous communities for three centuries, later they put them in hands of new mestizo landowners through demarcating companies which were enormously prosperous during the Porfirian Age; other successful companies were foreign ones which invested in banks, oil, mines, trains, factories and haciendas (Rosique, 1984:63).

The Porfirian capital, which harbored close to 5 thousand factories in the early 20th century, had electric streetcars which transported people from the city to other neighboring towns. It was also part of a 19-thousand kilometer network of trains which connected the most important cities, ports and productive centers of the country; it was a decisive for the conformation of the national territory. Mines, lives and haciendas were controlled according to the old dictator’s will thanks to political centralism and absolute control over the country by the Porfirian militia.

The 1910 Revolution overthrew this government plagued with social injustices which was the essence of the inherited territorial model. This model kept on living thanks to political centralism, economic, demographic and urban concentration during the 20th century; landown oligarchy was replaced with the industrial bourgeoisie, a role played by an expropriating, reformist, populist and entrepreneur State.

When the Revolution ended, Mexico City rapidly grew thanks to this first wave of industrialization and motorized vehicles; the 350 thousand inhabitants in 1900 turned into almost 21 million in 2010. Nowadays the population keeps growing and living in the basin’s soil (Porras & Méndez, 2013) in spite of the laws, national plans, programs, local bands, municipal urban projects and government agencies created in the 1970’s thanks to millionaire budgets that intended to control the growth of the country’s cities and avoid environmental impact.
Once the Revolution ended, the national development project was promoted by the government of Sonora (1920-1934) in order to centralize all kinds of industries in Mexico City. This policy was followed by import substitution brought on by WWII and was then linked to the “Mexican Miracle” (1940-1970). Furthermore, Cardenas’s agrarian reform, the oil and train expropriation, the creation of banks and the National Polytechnic Institute and the decree to preserve national parks within the Federal District promoted development policies which haven’t been finished and still are a strong source of inspiration for Mexico’s basin’s comprehensive and sustainable management.

Stabilizing and shared development policies (1970-1982) were implemented and based on a mixed economy model which forced the State to assume market risks, create parastatal companies and trusts –where private interests would not have guarantee for their investments-. Thus, the State became the largest and most unproductive businessman and boss; operated by a bureaucracy whose needs were all market-oriented and fulfilled social objectives, but were not accountable and were in the red.

The Global Development Plan (1978) included the State’s economic speech: agriculture, stockbreeding, fishing, industry, housing, human settlements; all of them were subject to state intervention, decentralization, deconcentration, territorial planning, national finances and citizen participation and were planned by the president’s cabinet. Finally, an adverse international environment, an out-of-control inflation, an enormous external debt and capital flight, the nationalization of banks and the devaluation of the peso against the dollar (from 21 to 78) in 1982 put this government up against the wall which was in bygone days the inspiration for other Latin American countries. After this economic adjustments, the ZMVM was hit by the 1985 earthquake which made a lot of people from the capital move to other states; some optimistic analysts though this process would promote the much-awaited deconcentration of Mexico City and even though the Federal District showed an overall population decline, the neighboring areas and suburban municipalities of the state of Mexico had a growth pattern well-above average.

Conclusion

When the technological globalization entered, the factual powers already operated under the neoliberal paradigm. Mexico was renegotiating its debt, cutting government budgets, returning to the public sector the most important companies, liquidating and exterminating ineffective ones; meanwhile, the new worldwide accumulation trends aggravated Mexico City’s territorial contradictions. The homogeneity of development promised by globalization translated into territorial fragmentation, economic polarization and social segregation.
Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, worldwide economy, politics and culture orbited around the supremacy of the United States which exploited the most advantageous territories and excluded the others. Thus, some countries had territories which were deemed as “winners” and “losers”; this promoted unequal development which became more and more acute and exclusive, left most population sunk in rural and urban misery, forced migration towards the richest countries of the northern hemisphere, destruction of local productive systems, deterioration of their infrastructure and cities and the depletion of natural resources (Pradilla, 2008:274-280).

The city which once was the seat of a dependent and late industrialization became and ungovernable megalopolis full of deindustrialization processes which turned into an un-informal economic terciarization, changing the urban environment of public spaces thanks to small shops promoted by president Fox and million “nini”.23

This diffuse and extended city is physically and functionally linked to neighboring capitals which form a regional crown of poorly-connected cities,24 the metropolization process:

“is based on production and reproduction relationships organized into a series of development axes built alongside the most important roads of communication of the central city with the outside, where an unarticulated appropriation of productive territory and formal and informal services takes place” (Ramírez, 2008:157).

The failure of the post-Fordian project of terciarized economy of highly qualified services brought on neo-Fordism which promotes the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, encourages national and international tourism to generate value from within the transnational companies which dominate this sector25 in a privileged Mexico City which has attractive rustic landscapes like Xochimilco, pre-Hispanic ruins like Teotihuacan, a historical downtown which harbors artistic and architectural treasures of seven centuries and which are now considered as humanity’s universal heritage; furthermore, it is near colonial cities such as Puebla, Tlaxcala, Cuernavaca “city of eternal spring”, Pachuca and its basalts, Valle de Bravo’s dam and Toluca famous for its stained glasses. This is the

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23 The “nini” phenomenon (from the English acronym NEET which means Employment, Education or Training) was originally detected by the British government in the year 2000 (Rosique, 2013).

24 The Regional Urban Consolidation Index (ICUR, Spanish: Índice de Consolidación Urbano Regional) measures concentration trends within the country’s central region. Its results are important because the megalopolis is still territorially and demographically consolidating themselves (Delgado, 1999:91).

25 In this sense, Marxists still think the generation of value can only be achieved through the secondary sector (Ramírez, 2008:159-160).
territorial perspective of Mexico's basin which housed 11 thousand years ago the first men that arrived from the Bering Strait.

Thus, we can conclude that:

- The human species, like many other, responds to its survival instincts and associates itself with other individuals of the same species to control and adjust spaces which can be used as shelters and ensure minimal resources for its subsistence.
- Given the outstanding abilities the human species has over animals; its sociocultural evolution has gone through the stages of savagery and barbarism to finally achieve civilization.
- Due to its prolonged stay on the planet, the human species is a product of its natural environment, but its cultural evolution makes it gradually take over this natural space and turn it into its territory.
- Even though the planet is divided geographically into regions according to its climate, orography, hydrology, vegetation types and topography; although the human mind takes more into account territory. Territories most formal version are nation-states which can appear in world maps.
- Following this line of thought, the synecism phenomenon sees man as collectively committed to producing spaces such as houses, streets, neighborhoods, public squares and cities which are seen as places of identity that have a phantasmagorical existence in the collective imaginary of groups and entire communities.
- If we take this into account, the concept of territory can be associated with other ones that describe smaller spaces, for example: terrain, soil, property, municipality, city, metropolis, state, district, area, megalopolis, region, country, etc.
- Territory is defined by the agents who live it or describe it in different moments; therefore, its scale is variable, depending on who speaks of it or what territory we are talking about or when we do so.
- This essay has spoken of Mexico's basin as the territorial unit where Mexico City was established seven centuries ago; however, it initially was only a small borrowed island which became a territory that politically and military controlled almost every inhabitant of Mesoamerica. When Cortés fully carried out his conquest, his territory grew and ended up including the some states of North America which were lost after Mexico's independence.
- Speaking of Mexico City, between the years of 1910 and 2013 it grew from 357 thousand inhabitants to 21 million and its urban-demographic expansion enveloped two neighboring states and forced the creation of the ZMVM which includes 59 municipalities of the State of Mexico, one of Hidalgo and the Federal District’s 16 delegations.
The State’s ambiguity has resulted in an economically and socially functional megalopolis which does not have a metropolitan government; thus, ungovernability prevails in this territory.

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