

Contesting the State from the Ivory Tower: Student Power, Dirty War and the Urban
Guerrilla Experience in Mexico, 1965-1982

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It is perhaps unorthodox for a historian to first thank a novelist in his acknowledgements, yet it makes sense for me to express my indebtedness to Mexican novelist Juan Rulfo. My introduction to Rulfo's short stories occurred early in my life when my understanding of Mexican social and political history was next to none. I was not concerned with the legacy of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, nor was I vested in challenging historical narratives—simply a curious individual who enjoyed listening to Rulfo's stories juxtaposed with the testimonies of my great uncles and aunts whose experiences in early post-revolutionary Mexico told a story of disappointment identical to the ones Rulfo portrayed in his writings. But beyond Rulfo's storytelling abilities he was also there to remind me about the writing process. In his own words Rulfo once uttered, "To write, one must truly suffer," a concise quote that appeared to encapsulate what would be my experience in writing this dissertation. Yet, with all due respect, I felt Rulfo was incorrect. While writing this dissertation was a strenuous and sometimes solitary experience, its materialization was only achieved with the support and encouragement of colleagues and friends who succeeded in making Rulfo's famous quote less accurate or at least alleviated my suffering.

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Being a historian of the Mexican dirty war ended up being more than I bargained for, nevertheless, I was happy to meet extraordinary people who shared their stories and experiences with me. Without their voices and testimonies this dissertation would have been incomplete. My research took me from the busy and loud streets of Mexico City and Guadalajara to the jungles of Chiapas where I encountered Maoists, former

revolutionaries, and indigenous people who had experienced first-hand the aggressive counterinsurgency campaign against subversive organizations in the 1970s. I also encountered people that were hostile towards “unearthing” such a morbid past and instead supported the idea of forgetting as a form of reconciliation for the self. The documents I worked with at the National Archive made the forty-five or more trips via the Mexico City metro or Metrobus from San Ángel to the National Archive worth the effort. In Gallery One of the archive, where the majority of Mexico’s “archive of terror” is stored, former members of the Mexican Secret Police welcomed you with a passive aggressive attitude, always claiming you made them work too much. While it was sometimes a game to obtain documents there were a number of archivists that made my research less of a burden. I would like to thank them for their patience and willingness to look through thousands of documents to locate specific ones I required. Erika Gutierrez in *Referencias* was always available to facilitate my access into Gallery One and Two. I cherish her friendship and her interest in rescuing the history and voices of Mexico’s violent past.

I can hardly call Mexico foreign given my Mexican background. Yet, in order to adapt to Mexico, in more ways than one, I still required some assistance. In Mexico I was fortunate to have a strong network of friends, colleagues, scholars, and human rights activists with similar interests. With their help I was able to fully immerse myself into the dark and still ambivalent world of the Mexican dirty war. Through their contacts I was able to locate former revolutionaries, access personal documents concerning the participation of students in urban guerrilla movements, and also pitch ideas between one

another. Without their help I would have failed in making my points and arguments convincing. For this I would like to thank Víctor Perez, Ricardo Gamboa, Diego Lucero, Fritz Gloeckner, Romeo Cartagena, Herman Padilla, Nadia Errachidi, Laura Castellanos; former revolutionaries like Bertha “Tita” Gutierrez; Antonio Michel, Miguel Topete, Jose Luis Esparza, Salvador Castañeda, Mario “El Guaymas” Cartagena, Hector Guillermo Robles, Lucia Rayas, and many others. Since starting my research Adela Cedillo has been a major support network. As one of the leading scholars of the Mexican dirty war she introduced me to more people and sources that I could imagine. I admire her unconditional dedication to human rights and the reconciliation process for victims of the dirty war. She has taught me that as dirty war scholars we have a purpose that goes beyond merely reconstructing a past, but also a moral obligation to use this knowledge as a tool for justice. I would also like to express my thanks to Alexander Aviña, Viviana MacManus, Shane Dillingham, Steve Allen, and Jennifer Boles who supported this project and offered their own comments for improvement.

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about taking the extra shifts or working nights as long as our education was secure and our health was never compromised. This is a debt I will never be able to repay, but I hope that this dissertation and doctorate will fulfill the dreams they envisioned for me. My brothers Oscar and Roberto have always been a major source of inspiration for me. Together they formed the best motivating team. Thus, without my family this doctorate would have no meaning.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who always supported my ambitions and instilled in me the discipline I needed to finish this project.

Abstract

This is a study of the rise of urban guerrilla movements in the context of the Mexican Dirty War. It narrates how students used the political and social conditions of their country, state-sponsored violence, as well as the turbulent ambiance in the universities as the justification for embracing the armed struggle. It argues that while historical narratives on urban guerrilla movements in Mexico and Latin America have largely focused on the armed struggle aspect of each movement and followed a generalized view that revolutionaries were adventurist, lacked a political consciousness, and were agents of an international conspiracy, this dissertation proposed a different approach. By looking at the context in which these students-turned-revolutionaries formed their armed struggle against the Mexican government, how they broaden their notion of class struggle to include students, and re-thought their positionality, makes Mexico a unique study to understanding militancy in the 1970s. This project argues that students urban guerrillas were convinced the armed struggle was the only available option left to change the government, but also stressed they were engaging in an intellectual war against the state in which they had to become the dominate voice in the universities, a space they considered produced adherents of the state, before a revolution could be carried out.

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List of Revolutionary Organizations and Acronyms

Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria (ACNR, 1968-1972)

Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS)

Dirrección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DGIPS)

Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, 1983)

Enfermos (1970-1972)

Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario (FER, 1970-1973)

Frente Urbano Zapatista (FUZ, 1970-1972)

Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional (FLN, 1969-1993)

Fuerzas Revolucionarias del Pueblo (FRAP, 1973-1983)

Grupo Popular Guerrillero (GPG, 1964-1965)

Guajiros (1969-1972)

Lacandonos (1969-1972)

Liga Comunista Armados (LCA, 1971-1972)

Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre (LC23S, or Liga, 1973-1984)

Los Macías (1967-1972)

Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria Estudiantil (MIRE, 1966-1968)

Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria (MAR, 1969-1990)

Movimiento Universitario de Renovadora Orientacion, MURO (1956-1980)

Partido de los Pobres PDLP (1967- 1978)

Procesos (1970-1972)

“This is going to be a horror story” – Roberto Bolaño, *Amuleto*

Introduction

Mexican Student Radicalism in the Age of the Dirty Wars

“A country where the youth is not committed to revolutionizing its environment is a country doomed to failure.” - Ignacio Salas Obregón, “Oseas,” leader of the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre

“Nobody move! Hands on your head!” Four young men jumped out of their seats and began waving .38 pistols a few minutes after takeoff on the Mexicana Airlines 9:20am flight from Monterrey to Mexico City on November 8, 1972. One of the individuals, identified as Germán Segovia, reached for the microphone and with a slightly quavering voice announced to the passengers that he and his companions were members of the Liga Comunista Armada, a student-led armed revolutionary organization founded at the Autonomous University of Nuevo León. During his announcement, it appeared that the militants were just as nervous as the passengers. Crew members and travelers sat stunned as the hijackers, their own hands trembling, shouted instructions, spouted Marxist rhetoric, and demanded the release of political prisoners, including the release of two comrades who “disappeared,” four million pesos, machine guns, and bullets. In the end, their demands were met and the plane landed safely in Cuba. Reports from the incident reveal that as passengers deplaned a number of them were seen asking revolutionaries for their autographs and even took pictures with them. Yet, while revolutionaries enjoyed their ephemeral fame and the incident concluded without major incident, the situation in Mexico remained “hot.”¹

¹ Laura Castellanos, *México Armado, 1943-1981* (México: Era, 2007), 190-191.

In the 1970s, more than 1,700 student-revolutionaries created over thirty armed revolutionary organizations throughout Mexico.² They justified their shift from peaceful protest to armed struggle based on their sense of pervasive social injustices and unwavering state-sponsored repression by the authoritarian ruling party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI). Their ideas of revolution, social justice, anti-capitalism, and anti-imperialism were informed by the writings of international figures including Karl Marx, V.I. Lenin, Franz Fanon, Che Guevara, Carlos Marighella, Mao Tse-tung, and Ho Chi Minh, as well as homegrown revolutionaries such as Ricardo Flores Magón and Emiliano Zapata. Historian Donald C. Hodges considered post-revolutionary radicals and revolutionaries to be the “political successors of Flores Magón” and instrumental in reviving anarchist theory.³ True, student-guerrillas appropriated the ideas and visions of famous rebels and leaders of anti-government movements. But they also realigned radical theories in order to make them fit with contemporary social, political, and culture issues.

“Challenging the State From the Ivory Tower: Student Power, Dirty War, and the Urban Guerrilla Experience in Mexico, 1965-1982,” focuses on two of the most prominent student-led urban guerrilla movements: the Enfermos (The Sick Ones) and the Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario (Student Revolutionary Front). It shows that although student-urban guerrillas were defeated by the government’s dirty war⁴ tactics, their armed

² According to Jorge Luis Sierra more than 32 armed revolutionary organizations surfaced over two decades. See *El enemigo interno: Contrainsurgencia y fuerzas armadas en México* (México: Plaza y Valdes, 2003), 19.

³ Donald C. Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism After the Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 24-34.

revolutionary movement shattered the hegemonic political culture of the PRI, and allowed non-violent social movements to defeat the authoritarian regime. This dissertation evaluates how militants conceived of becoming the vanguard of the masses, the forms in which their ideas and actions transformed radical political culture and insurgent politics, and how their struggle fits within a broader history of resistance against the authoritarian government in Mexico. It begins by placing urban guerrillas in the historical context of student militancy, then describes their social origins, political ideals, and the guerrilla subculture of violent revolution they forged, and finally examines their repression through dirty war-style tactics by the Mexican government. While studies of urban guerrilla movements have largely been interpreted from a militaristic angle, student-guerrillas in Mexico conceived a culture of rebellion that went beyond typical notions of armed insurrections to include themselves as legitimate agents of revolutionary change in order to weaken the ruling party's dominance. The rise of student-led armed struggles outside of Mexico City created a situation in which the ruling party exposed its authoritarian nature which had been covered over by a supposed "democratic opening" in the 1970s. While the ruling party found it easier to monitor civil disobedience in Mexico City, it was less prepared to hamper anti-government hostility in outside the capital. These urban guerrillas, by forcing the government to compromise its adherence to legal procedures in carrying out a counterinsurgency dirty war further challenged the government's legitimacy, based on a supposed and revolutionary heritage.

⁴ Although a definitive notion of dirty war has yet to be constructed the term generally refers to counterinsurgency tactics in low-intensity warfare against an undefined enemy or guerrilla movement. The word "dirty" is used to describe a government's need to violate the human rights of combatants and civilians as defined by the Geneva Conventions of War in order to eradicate subversion, meaning human rights are violated.

This dissertation argues that armed struggle perpetuated by student urban guerrillas against the state was a clear battle against the ruling party's official propaganda machine; and not simply a class struggle, it was also an intellectual war. Revolutionaries were well aware that their struggle entailed more than simply confronting the government's counterinsurgency units on the streets—a victory would be contingent on winning a war of ideas against the PRI apparatus in the universities. Not far into the post-revolutionary period peasants and workers spearheaded insurrections and envisioned overthrowing the government for failing to fulfill the goals of the revolution and thoroughly eradicating vestiges of the old regime. Yet, they failed to take into consideration how to overcome the hegemonic cultural norms imposed by the ruling party and its elitist supporters. From within the universities students devised a strategy they expected could abolish these cultural norms. Student-guerrillas argued that class struggle and an intellectual war against the ruling party's official propaganda were indispensable tactics needed to weaken the state apparatus, both politically and culturally.⁵ Therefore, student-guerrillas commenced a major campaign to regain control of the university to eradicate the ruling party's official propaganda in order to raise revolutionary consciousness among their peers, and reinstate popular education. The struggle of the FER and Enfermos are a classic example of Antonio Gramsci's theory of the "war of the position." Until revolutionaries regained control of institutions and spaces

⁵ Both the University of Guadalajara and the Autonomous University of Sinaloa where spaces were student-guerrillas and pro-government youth organizations battled for control of the university. Violence on the campuses reached unprecedented levels in the mid-1970s when guerrilla forces were at their height and taking greater measures to conquer educational institutions. See Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DGIPS), "Estado de Sinaloa, Información de Culiacán," caja 1920B, 24.

where elite culture “breeds” and the official history continues to lionize the PRI, the possibilities of raising a collective revolutionary consciousness had little probability of succeeding. Challenging the ruling party’s official propaganda also meant students questioned the revolutionary nature of the state and its official interpretation of history. In essence, the state and urban guerrillas were professing “competing histories” and each claimed advocated to be more revolutionary than the other—this all in an effort to draw popular support and the allegiance of the working-class. Thus, it makes perfect sense why the PRI invested increasing amounts of energy to defeat the revolutionaries, and expel or “annihilated” them from state universities for professing ideas that challenged those of the state.⁶

The Myths of 1968

Much has been written about student militancy in 1968, when hundreds of thousands of students took to the streets to demand social justice, political reform, and to decry the lack of democracy within the PRI. But little significance and attention has been given to post-1968 student militancy. One reason for this neglect has been the single-minded focus on the 1968 student movement in Mexico City and the political crisis that followed the massacre of peaceful demonstrators at Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968. Perhaps because of its tragic ending in a military assault ordered by President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz and Luis Echeverría, his Secretary of Gobernación (the Ministry of Internal Security), 1968 continues to fascinate Mexicans of all ages and its memory remains alive in the social imaginary by way of historical works and the testimonies of former

⁶ AGN, DFS, 100-12-1-71 H-213 L-19; 100-23-1-73 H-244 L- 23;

participants.⁷ In the United States as well, historians Eric Zolov, Elaine Carey, Leslie Jo Frasier, Deborah Cohen, Herbert Braun, and Donald Mabry have all contributed to our understanding of 1968, and its relation to the Mexican state, gender, political culture, and popular politics.⁸ The 1968 student movement marked the apogee of student radicalism, according to this interpretation, as young people demonstrated they were capable of leading a massive counter-hegemonic movement to challenge the ruling party's authoritarianism. Historians often date the beginning of the downfall of the PRI, whose seven decades of power ended with the presidential election of 2000, to the crisis of legitimacy at Tlatelolco.

Yet the idea that the 1968 movement in Mexico City was the pinnacle of student militancy fails to take into account the multiple ways in which student radicalism underwent important shifts in the 1970s, particularly outside the nation's capital. For a faction of the student radical left, armed struggle seemed inevitable. The new wave of post-1968 radicals sought to confront the challenges of the 1970s by veering away from reformist ideas and non-violent activism, because these sorts of strategies and concepts had failed for decades. Going underground, or becoming a guerrilla, meant fighting back, and seeking to overthrow the repressive regime and begin with a clean slate. Former

⁷ Sergio Zermeño, *México: Una democracia utópica. El movimiento estudiantil del 68* (México: Siglo XXI, 2003); Gilberto Guevara Niebla, *1968: Largo camino a la democracia* (México: Cal y Arena, 2008); Raúl Álvarez Garín, *La estela de Tlatelolco: Una reconstrucción histórica del Movimiento estudiantil del 68* (México: Itaca, 1998); Ramón Ramírez, *El moviminetto estudiantil de México* (México: Era, 2008).

⁸ Herbert Braun, "Protests of Engagement: Dignity, False Love, and Self-Love in Mexico During 1968," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39 3 (July, 1997): 511-549; Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Leslie Jo Frasier and Deborah Cohen, "Mexico '68: Defining the Space of the Movement, Heroic Masculinity in the Prison, and 'Women' in the Streets," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83,4 (November 2003): 617-660; Donald J Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State: Student Conflicts, 1910-1971* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982); Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

activists and scholars have spoken of a crisis of student militancy in the wake of the massacre, but these assessments have exclusively focused on Mexico City.⁹ Meanwhile, outside the capital's boundaries, student militancy continued to be endemic in state universities throughout the provinces. Within a new wave of student movements, the fabric of student radicalism dramatically changed. Urban guerrillas conceived new methods of tackling ongoing social, political, and cultural issues and confronting the challenges of a new decade. Thousands of students in the provinces organized protests on their campuses around a number of issues that included the democratization of the university and to recuperate their agency as students, predominantly in Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Jalisco, Oaxaca and Monterrey. While their demands were not far removed from those put forward by 68ers, the notion that student militancy was in a crisis is no longer tenable.

Even those historical accounts that do acknowledge the armed struggles of the 1970s generally attribute them directly to the Tlatelolco massacre.¹⁰ Although events of 1968 led many students to conclude that non-violent means would not suffice to democratize Mexico, there were a number of other factors that played a decisive role in drawing a faction of the student-left to advocate violent revolution. By continuing to view 1968 as the “point of departure” to understanding radicalism we risk sidelining these

⁹ Gilberto Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle: Crónica del movimiento estudiantil mexicano* (México: Siglo XXI, 2009), 52-63; José René Rivas Ontiveros, *La izquierda estudiantil en la UNAM: Organizaciones, movilizaciones y liderazgo, 1958-1972* (México: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2007), 627-630. Raúl Álvarez Garín, former leader of the 1968 student movement, interview with author, July 2008, Mexico City, tape recording, Comité '68.

¹⁰ Castellanos, *México Armado*; Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle*; Marco Bellingeri, “La imposibilidad del odio: la guerrilla y el movimiento estudiantil en México, 1960-1974 in Ilán Semo, *La transición interrumpida, 1968-1988* (México, D.F.: Departamento de Historia, Universidad Iberoamericana/Nueva Imagen, 1993).

other important factors, including the declassified files of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad and ultimately accept a state-sponsored version of events.¹¹ Despite access to new archival sources from Mexico's "archive of terror," historians mistakenly draw a straight-line between the student movement and the rise of urban guerrilla movements.¹² Such an interpretation not only disregards student militancy after 1968, it also leaves a gap in the historiography that distorts our understanding of Mexico during the 1970s.

Moreover, this dissertation offers a new perspective into the culture of rebellion of the 1970s by focusing on the case studies of two prominent urban guerrilla movements: Guadalajara's FER and Sinaloa's Enfermos. Both groups began as student protest movements, but after years of combating pro-government forces on their respective campuses and in the streets, they were forced to go underground.¹³ These movements have inspired memoirs by former guerrillas, as well as scholarly and journalistic histories,¹⁴ but no one has yet offered a full-scale comparative evaluation of these two guerrilla movements. Close study will help pinpoint specific elements that

¹¹ The urban guerrilla-student movement connection was initially a theory posited by government authorities and high-ranking military men. Besides the vast repertoire of documentation collected by the secret police and Department of Defense, General Mario Arturo Acosta Chaparro's book, *Movimiento subversivo en México* (México: Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 1990), also makes these associations. Police records reinforced this notion by widely citing that students they apprehended had prior political experience in 1968 even though they were too young to participate or were never in Mexico City.

¹² Both the Dirección Federal de Seguridad and the Dirección de General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales were security organizations that worked with the Secretary of Defense to gather intelligence information on "subversive activities" during the dirty war.

¹³ See Oscar Flores, "El movimiento universitario a la guerrilla: El caso de Monterrey (1968-1973)," and Ramon Gil Olivio, "Orígenes de la guerrilla en Guadalajara en la década de los sesentas," in *Movimientos armados en México, Siglo XX*, ed. Verónica Oikión Solano and Marta Eugenia García Ugarte (Zamora: Colegio de Michoacán/CIESAS, 2008); Lucio Rangel Hernández, *La Universidad Michoacana y el movimiento estudiantil, 1966-1986*. Morelia: UMSNH, Instituto de Investigaciones-Históricas, 2009).

¹⁴ For example, Guillermo Robles Garnica, *Guadalajara, la guerrilla olvidada: Presos en la isla de la libertad* (México: Ediciones del Otro Cuba, 1996); Alberto Ulloa Bornemann, *Sendero en tinieblas* (México: Cal y Arena, 2004), and Miguel Topete, *Los ojos de la noche: El comando guerrillero Óscar González* (Guadalajara: La casa del mago, 2009).

shaped the political consciousness of students-turned-revolutionaries, while also revealing their contributions to a wider ethos of rebellion, political culture, and insurgent politics in Mexico. As student movements they were initially reluctant to use violence as a political tool, but when repression from local officials and pro-government student organizations escalated, they decided to acquire arms for self-defense. Only then did the armed struggle appear increasingly palpable for radicals and ultimately dozens of students who realized peaceful protests were producing fruitless results.¹⁵ Both of these groups embodied the ethos of rebellion and their ideological innovations prompted a new wave of student-revolutionaries in the post-1968 era. When an array of independent revolutionary movements convened in Guadalajara in 1973 to form the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre (September 23rd Communist League), or Liga—the Enfermos and FER formed the “backbone of the newly founded guerrilla movement.”¹⁶

Guerrillas were the daughters and sons of the working-classes, peasants, and occasionally rebels even came from affluent society. They were politicized in locales ranging from the barrios to the high school and university. Their campaigns against the government produced such popular heroes as Ignacio Salas Obregón, David Jiménez Sarmiento, Martha Maldonado, and Alicia de los Ríos—whose names resound within the Mexican revolutionary left in the same way that Uruguayan urban guerrilla commander Raul Sendic, Cuban guerrilla leader and feminist Celia Sánchez, and Argentine militants, the Santucho brothers, are revered in their own countries’ armed revolutionary

¹⁵ Liberato Teran, *Sinaloa: Estudiantes en lucha*. Culiacán: Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, 1982); Guillermo Robles Garnica, *Guadalajara, la guerrilla olvidada*.

¹⁶ Jose Luis Esparza, former member of the Liga, interview with author, March 2010, Mexico City, tape recording.

movements. While global guerrilla organizations and revolutionary governments were speaking of international proletarianism and worldwide revolution, Mexican guerrillas remained concentrated on radically changing their own country. Student-revolutionaries sought, as did Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui in the 1920s, to “construct an ideological model that fit the conditions of their respective country.”¹⁷ Ideologically, there were enormous disparities between militants, which precipitated internal tensions and contributed to the eventual demise of the Mexican urban guerrilla movement.

Although many dreamed of following the example of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, only a few Mexican organizations actually took up arms against the government, and even they faced an uphill battle to convince workers, peasants, and the middle classes to join their revolutionary struggle.

Post-1968 student militancy also offers a glimpse into the ongoing social and political crisis during a period incorrectly labeled as “pax-priísta,” a term used to identify a period of political stability in Mexico.¹⁸ While this label has been used to refer to the image of political stability in the decades around mid-century, it had become less viable by the 1970s, given the state’s violent response to armed struggles, its own internal factionalism, and crisis of legitimacy it was undergoing after the 1968 massacre. When former Secretary of Gobernación Echeverría assumed the presidency in 1970, he immediately sought to repair the ruling party’s legitimacy by first reconciling with

¹⁷ Maricela Balderas, interview with author, July 2008, Guadalajara, tape recording.

¹⁸ Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of Pax Priísta, 1946-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Alexander Aviña, “Insurgent Guerrero: Genaro Vázquez, Lucio Cabañas, and the Guerrilla Challenge of Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1960-1996” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 2009). Both authors debunk the “pax-priísta” premise from a rural armed struggle perspective. I believe that by using student militancy as a lens to understand the 1970s, this dissertation also contributes to this historiographical trend.

students and carrying out political reforms under the auspice of an “apertura democrática” (democratic opening). Echeverría sought to echo the policies of populist former president Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), who effected sweeping land and labor reform to fulfill the promises made to the popular classes by the Revolution of 1910.¹⁹ According to one scholar, even though Echeverría presented himself as an ambitious president “who was going to reduce poverty, improve social programs...he had no idea how to accomplish these goals.”²⁰ Seeking to “restoring a workable relationship with intellectuals”²¹ and the youth, Echeverría assigned numerous a number of them to small posts in the government and as heads of culture and educational programs. But his intentions of building an amicable relationship with students was destined to fail given Echeverría disregard of the violent history between the state and the youth. Students who refused to submit to his invitation to become a part of the “democratic” process were dismissed as being rabble-rousers and uncultured youth. On the other hand, anti-Echeverría students lambasted their peers for allowing themselves to be co-opted. To further complicate his program of democratic opening, Echeverría also faced harsh criticisms from the conservative faction of the PRI and the elites who viewed his populism with distrust and tremendous anxiety. The political crisis intensified so much

¹⁹ See Amelia M. Kiddle and María L.O. Muñoz, ed. *Populism in 20th century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

²⁰ Victor Urquidi of El Colegio de México, quoted in Jonathan Schlefer, *Palace Politics: How the Ruling Party Brought Crisis to Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008) 148.

²¹ Carlos Fuentes initially offered his support of the Luis Echeverría administration and believed in his political program. Claire Brewster, *Responding to Crisis in Contemporary Mexico: The Political Writings of Paz, Fuentes, Monsiváis, and Poniatowska* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 69-76; Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 208-217.

that apparently rumors were being spread about a potential military coup in 1976, though there is little evidence to suggest that this was actually in the works.²²

Student-guerrillas were convinced that a number of historical events and circumstances had placed the responsibility of liberating the masses on their youthful shoulders. In *El tiempo que nos toca vivir*, Raúl Ramos Zavala, one of the leading advocates of the armed struggle in Mexico, explained how he justified a new revolutionary insurrection. Although his interpretation speaks little to the role of students in this struggle, Ramos Zavala does explain how the unremitting repression against the working-class by the government and union charrismo (bossism) allowed for students to assume the role of leaders of a new revolutionary movement alongside peasants, given the unlikely probability *obreros* would rebel. Salas Obregón, the foremost theoretician of the urban guerrilla experience, echoed Zavala's points by adding a Leninist interpretation that a vanguard would be required in order to reignite workers revolutionary determination and that students would be at the forefront of that movement.²³

While Ramos Zavala's ideas were informed by his time in the Communist Youth and his own experience as a teacher and social activist, Salas Obregón supported the idea of cross-class alliances and the correlation between student and class struggles from studying the political lines of the Enfermos and FER. When Salas Obregón organized the meetings that led to the formation of the Liga in 1973, the Enfermos and the FER were the most prominent organizations precisely because they represented the best example of

²² José Agustín, *Tragicomedia mexicana: La vida en México de 1970-1982*, vol. 2 (México: Planeta, 2004), 123.

²³ For more information see Raúl Ramos Zavala *El tiempo que nos toca vivir* (México: Tierra Roja, 2003); Ignacio Arturo Salas Obregón, *Cuestiones fundamentales del movimiento revolucionario* (México: Editorial Huasipungo, 2003).

cross-class alliances. Many professors at state universities, while not openly supportive of urban guerrillas, gave lectures about Mexican history that closely resembled the revolutionary discourse professed by student-guerrillas. One professor appeared to understand the argument for a new insurrection, explaining that revolutionaries like Zapata “never intended to transform the social structures of our country,”²⁴ whereas these new struggles were seeking a fresh start.

Historians of post-1968 student radicalism tend to highlight the failures of student revolutionaries, often attributing them to the adventurist, apolitical nature of youthful ideas and aspirations. Because of these negative stereotypes, scholars have undervalued the actions of student-revolutionaries and overlooked the permanent stamp they left on Mexico’s revolutionary history. These ways of looking at youth contributions to politics have taken out the political element of student-led movements and underestimated their accomplishments. In order to make this transition, each group developed methods to radicalized potential recruits. One of their most important contributions was getting students to embrace their working-class backgrounds and draw linkages between their own struggle within the university and those of popular groups in society at large. Both the Enfermos and FER made long-lasting changes to the way students viewed themselves within Mexican history. Revolutionaries prompted their comrades to re-conceptualized their views on class resistance, think in terms of student antagonism always belonging to the history of class struggle, and that the revolutionary leadership did not have to be in

²⁴ “Problema estudiantil,” AGN, DGIPS, caja 1920, 1969, 8.

the hands of the peasantry or working-class.²⁵ In various documents written by student-guerrillas they explicitly sought to impel their comrades to take a moral stance by converting them into a “student arm of the proletariat” and assuming responsibility for becoming a “battering ram that drives and contributes to the transformation of their brother’s class struggle.”²⁶ Thousands of student assumed the calling even though they had no direct connection to the working-class community and were forced to sacrifice comfortable bourgeois lifestyles.

Official propaganda has accused student-revolutionaries of disrupting the progression of Mexican democracy and perverting the minds of vulnerable youth. As in Argentina, journalists and scholars in Mexico have gone as far as to blame revolutionaries for creating a political crisis and provoking the dirty war, and minimizing the state’s actions or justifying them. Journalist Julio Scherer and political scientist Jorge Castañeda are among the chief adherents of the “Two Devils Thesis,” which claims that both the state and guerrillas equally participated in creating a dirty war.²⁷ This premise supports a state-sponsored version of history and overlooks the thousands of documents detailing the government’s voracious counterinsurgency campaign as well as the

²⁵ This became a major issue when student revolutionaries wanted to join forces with Lucio Cabañas’ revolutionary movement in Guerrero. Student-guerrillas complained Cabañas lacked a class struggle interpretation of the Mexican condition and that his poor vs. the rich lacked a strong theoretical framework. See Mario Ramírez Salas, “La relación de la Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre y el Partido de los Pobres en el estado de Guerrero en la década de los sesenta,” in *Movimientos armados en México, siglo XX*, ed. Verónica Oikión Solano and Marta Eugenia García Ugarte, vol. 2 (México: El Colegio de Michoacán/CIESAS, 2008); Marco Bellingeri, *Del agrarismo armado a la guerra de los pobres: Ensayos de al guerrilla rural en el México contemporáneo, 1940-1974* (México: Ediciones Casa Juan Pablos/ Secretaría de Cultura de la Ciudad de México, 2003).

²⁶ “Manifiesto al estudiante proletario,” Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre, October 2, 1973, Mandeville Special Collections, UC San Diego, Reel 4 Folder 7, 11.

²⁷ Jorge Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Julio Scherer García, and Carlo Monsiváis, *Los patriotas: De Tlatelolco a la guerra sucia*. México: Nuevo Siglo, 2004.

unprecedented number of human rights abuses it committed. To argue that guerrillas and the state both precipitated the dirty war is further inadmissible when one juxtaposes the combative nature of each side. The armed forces had greater resources to see the guerrillas were eliminated, while revolutionaries were constantly suffering from the lack of a dependable arsenal and adequate combat training. Critics and the state also complain that guerrillas violated human rights and thus deserved to be imprisoned for their actions.²⁸ True, the Mexican state reacted as any other government would if an armed resistance movement was seeking their violent overthrow. But the manner in which the counterinsurgency campaign was executed is what human rights groups and victims strongly take issue with. Both groups argue that while the PRI depicted Mexico as a democracy the government violated citizens' human rights and disregarded revolutionaries' legal rights, thereby failing to uphold the rule of law.

Studies on armed struggles in Mexico have generally been highly critical of those who chose revolutionary violence in favor of the ballot and peaceful protesting. Chief among the critics of student guerrillas has been the democratic left, and even some former members of armed struggles. Former leader of the 1968 student movement Gilberto Guevara Niebla referred to ultra-leftists and their revolutionary movements as "lumpen" and student militancy at its worst.²⁹ Guevara has upheld the notion of student-revolutionaries as individuals fueled by "resentment and a desire for revenge" and

²⁸ During the height of the urban guerrilla experience state universities suspended a number of student events because they could not guarantee their safety. In response, students remonstrated against this administrative decision but also chided revolutionaries for disrupting student life. AGN, DFS, "Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa "Grupo Los Enfermos," 100-23-1-73 H-290 L-23.

²⁹ Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle*, 80.

disregard for “rational and democratic politics.”³⁰ Heriberto Castillo has gone on the record of questioning whether student-guerrillas truly knew what revolutionary violence meant and if they were honestly brought to the armed struggle or they brought themselves to take such actions. At a time when guerrillas were advocating a new revolution and orchestrating “expropriations,” Castillo defined these actions as counterrevolutionary,³¹ therefore questioning student revolutionary authenticity. Other anti-guerrilla pundits have even charged guerrillas with perverting radicalism and compromising the left’s legitimacy when it was attempting to be reinstated into the electoral process. Interestingly, most of these critics of the urban guerrillas have been fueled by personal vendettas, and they still repeat the same bitterness toward student-revolutionaries that they expressed after the initial decision to go underground back in the 1970s.³²

Chapter Outline

“Challenging the State from the Ivory Tower” follows the history of Mexican urban guerrillas through four chapters, examining their antecedents, formation, guerrilla culture, and ultimate repression. Chapter one contextualizes the student-guerrillas of the 1970s by pointing to a long history of student militancy and popular political movements through 1968. Student militancy before 1968 has been examined before, but work remains to locate it within the broader history of social movements. This chapter begins

³⁰Gilberto Guevara Niebla, *1968: Largo camino a la democracia* (México: Cal y Arena, 2008), 129; Arturo Martínez Nateras ed., *¡No queremos apertura, queremos revolución! Materiales del Foro Nacional Estudiantil* (México: Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1972).

³¹ Heriberto Castillo, *Desde la trinchera* (México: Oceano, 1986), 209-210.

³² Gilberto Guevara Niebla’s cousin was killed by the Enfermos and it was rumored he and other former 68ers were also targeted to be killed. AGN, DFS, 11-4-73 H-2 L-226.

with a brief overview of student activism before the 1910 Mexican Revolution, but focuses more on the post-revolutionary period. The chapter also looks at the rise of the university as a competing space between supporters of the PRI regime and anti-government militants, the impact of socialist education on students' political consciousness and notion of history, how society perceived students overtime, and changes over time within student radicalism. Student radicals in the thirties, forties, and fifties established a precedent for future expressions of student militancy by opening up a forum for revolutionary politics and inviting their peers to become more than just producers of knowledge but also active citizens. This chapter stresses that we cannot understand how students rose to become proactive leaders in counter-hegemonic movements against the PRI without having a grasp of student militancy before 1968. It argues that student militancy before 1968 demonstrates how radicalism was redefined and altered to fight the ongoing cultural, social, and political dilemmas confronting the country. Moreover, this chapter shows that student militancy of the 1970s cannot be attributed to the violent repression of the 1968 student movements.

Chapter two decenters the legacy of 1968 further by looking at the regional dynamics that forged the revolutionary movement. It thereby contributes to our understanding of the student guerrilla experience by showing the diversity of their trajectories, with a particular focus on the regional histories of the Enfermos and the FER. These groups were founded on the increasing violence that leftist students experienced when they voiced their opposition against University policies, police brutality, and to the presence of a right-wing student organization funded and armed by the federal

government. Political opposition was thwarted by the Federación Estudiantil de Guadalajara (FEG), a right-wing student organization that had dominated the U de G since the 1950s. As a paramilitary faction of the state and local government its job was to suppress student discontent, eliminate individuals if necessary, and assist to preserve a traditionalist educational curriculum. The FEG unabashedly ruled over politics, denying opposition groups the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the current political situation, both locally and nationwide from gaining any headway in jeopardizing their dominance. Repression, however, was not confined to the University. Fegistas terrorized students on and off campus for sympathizing with leftist ideas and popular social movements that tried to unhinge the PRI's power.

Meanwhile the Enfermos originated during the tumultuous student movement in Sinaloa (1966-1973) as a faction within the within the Federación de Estudiantes de Sinaloa (Student Federation of the University of Sinaloa, FEUS). Within the FEUS the relationship between moderates and radicals was increasingly fragile. Advocates of non-violence and revolutionary hardliners incessantly fought over control of the organization. According to dissatisfied militants, the central problem of the FEUS was its lack of political initiative, a feature that prompted the radical spectrum of the organization to pressure the group to take on direct actions.³³ Student-revolutionaries were baptized with the name “enfermos” after a confrontation between leftist and conservative students. Right-wingers during a demonstration cried-out out to militants, “anarchists, delinquents,

³³ Héctor Ibarra Chávez, *Pensar en la guerrilla en México* (México: Ediciones Expediente Abierto, 2006), 102.

ultra left-wingers, you are all sick!”³⁴ From then on the name was appropriated to identify the revolutionary faction of the student left.

The histories of the Enfermos and FER are inextricably intertwined. Both sought better channels to create cross-class alliances and believed in protecting the sanctity of the university. Chapter two emphasizes that the innovations the Enfermos and the FER contributed to radical political culture were the basis of the new culture of rebellion in the 1970s. From their experiences with local politics and repression they forged the student-proletariat moniker and applied the idea of the university as a factory to revolutionary thought. It argues two points: first, that a regional histories challenge the long established narrative that implies the PRI dominated the provinces politically. The rise of a new wave of student militants reveals how powerful the “student movement” became and the ruling party’s inability to quell its ascendance. Second, it argues that the Enfermos and the FER were products of their own local history and given their deep connection to the community they were able to contribute the most to the ethos of revolutionary politics in the seventies. They used the memory of past student movements to forge a new political program that went beyond their predecessors visions. In Guadalajara urban guerrillas sought resisted going underground without having a cohesive student base before organizing popular support. Organizing barrio youth therefore became the ultimate goal of the FER. Not only did this form of organizing amalgamate youth that shared common socioeconomic backgrounds, it also catalyzed consciousness raising and camaraderie. By appropriating their proletariat backgrounds revolutionaries hoped to draw in support from

³⁴ Castellanos, *México Armado*, 195.

the proletariat by demonstrating the interconnections between both groups' plights.³⁵ Moreover, the story of the Enfermos shows that students in Sinaloa supported and participated alongside peasants in land disputes. Therefore, for radical youth, student militancy had always been a part of class struggle in their state.

Chapter three compares the culture of student urban guerrillas with non-violent grassroots social movements to give a broader understanding of the diverse ways that student militants challenged the authoritarian government. The factionalism between these two approaches and the differences within each movement's theoretical and revolutionary process served largely to confuse the wider Mexican society. This chapter demonstrates how large numbers of students who once fit into the 1968 student rebellion reorganized to form peaceful political movements instead of joining up or even forming an alliance with guerrilla movements. The second part of the chapter analyzes cultural practices as discourse for radical change. Its purpose is to assess the development and dynamics of guerrilla and student "cultures." For example, I will explore the differences and commonalities between student radicals and urban revolutionary movements. Focusing on elements that contributed to the expansion of radical youth cultures such as: symbolism, propaganda, creativity, indoctrination, and camaraderie building, will illustrate how each played a crucial function in expanding students revolutionary consciousness. Although youth cultures of the 1968 student movement in Mexico City and urban guerrilla insurgencies were similar, there were also many conflicts in the ways each faction employed propaganda, symbolism, literature and even music. Furthermore,

³⁵ What actually occurred was the integration of entire families (i.e. brothers and sisters) into armed struggles. Therefore, it is not a surprise a large percentage of Enfermo and FER militants were not only connected across ideological boundaries, but also by family ties.

this part will address how youth culture in the late 1960s and early 70s, in the minds of parents, deviated from traditional Mexican family values and put parents and students against one another.

The final chapter of the dissertation describes the government's counterinsurgency campaign against student-guerrillas. It argues that before "dirty war" tactics became state policy, the government allowed local governments to perform regional anti-subversive campaigns against student dissent. When the PRI realized that local governments lacked sufficient resources to eliminate youth antagonism and that students were taking greater measures to fight back against police, the dirty war became national. Student dissent had become such a powerful entity that the state was forced to reveal once again its authoritarian nature and also to compromise its democratic veneer. Drawing heavily on police records and the testimonies of former guerrillas, this chapter reconstructs how the government illegally sought the complete eradication of "subversive" organizations. In doing so, it compares dirty war tactics used in the Southern Cone with Mexico to show that the government sought the systematic repression of the ultra-left. In response to the student guerrilla movement, the government shifted its goal from containing dissent to completely eradicating all vestiges of opposition in order to reassert its crumbling authority.

Methodologies

The research materials I use are primarily government documents, police records, interrogations, related archival notes, espionage, transcripts, comments by military

leaders, and testimonies by former revolutionaries. Mexico's very own archive of terror is housed in two "galleries" at the Archivo General Nacional in Mexico City. Thousands of documents compose this archive, describing the government's counterinsurgency campaign against urban and rural guerrillas, as well as daily reports from states where student mobilizations were occurring. These documents allow an understanding of how the government interpreted the guerrilla threat and how they thought. DFS records offer an insiders look into the language, emotions, and ongoing conversations between security units. These documents also reveal the national component of the counterinsurgency campaign and show just how broadly defined the word "subversive" was being employed. In the less-organized Gallery Two documents from the Dirección de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales and the National Defense Secretary also offer a depiction of the counterinsurgency campaign, but also hold photographs that present a vivid description of the urban guerrilla experience. These documents provide a beneficial look into the state's mindset and how they carried out their "war against subversion."

Furthermore, I am very concerned with language and how the state justified its counterinsurgency campaign through rhetoric and labels. There is a major debate in the field concerning the manner in which the state attempted to eliminate opposition. Some argue that it was a "low intensity" struggle because the state continuously denied a guerrilla threat and never claimed to be conducting a "dirty war" as had Argentina and Chile. Government documents, thus, offer insights into how the state imagined itself during this period and how it internalized the guerrilla threat. Daily articles reporting on guerrilla or terrorist activities elucidates how exactly the government and the loyalist

media used a specific type of language evocative of other dirty war cases to percolate a sense of fear and terror into homes across the country. Cold war politics continued to find its way in the language used by newspaper columnists who reinforced the fears that guerrilla movements were agents of Cuba. But mass media also functioned as a tool to speak pompously of the PRI, as well as justify and venerate its actions against the “guerrilla threat.” The media forged an image of the ruling party as a pillar of democracy and had a minor effect in reinforcing the PRI as a paternalistic government.

This dissertation seeks to describe why students went underground and to add their voices to a history from which they have been, until recently, largely excluded. A major part of my research consisted of interviews with former guerrillas and their family members, although only a few made it into the actual dissertation. Nevertheless, this dissertation is about knowing the people who went underground. Collecting testimonies is a valuable contribution to our deeper understanding about life in clandestine organizations, because it provides an inside look at what students were thinking and why they deemed themselves the vanguard of the people. How memory functions and the meanings of these memories differ from case to case. Exploring memories of terror leads us into a maze where facts move in different directions. However, memories can also be used to bridge the lacuna between what is known and what is believed. In general, testimonies are an invaluable material that according to historian Daniel James, provides “access to basic empirical information unobtainable from more traditional sources, such as newspapers, municipal archives.”³⁶ When investigating state violence, testimonies can

³⁶ Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 122.

provide a useful check on police records, particularly interrogations, which may be filled with inconsistencies and omissions. Thus, one needs a “second opinion” to build upon. Letters, testimonies, and interrogations together help to create a viable corpus of perspectives on the reasons why students felt it was their obligation to take up arms. While testimonies have been a difficult resource to rely on due to many ex-militants unwillingness to be interviewed, countless former participants are now prepared to speak of their experiences in order to enable a reinterpreted version. By examining how former participants remember, we can ascertain how people who shared collective traumas and political ideologies construct specific illustrations of historical events.³⁷

Final Thoughts

The Mexican “dirty war” has yet to capture the public’s imagination, unlike the more widely recognized cases of South America, which have been the subject of truth commissions and academic studies. This neglect is mainly due to the exclusive focus in Mexican historiography of the 1968 student movement. The purpose of this dissertation is do more than fill a lacuna in Mexican history overlooked by the academic community; I intend to show how a decade of political and social strife had long-lasting consequences on the Mexican politics, society, culture, and collective memory. The legacy of political culture developed by student-revolutionaries during the armed struggles of the 1970s continues to be visible today in modern guerrilla movements, non-violent struggles, and university politics. Many student-revolutionaries who remained underground after 1981

³⁷ Susana Kaiser, *Post-memories of Terror: A Generation Copes with the Legacy of the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 34.

went on to form the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) or the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR). While these organizations have not entirely succeeded in their goals of dramatically transforming Mexico, they have succeeded in many other respects because they embraced the culture of rebellion forged earlier by groups like the Enfermos and the FER to build a new revolutionary struggle and to free society so that people could belong to the left or adhere to radical ideas.

This dissertation contributes to our understanding of Mexico during the age of Latin American dirty. It also decenters the 1968 student movement by taking into account the influence of regional politics, barrio culture, homegrown student movements, cross-class alliances, and diverse state traditions of rebellion in the creation of student-led urban guerrilla movements. The rise of armed struggles largely led by students shook the state apparatus, prompting the PRI to reassert its authoritarian culture, and reestablished students as a viable political force after 1968. In a time when the Mexican State was attempting to re-legitimize itself following a cycle of violent episodes that put into question its power, student guerrillas presented a strong counterforce against the ruling party. Studying the role of Mexican students in armed struggles has three benefits: first, it explains why the state was so vested in imposing Cold War policies in the university and why students were seen as a major threat; second, it shows why students took the initiative to foment a revolutionary change through guerrilla warfare when the traditional agents (workers and peasants) were already present; and finally, it demonstrates that urban guerrilla movements were the first to insist on a socialist revolution instead of a reform of the outmoded 1910 revolution.

Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines questions about state-violence, insurgent politics, cultural hegemony, class struggle, education, and memory this dissertation offers new insights into how student-revolutionaries conceptualized a new political line to build a counter-hegemonic movement to undermine the State, and the conflicts students encountered that ultimately led their struggle to collapse. I hope that this dissertation will be of importance to a wide cross section of scholars engaged not only in dirty war histories but also insurgent politics. Student radicalism has not been used as a category of analysis for some time, but this project demonstrates how we can gauge the political state of a country by look through a student radical lens. It will also appeal to those invested in the larger issues of Cold war policies in Latin America and political and social movements centered around the issue of who and why certain social groups took the initiative to lead a revolutionary struggle. Scholars of Mexican history will be given a new lens to understand Mexico in the 1970s and also how urban guerrilla movements contributed to the ruling party's demise, even though it continued to limp on for another eighteen years in power. Political culture is always changing in Mexico, but the ideas professed by urban guerrillas remain a vital part of present-day leftist discourses.

Chapter One

Mexican Student Militancy in A Historical Context

“Give me four years to teach the children and the seed I have sown will never be uprooted.” -V.I. Lenin

Mexican students have a long history of militancy as they have sought to make their voices heard and to influence national politics. Although the international youth movement of the 1960s has often been seen as a new phenomenon that came about when student protestors in Paris, Berkeley, Tokyo, and Frankfurt successfully challenged national political agendas, Latin American revolutionary leaders such as Fidel Castro already had a long tradition of cutting their teeth in student politics. Nevertheless, even in Mexico, for decades the voices and contributions of students in the creation of the modern state have been overlooked. There are two basic explanations for why students have not been seen as a force for genuine social change before 1966.³⁸ First is the narrative of irrelevance: students have been treated as ignorant of real-world issues, and their protests have been widely dismissed as pointless and utopian. While not a universally accepted opinion, it was still prevalent. Second is the narrative of cooptation: university protests have often been viewed, and correctly so, as a springboard into national politics — within the authoritarian regime. For example, many of the students who volunteered in support of the 1929 presidential campaign of former Secretary of Education, José Vasconcelos (1921-24), against the incipient National Revolutionary

³⁸ I use 1966 as a demarcation to indicate the first mass student movement of the 20th century in Mexico. While there *were* earlier expressions of student activism, 1966 exemplifies the first major movement spearheaded by students against the PRI.

Party (renamed the PRI in 1946), later became powerbrokers within the one-party state.³⁹ Yet despite these critiques, another vibrant sector of the Mexican student population has sought to revise their position in civil society and to rethink their relationship with the state. Student-led urban guerrilla movements of the 1970s saw themselves as heirs to a long line of student protests, and although the 1968 movement in Mexico City was part of this tradition, student guerrillas generally considered it to be peripheral to their personal and historical development.

When student guerrillas took up arms in the 1970s against the government and the ruling class, their propaganda and discourses often referred to the “great student movement.”⁴⁰ Student protests in Mexico were a recurring phenomenon in the early twentieth century. For the most part, the center of student discontent has been Mexico City, but in the 1930s, with the creation of socialist education, student protests surged in different parts of the nation around issues concerning higher education and its accessibility to disadvantaged youth. While these were mostly short-lived spurts of student dissent, the student movements that surfaced afterwards built on these strategies and ploys. Moreover, the role of the university and students in national development has been reconstituted as educational opportunities began to open for children of the middle classes and even for some workers and peasants. As a result of these changes, student radicalism in Mexico has evolved over the decades from being exclusively concerned

³⁹ See Luis A. Marentes, *José Vasconcelos and the Writing of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 2000). Vasconcelos decided to run for president after “in order to uphold the true Revolutionary ideals had had been trampled by the corruption of Plutarco Elías Calles’s political machine.” Kristin Pesola, “Forgeries of a Failed Hero: Antonieta Rivas Mercado in the Hands of José Vasconcelos,” *Latin American Literary Review* 33, no. 66 (July - December 2005): 95.

⁴⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-235-74 H-81 L-8.

with university issues to tackling broader social and political problems. This militancy was fueled by growing discontent with the Mexican political system, and the disconnect between capitalist industrialization policies and the ruling party's revolutionary propaganda, which by the late 1940s was losing "its seductive power."⁴¹ In the '60s, student militants were particularly attracted to the model of the heroic guerrilla represented by the Cuban Revolution, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Herbert Marcuse, and Third World liberation theorists. Nevertheless in the '70s, Mexican student revolutionaries recognized important differences between the successful Cuban movement of 1959 and social conditions within their own country, and instead sought to create their own revolution.

This chapter also seeks to examine the student movement of 1968, when youth finally became the center of national attention as leaders of a social movement that spoke not just for student concerns but also sought to bring a democratic opening for all Mexicans. But while the historiography has largely focused on the rise of student militancy in 1968 as being a part of the global movement of national liberation that blossomed in the seventies, past instances of student militancy in Mexico since the 1920s informed the ideas of activists and helped build consciousness during the student movement and urban guerrilla experience. The idea of a direct link between 1968 and student militancy in the seventies was created in the aftermath of the student massacre by scholarship, journalists, and former activists to exemplify the legacy militants imprinted

⁴¹ José Iturriaga, "México y su crisis histórica," *Cuadernos Americanos* (mayo-junio 1947): 21-37, cited in Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 157.

on political culture, which they widely did. Thereafter, all previous reverberations of student radicalism were overshadowed by 1968.

Chief among the litany of underlying elements making up a students' political consciousness was having a grasp of history, primarily of popular political mobilizations. As avid historians, students in the 1960s and 1970s used history to demonstrate how their own struggles were intertwined with sociopolitical mobilizations.⁴² More broadly, this chapter argues that the new revolutionary state created in the aftermath of the 1910 Mexican Revolution was complicit in establishing the foundation for a culture of rebellion embraced by students in the 1960s and 1970s. Beginning in the 1920s after a decade of armed conflict, the government carried out radical educational reform and promoted the arts to “unify and modernize Mexico.”⁴³ In addition, a popular version of history was institutionalized into the curriculum as a means of portraying all social classes as vital players in the creation of the nation-state. At the same time, it exalted historical rebels, —class struggle, and celebrated the defeat of tyrants. From these portrayals the ruling party manipulated its legacy as heir to the revolution and created official propaganda that helped it to preserve state control. Popular groups were seduced into believing they were integral members of the nation-state, leading to a false consciousness.

⁴² Alexander Aviña has used this premise to contextualize the histories of rural guerrilla struggles in Guerrero within the broader history of popular political mobilizations in Mexico. See his “Insurgent Mexico: Genaro Vázquez, Lucio Cabañas, and the Guerrilla Challenge to the Postrevolutionary Mexican State, 1960-1996” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 2009).

⁴³ Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 133.

Paradoxically, what was meant to preserve the revolutionary family's power was used against the state by counter-hegemonic movements, primarily instigated by students. According to one former urban guerrilla, "What else did the Mexican government expect? From an early age students are introduced to a history of rebellions against authority, which in turn makes them believe that only through rising up against the state is change achievable."⁴⁴ Even the 1917 Constitution was cited to justify dissent. Article 39 clearly states that, "The people at all times have the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government." While this says nothing about armed insurrection, student-revolutionaries felt it legitimized their struggle against the authoritarian state and validated their role as revolutionary agents. This led to voracious ideological struggles over histories of radicalism between students and the state.

Student Activism in the Early Post-Revolutionary Era

"Hungry, man? Reach for a book. It is a weapon." - Bertolt Brecht

For much of the twentieth century, the Mexican university has been an epicenter for radical thinking and a challenge to the hegemony of the ruling party. The historical literature on student radicalism in Mexico is extensive but primarily focuses on the 1968 student movement. Fewer studies emphasize the role of the university in revolutionary armed struggles. Yet despite a hesitant early relationship with the Revolution of 1910, increasing numbers of university students became mobilized toward the struggle for social justice. The socialist education movement of the 1930s brought awareness to many

⁴⁴ Alberto Ulloa Borneman, interview with author.

of the need to expand access to higher education, while the social movements of 1940s and 1950s attracted many students, a trend culminating with the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. This section seeks to trace the lineage of student mobilizing and the rise of their political consciousness before 1968.

Mexico has a long tradition of higher education. The Spanish Crown established the first university in the hemisphere in Mexico City in 1551, while the Bourbon Reforms of the eighteenth century led to the creation of practical education in mining and other industries. Because these early institutions were closely tied to the Catholic Church, the triumph of the anti-clerical Liberal government of Benito Juárez led to their abolition in 1867, to be replaced by government schools. The liberals began in 1868 with the creation of a National Preparatory School at the old Colegio de San Ildefonso in Mexico City. Following European practices, Normal Schools were established to train schoolteachers, starting in Mexico City in 1881, with other schools founded later in state capitals such as Guadalajara, Xalapa, and Saltillo.

Much like the ruling party in the '60s and '70s, the government was an ongoing target of criticism during pre-revolutionary period. But contrary to student activism in those decades, during the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship (1876-1911) student dissent was generally contained within small collective groups. Mass demonstrations and rallies were scarce before the 1920s, whereas in other parts of Latin America, such as Argentina, mass student protests were prevalent.⁴⁵ In fact, the first major student demonstrations occurred outside Mexico City in Michoacán in 1895 and 1910 by students demanding

⁴⁵ See Richard J. Walter, "The Intellectual Background of the 1918 University Reform in Argentina," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (May 1969): 233-253.

education reform and denouncing government policies.⁴⁶ Yet, students' political mobility outside the university has experienced recurring impediments. In the early part of the 20th century the university greatly differed from what it is today, mainly because institutions of higher education were controlled by the state. While in theory the university identified as space of academic freedom and a leader of national development, it also had to conform to the needs of the country "defined by the nation's leaders."⁴⁷ Even then, these struggles were aimed at education reform and the Díaz regime's embrace of positivism as a model for "order and progress," the motto of the state.⁴⁸

In 1910, on the eve of the Mexican Revolution, education minister Justo Sierra obtained legislation uniting the Colleges of Law, Mining, Engineering, and Medicine with the Normal and Preparatory Schools into the National University of Mexico.⁴⁹ Sierra, a liberal and denouncer of positivism sought to create a non-religious university that embraced the ideas professed by Mexican liberalism, independent of government intrusion and academic freedom.⁵⁰ He envisioned the National University as Mexico's rite of passage towards modernity and a breath of new life to the country's antiquated educational system. Institutions such as the National Preparatory School and the School

⁴⁶ Antonio Gómez Nashiki, "El movimiento estudiantil mexicano: Notas históricas de las organizaciones políticas, 1910-1971," *Revista Mexicana de Investigaciones Educativas* 8, no. 17 (enero-abril 2003): 188.

⁴⁷ David E. Lorey, *The University System and Economic Development in Mexico Since 1929* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 25.

⁴⁸ According to Elizabeth Flower, "In Mexico, as in France, it represented the same glorification of humanity, of industrialization, of order and progress; the same insistence on the separation of the church from the government; and the ultimately and same denial of individualism. Modifications were made toward a more conservative reading of the doctrine." See her essay, "The Mexican Revolt Against Positivism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 10 1 (January 1949): 115.

⁴⁹ For a history of the UNAM see Justo Sierra, "Inaguración de la Universidad Nacional el 22 de Septiembre de 1910," in Justo Sierra, *Discursos* (México: UNAM, 1948), 447-462; Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*.

⁵⁰ Michael E. Burke, "The University of Mexico and the Revolution, 1910-1940," *The Americas* 34, no. 2 (October 1977): 252.

of Advanced Studies were among the two most prominent and successful in accomplishing Sierra's goal of intellectual advancement. While academic freedom was a fundamental component of the university's philosophy, it came with caveats. Unwritten restrictions were implemented that seriously impeded genuine academic freedom, according to one scholar, "squelched humanism and dissent."⁵¹ By far, the institution that garnered the heaviest critiques by both sides of the political spectrum was the School of Advanced Studies given attacks against positivism. In 1912, the School's existence came under-fire when liberals and pro-Díaz legislators in Congress collaborated to eliminate the School of Advanced Studies because they viewed it "as a regressive step toward the fruitless love of theory that had traditionally retarded progress." One positivist journalist went even renamed the institution as the "School of Advanced Speculative Rambling."⁵² The battle between the sciences and humanities took a tremendous toll on the structure of the university and impeded students from freely performing their duties as intellectuals.

One student-intellectual group often used as a reference to understand student militancy in the early part of the 20th century in Mexico was the Athenaeum of Youth (Juventud del Ateneo). Formed in 1909 by Vasconcelos and Martín Luíz Guzmán, the Juventud amalgamated a small group of young (elite) intellectuals to promote culture and education, but also to counter Porfirian positivism as guidance for these two topics.⁵³ For the most part they were enigmatic philosophers, novelists, and journalists, interested in

⁵¹ Daniel C. Levy, *University and Government in Mexico: Autonomy in an Authoritarian System* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1980), 25.

⁵² Burke, "The University of Mexico and the Revolution, 1910-1940," 254.

⁵³ According to Daniel C. Levy "Comtean positivism displaced traditional liberalism. To meet their material development goals the positivists established the National Preparatory School..." See also *University and Government in Mexico*.

theatre, and shared a common interest in reforming education and abhorrence of the *científicos*, the “scientific ones,” who were architects of Díaz’s positivist policy and perpetrators of anti-intellectual sentiments. These “intellectual rebels”⁵⁴ also included future prominent figures such as Alfonso Reyes, Antonio Caso, and even Diego Rivera, although the artist’s participated less than others. Despite being critical of the dictatorship, the Juventud refuted politics and instead opted for philosophical approaches to improve Mexican society. They were inspired by the writings of Kant and Nietzsche, and proclaimed themselves as heirs of the modernist movement and “antipodal of *porfirismo*’s cultural system.”⁵⁵ But in spite of being overtly against Díaz, they were not the intellectual precursors of the Mexican Revolution. Much like dozens of intellectuals during the armed conflict, the Juventud maintained a relatively non-participatory stance. Only after the Revolution did a few of its members assume distinguishable positions in the new government—allowing them to launch education reform.⁵⁶

Before Vasconcelos became rector of the National University in 1920, its stand during the Revolution was unclear and controversial. Speaking to the university’s political and social quagmire during the Revolution, Michael E. Burke stated “the new institution found itself under immediate pressure to become 'revolutionary'...”⁵⁷ Though, other factions of the revolution had less trust for the university because it was an “arm of the state and an elitist, conservative institution with Porfirian origins as well as with ties

⁵⁴ Flower, “The Mexican Revolt Against Positivism,” 115.

⁵⁵ Horacio Legrás, “El Ateneo y los orígenes del estado ético en México,” *Latin American Research Review* 38, 2 (2003): 37.

⁵⁶ For the most recent work on the Juventud del Ateneo see Susan Quintanilla, *Nosotros: La juventud del Ateneo de México. De Pedro Henríquez Ureña y Alfonso Reyes a José Vasconcelos y Martín Luis Guzmán* (México: Tiempo de Memoria, 2008).

⁵⁷ Burke, “The University of Mexico and the Revolution,” *The Americas*, 34, 2 (October, 1977): 252, 256.

to the colonial past.”⁵⁸ As late as 1915, the majority of students and faculty members remained on the sidelines during the conflict and were apathetic to revolutionary ideals. While students continued to demand educational reforms, their “protests seemed self-seeking if not counter-revolutionary.”⁵⁹ Although some left school to join the insurgent armies, they were viewed with suspicion by campesino soldiers, who had often suffered the loss of communal land or personal property in dealings with Porfirian *licenciados*—lawyers and other educated people.⁶⁰ The sandal-clad followers of Emiliano Zapata who marched into Mexico City in the summer of 1914 did not make a favorable impression on aspiring intellectuals either. With the exception of Vasconcelos, members of the Juventud were “fed up with the Revolution” and soundly criticized its actions, most notably, in the works of Guzmán.⁶¹ But this did not stop Vasconcelos from inviting a number of close colleagues to fill a void at the university. Intellectuals like Alfonso Caso (Antonio’s brother) and Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the future founder of the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (Confederation of Mexican Workers, CTM), began their careers as professors at the National University and keenly accepted Vasconcelos’s program of using the university to fulfill the demands of the Revolution.⁶² While it appeared at this point that most agreed with the universities’ role in institutionalizing the Revolution, major conflicts surfaced between Vasconcelos and other intellectuals.

⁵⁸ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 29.

⁵⁹ Burke, “The University of Mexico and the Revolution, 1910-1940,” 256.

⁶⁰ Samuel Brunk, “Zapata and the City Boys: In Search of a Piece of the Revolution,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* (1993).

⁶¹ Ordorika, *La disputa por el campus*, 63.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 64.

Education Reform, Social Control, and the First Expressions of Student Militancy

“To educate is to redeem.”⁶³ - Adage in the wake of the 1910 Revolution

Education reform was used as a tool for social control in the wake of the armed revolution, which lasted from 1910 to 1920. As revolutionary generals consolidated their power in the 1920s, university administrators wondered what the future laid for education. Liberals and conservatives within the revolutionary leadership were already engulfed in a battle over the control higher education, which further reinforced administrators' anxieties.⁶⁴ The first concrete initiative to overhaul education was spearheaded by President Álvaro Obregón. In 1921 he selected Vasconcelos to head the newly created Ministry of Public Education, or SEP. Vasconcelos's brief tenure as rector (1920-1921) of the National University had put him in direct contact with the university's weaknesses, prompting him to initiate comprehensive educational reforms. Being a supporter of the Revolution, he favored a politicized university, whereas Caso, his compatriot and replacement at the National University, proposed a “scholarly environment free from day-to-day politics.”⁶⁵ Caso's apolitical stance garnered criticisms from revolutionary leaders, who viewed the university not only as a space of intellectual advancement, but also as a vital machine in forging what anthropologist and *indigenista* leader Manuel Gamio once demanded, “a coherent and well-defined nationality.”⁶⁶

⁶³ George I. Sánchez, *Mexico: A Revolution by Education* (New York: Viking Press, 1936), 64.

⁶⁴ Levy, *University and Government in Mexico*, 26.

⁶⁵ Burke, “The University of Mexico and the Revolution, 1910-1940,” 257.

⁶⁶ See Manuel Gamio *Forjando patria: Pro-nacionalismo* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2010) and Josefina Vazquez de Knauth, “Mexico: Education and National Integration,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 2,3 Education and Social Structure (July, 1967): 212.

National integration through education became a concrete policy of the state with Vasconcelos as head of the SEP. In correspondence with the revolutionary leaderships' intention of building a strong centralized government all policies related to education reform passed through the SEP. Policymakers prioritized educational reform in the countryside, given the enormous social and economic imbalances between urban and rural Mexico. The 1917 Constitution had assigned individual states the responsibility of managing their own education system, but this proved to be disastrous in a time of revolutionary chaos. A constitutional change in 1921 empowered the federal government to set up schools in needed areas, largely in the countryside.⁶⁷ Together with other intellectuals and authorities, Vasconcelos facilitated the establishment of rural schools "to discipline and channel the energies of rebellious peasants."⁶⁸ The idea of rural people as backwards and inherently disobedient was a long-established premise and continued to be an overarching influence on post-revolutionary policy making, particularly in the realm of education. The early intellectual architects behind the rebirth of Mexico's education system forged policies to integrate marginalized groups into the new national project based on racial and class-based beliefs, yet laced with inclusive language.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, these reforms were meant to transform marginalized groups into proactive citizens.

According to Mary Kay Vaughan, post-revolutionary education was meant to "capacitate

⁶⁷ Harold Benjamin, "Revolutionary Education in Mexico," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 182, Education for Social Control (November 1935): 87.

⁶⁸ Mary Kay Vaughan, *Culture Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 4; Guillermo Palacios, "Postrevolutionary Intellectuals, Rural Readings and the Shaping of the 'Peasant Problem' in Mexico: El Maestro Rural, 1932-34," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30 2 (May, 1998): 309-339

⁶⁹ See López, *Crafting Mexico*, 134; See also Eugenia Meyes, Ángeles Sánchez, and Cristina Pug, "Los intelectuales de la revolución: Luis Cabrera, Ricardo Flores Magón, José Vasconcelos," *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 31 122 (1985) 81-98.

the citizen for participation in democracy.”⁷⁰ Leaders also drew connections between educational reform and combating economic disparity. In theory, reformers believed they could reduce the gap between affluent society and the popular masses by training students of impoverished communities into professions and allowing them to ascend up the economic ladder, although the viability of this plan was highly questionable.⁷¹

While a faction of the booming student population was eager to return stability to Mexico, they were quick to uncover the state’s exploitation of education for containing the masses. Students became politically active during the first two decades after the Revolution. According to Donald Mabry “the social-content of the Mexican Revolution encouraged students to advocate social justice as an act of patriotism.”⁷² The ongoing debate concerning the role of the university in nation-state building reached a new height in the early 1920s.⁷³ Both sides agreed the university should serve the country, though a number of caveats were in place to restrict the agency of students. Bent on politicizing the university and creating it into a bastion for social activists Vasconcelos encouraged students to become more political, work for social justice, and refute individualism. While the National University would later become a major epicenter for student discontent, the Preparatory School was already a major hub for student activism. Lombardo Toledano, a former student leader, became the School’s director in 1922, and ultimately Vasconcelos's adversary.

⁷⁰ Mary Kay Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982), 84.

⁷¹ Daniel A. Morales-Gómez and Carlos Alberto Torres, *The State, Corporatist Politics, and Educational Policy Making in Mexico* (Praeger Publishers, 1990), 12.

⁷² Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 16.

⁷³ Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 1

Vasconcelos's obsession with controlling every aspect of education reform amassed enemies and engendered a wave of student discontent against his own policies and abuse of power. At the Preparatory School, Lombardo was already a powerful figure recognized for his exceptional oratorical skills. During his time as director of the Preparatory School, he employed his organizational skills to build a strong student group, and convert the school into a “power base for national politics.”⁷⁴ Vasconcelos, fearing he was losing control of the Preparatory School, demanded Lombardo's resignation. In response to the resignation, the Federación Estudiantil Universitario (University Student Federation, FEU) orchestrated a protest demanding Vasconcelos reinstate Lombardo. Students took to the streets in the first major organized student demonstration in a decade. Violence broke out, and a police officer was brutally killed by students. Twelve students were promptly expelled, with more to follow, including the leaders of the movement: Daniel Schultz and José María Ojeda.⁷⁵ While the FEU failed in its endeavor, it established a precedent for student radicalism. The organization remained a major player in demanding transparency in university policy-making and the participation of students in decision-making. It organized conferences and exchanged ideas about educational reform with international organizations in Latin America.

Together the Preparatory School and the National University formed a foundation for a culture of student militancy and evolved to coincide with the political, social, and culture problems at the time. The most extreme example of this came in the late 1920s, after Vasconcelos resigned from his position as head of SEP, when the

⁷⁴ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 35.

⁷⁵ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 36-37.

administration of Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928) promulgated rules and regulations that students perceived to limit academic freedom. From a distance it appeared Calles's position on education was not far removed from the ideals of Vasconcelos and other revolutionary professors at the National University and Preparatory School. But when closely scrutinized, Calles stressed more than anyone before him the links between education and economic development. He cloaked his modernization program by concerning himself with illiteracy in the country and the importance of education in forging a unified population, while hiding the true nature of his scheme. Much like Obregón, Calles aspired to transform education into "a tool aimed at centralizing the federal government's control over the country."⁷⁶ He also thought of the university in capitalist terms. Put differently, besides its intellectual obligations the university was also created to increase economic production. In the 1970s student-revolutionaries would draw from this capitalist idea of the university to forge a Marxist interpretation metaphorically comparing the university to a "factory" and challenging the state's official propaganda as a tool to preserve power.⁷⁷

Under Calles, the underpinnings for a corporatist state and a centralized government began to materialize. With the formation of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party, PNR) in 1929, Calles pledged to continue executing reforms in the countryside and the cities. Urban workers were promised protection and rights and peasants land reform, and of course education. But the

⁷⁶ Andrae M. Marak, *From Many, One: Indians, Peasants, Borders, and Education in Callista Mexico, 1924-1935* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2009), xxvi; See also David E. Lorey, *The University System and Economic Development in Mexico Since 1929* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

⁷⁷ See A Tecla Jiménez, *Universidad, burguesía y proletariado* (México: Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1976).

overarching justification for carrying out these reforms was not entirely based on national unity through education, but also to control class conflict.⁷⁸ With the creation of the PNR, Calles expected to complete the centralization of the government and take the power away from the provinces. Obsessed with power, Calles would establish a precedent for future presidents, namely Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, who was preoccupied with controlling all aspects of the presidency.

The state's concern with protecting its power allowed for student militancy to grow since youth were not seen as a vital threat to the PNR. Underestimating the political acumen of students, Calles played his part in reforming education without much student participation. The notion that "older people" were attempting to control and mold future leaders based on their needs while disregarding students' aspirations and agency catalyzed the university into a bastion of opposition to Calles. In response, the Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios (Federation of University Students) and independent students mobilized to denounce their exclusion and reigniting conversations about university autonomy. But these initiatives moved slowly and the impetus dissipated. In 1927, the Confederación Nacional de Estudiantes (National Student Confederation, CNE) was founded to organize student activism in Mexico City. While the FEU and other organizations represented students before 1927, the CNE gained greater respect from militant students for being more politically determined.⁷⁹ As the Confederation's clout grew on the political and university scene, the FEU largely faded away.

⁷⁸ Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928*, 130.

⁷⁹ Nashiki, "El movimiento estudiantil mexicano," 189.

Student militancy during the Calles regime experienced another surge with the Cristero Rebellion, but this time around, conservative and progressive students were both politically active. In 1926, Christian followers and members of the clergy revolted against the federal government in what started as minor protests but later transformed into a full-scale War. Calles capitalized on the 1917 Constitution's strong stance against religion by passing rigid legislation to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church on society, primarily through education. Less than a year into Calles' term, Church officials and laymen organized protests to decry the anti-religious policies of the state and the persecution of worshipers and priests. Using guerrilla warfare tactics, priests and worshipers engaged in confrontations with the federal army and suffered tremendous losses. Dozens of priests were executed for inciting the rebellion. The revolt lasted from 1926 to 1929 and had long-lasting ramifications for the state.

As the Cristero War raged on in distant battlefields, students waged a movement without weapons. Enraged by the state's anti-religious stance, students enrolled in Catholic schools organized to protect their academies. While this was not the first time Catholic students coordinated protests against policy making, conservative student militancy was given a new face during the war. With the guidance of Archbishop Mora y del Río, in 1926, the National Catholic Student Union was born and transformed into an "ecclesiastically recognized student organization," obligated to defend the Church's interests.⁸⁰ Calles's anti-religious stance prompted progressive students to side with the president against the clergy and supporters of traditional forms of instruction in the

⁸⁰ David Espinosa, "Student Politics, National Politics: Mexico's National Student Union, 1926-1943," *The Americas* 62 4 (April, 2006): 533-534. Members of the Union were also killed during the conflict.

advent of the Cristero Rebellion. State officials made it appear that religious instruction jeopardized the ethos of the university. They perceived Calles as a pillar of academic freedom. Using the politics of fear to push the state's political agenda, legislatures were able to lure students into believing the threat was real.

The Cristero War and the power of conservative student radicalism exposed the vulnerability of secular education, thus impelling the government to expedite reform. Student militancy on the left experienced a surge in the 1930s. Allowing the rise of student organization appeared to be a risk the state was willing to take even though it meant the possibility of more youth agitation. On the other hand, tolerating an organized student front meant they would also see that conservative student groups remained at bay while at the same time uphold the state's education reforms and official propaganda. Despite the culmination of the armed conflict, the Catholic Union and Marxist students from the UNAM fought ideological battles on campus and outside Mexico City.⁸¹ By 1933, the ideological battle turned violent. Catholic students led by future founder of the Partido de Acción Nacional (National Action Party, PAN), Manuel Gómez Morín and academic Rodolfo Brito Foucher employed the first *grupos de choque* or *porros*, armed thugs to confront their adversaries with violence.⁸² The usage of porros became commonplace in student confrontations, and by the 1960s and 1970s they were being employed by the government as well.

Both the FEU and the CNE responded to the violence by continuing to push for radical reform in the university and using debate, not brutality, to defeat their adversaries.

⁸¹ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 99.

⁸² Shock groups. Hugo Sánchez Godínez, *Génesis, desarrollo y consolidación de los grupos estudiantiles de choque en la UNAM, 1930-1990* (México: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2006), 153.

Both organizations encountered a number of impediments along the way that limited their efficiency and compromised the coalition they had formed. Unable to resolve their differences, a number of new student groups splintered off. Divisions in the student left heralded fundamental changes to the ethos of student militancy. Some students realized they had lost track of their role in society by consuming themselves with issues exclusively concerning their own well-being and future careers. This prompted a new period of radicalization and redefinition of the student militant. Perhaps more than any other department, professional schools (lawyers for the most part) embodied this trend by refraining from having any direct involvement in these ideological standoffs and instead focused on nation-state building. For instance, the Schools of Economics directed all their energy to solving national issues. Considered a bastion of radical thinking, students were relatively passive militants who only used socialist theory to develop “potential patterns for development.”⁸³

Far greater changes to the educational system came with the implementation of socialist education under President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940).⁸⁴ University students had reason to be suspicious because the primary goal of this new policy was to extend educational opportunities beyond the elite of Mexico City to workers and peasants, particularly in isolated areas.⁸⁵ The policy also had a number of other goals, as historian Mary Kay Vaughan explained:

⁸³ Burke, “The University of Mexico and the Revolution, 1910-1940,” 271.

⁸⁴ Cárdenas changed the PNR to the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM).

⁸⁵ His presidency lasted from 1934-1940. Originally from Michoacán, Cárdenas was a General in the Mexican Revolution. Considered the most loved president of Mexico, he is revered for his long list of accolades, most importantly the massive distribution of land to landless peasants and indigenous people. Other examples include the massive spread of education and the nationalization of the oil reserves. Also, he refused to live in the National Palace and instead converted it into a museum, continued to travel

Socialist education supplemented existing policy emphasizing peasant behavior reform with an intensified attack on superstition, religious practices, and the church. Socialist pedagogy also stressed collective learning and organization for adults and children. Children could learn productive habits through group cultivation of gardens and the formation of cooperatives. Men would form agrarian associations to press for land, producer cooperatives to cultivate it, and sports teams to foster a modern, nationalist, and productivist sociability.⁸⁶

In educating the masses, Cárdenas was pursuing the ultimate goal of genuine national integration. The curriculum promoted a new pantheon of revolutionary heroes, whether national leaders like Emiliano Zapata or unknown local figures who had opposed elite landowners and could provide role models for young people. The emphasis on new types of instruction, including collective learning, social organizing, and visual education through revolutionary murals, also contrasted with the traditional methods of university education.

Implemented in late 1934, socialist education radicalized student militancy and also reignited a new period of student conflicts on campuses throughout the country. New student organizations were created to counter socialist education. Political ideology lay at the heart of these debates between academic administrators, students, politicians, and intellectuals. Conservatives questioned whether the government should have such a powerful influence over the content of education, even going as far saying that forcing

throughout Mexico listening to the demands and problems of the peasantry, cut his president salary in-half, and had a rule that the poor were to always be the first in line to see him.

⁸⁶ Mary Kay Vaughan, *Culture Politics in Revolution*, 5.

socialist education on students was a moral sin.⁸⁷ Thus, the debate was about more than simply the meaning of socialist education. Opponents sullenly criticized it as being “atheistic, Marxist, and sex education.”⁸⁸ Vicente Lombardo Toledano, who had emerged as a Cardenista union leader, argued forcefully for creating an education system that specifically catered to the working and peasant classes. He believed that the socialization of society and its means of production had to begin within the educational system. Lombardo Toledano hope to instill within the university an explicit mission to guide this transformation by training students, professors, and by way of them, the country, that “human history had been the evolution of social institutions towards classless society based on people’s ownership of property.” Also, it was important that society learn the “ethics of a classless society.” Adding to this proposition, Lombardo Toledano also proposed that faculty and students must be required to spend a complete year performing public services and finally that Marxism should be the single ideological foundation for university instruction.⁸⁹

Still the UNAM and urban higher education was not fulfilling the needs of working-class students. The social composition of students at the UNAM and Preparatory School continued to be predominantly students from the upper echelons of society. Even if peasant students signed up for courses at the UNAM, the subjects taught did not cater to the needs of rural communities. To revolve this, Cárdenas founded the National

⁸⁷ Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth Century Mexico*, 166; See citation by Gabriel Contreras, “Grupos Católicos en la UNAM, 1936-1948,” in *Historia de la educación superior en México: Historiografía y fuentes*, ed. Oscar García Carmona and Sonia Ibarra Ibarra (PUBLICATION DATA NEEDED), 243.

⁸⁸ Harry John Carlson, “The Impact of the Cárdenas Administration on Mexican Education” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona, 1963), 76.

⁸⁹ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 182.

Polytechnic Institute (IPN) in 1936. He envisioned the university would train working-class and peasant youth in professional skills and in theory Cárdenas anticipated peasant students would then return home and spearhead the countryside's development. The program worked for the most part but it had a number of drawbacks. First, not all students from rural families returned home to expand agricultural development. Many stayed in Mexico City or relocated to other urban cities to take advantage of the economic boom and rise up the economic and social ladder.

Conservative reactions against socialist education led to the proliferation of new universities outside Mexico City, an ironic twist given the Cardenista goal of decentralizing the educational system. According to Gabriel Contreras, public schools were closely monitored and visited by SEP officials to assure no religious instruction was taking place. Even private schools feared repercussions. In order to avoid inspection they held class in homes, classrooms were reduced in number, and students were prohibited from playing.⁹⁰ Some conservative students even established their own universities, like the Autonomous University of Guadalajara, a private institution founded in 1935 with the specific goal of evading the socialist education mandated by the central government. Even an ostensible Cardenista ally, the regional strongman and conservative general Maximino Avila Camacho, transformed the State College of Puebla, the former Jesuit Colegio del Espíritu Santo, into the Universidad de Puebla in 1937. This state-supported university gained institutional autonomy only in 1956, a decade after the autocratic general's death. The most prestigious university outside of the capital, the Tecnológico de Monterrey, was founded in 1943 through the initiative of local business leaders, most

⁹⁰ Contreras, "Grupos Católicos en la UNAM, 1936-1948," 243-244.

notably Eugenio Garza Sada, heir to both a steel and brewing conglomerate. Although these and other institutions were created largely in opposition to the radicalism of socialist education, in time they spawned their own radical student movements that challenged the authoritarianism of the PRI.

Meanwhile in Mexico City, an increasingly conservative regime sought to infiltrate the UNAM in order to weed out the influence of socialist education. This campaign was promoted by Cárdenas's successors as president, first the avowedly Catholic Manuel Avila Camacho (1940-1946), younger brother of the Poblano political boss, and then the avidly pro-business Miguel Aleman (1946-1952). These new administrations executed major changes to revolutionary policies of Cárdenas. Socialist education was official erased from the Constitution in 1945, and land reform was severely curtailed. Student militancy remained a powerful force throughout the country and continued to be a major nuance to the new administration. But the regime caught a major break when radical conservative Rodolfo Brito Foucher was elected rector of the UNAM in 1942. In keeping with the new government's policy on student dissent, the newly elected rector of the UNAM appointed officials who would monitor student activities and help abolish the vestiges of socialist education.⁹¹

The regime's endeavor to depoliticize the university was able to take place once Antonio Caso's younger brother Alfonso assumed the rectorship of the UNAM in 1944. While Caso respected the holiness of university autonomy, like his older brother he was leery of a political and militant university and the ramifications it potentially presented. In retrospect, Caso would have belonged to the Juventud faction supportive of cultural

⁹¹ Ordorika, *La disputa por el campus*, 81.

enlightenment and not Marxist theory. With these ideas in mind he implemented a number of provisions threatening student agency and control of their academic careers, namely limiting student say in hiring professors and other vital decisions.⁹² New student mobilizations spawned to denounce attempts at silencing students' opinion in university policymaking and creating an undemocratic system.⁹³ Activists elicited the help of not only their radical peers but also invited apolitical students to take a stand against changes made to their academic freedom and the establishment of an authoritarian "regime" in their university. Angered at these policies, student militancy was reborn after a short hiatus. The regime had not eradicated student militancy following the nullification of socialist education. The state mistakenly believed that student radicalism was based on socialist education, and overlooked the historical roots of dissent.

Outside of Mexico City, students mobilized but not necessarily against the government's intention to depoliticize the university. Instead they complained about the dearth of adequate facilities and the irresponsible distribution of funds by state officials. Rural schools were damaged following the end of socialist education. Government officials basically allowed a number of schools to collapse as a result of the redistribution of funds to economic projects. Upset with government's neglect of rural education in 1947, student groups from *escuelas normales* (normal schools) headed mobilizations demanding better assistance from the federal government. Students at public universities also participated in protests. Two years later at the Universidad Michoacana de San

⁹² Ordorika, *La disputa por el campus*, 98.

⁹³ Daniel Levy, "University Autonomy in Mexico: Implications for Regime Authoritarianism," *Latin American Research Review* 14, 3 (1979): 135.

Nicolás de Hidalgo, students protestors denounced the construction of an outdoor theatre instead of increasing the university's budget. In the end, two students were killed.⁹⁴

The events at the Michoacana, in rural schools, and in Mexico City revealed the breadth of student discontent and exemplified a deeper meaning that transcended university related issues. Activists increasingly became agitated at the government for constantly trying to transform the university into an arm of the state. Students quickly came to the realization they had been used to promote the state's official propaganda and manipulated into thinking they were participating in the advancement of society. Like the revolutionary figures they learned about in class or encountered in the murals of Diego Riveras, José Clemente Orozco, and Alvaro Siqueiros, students desired their own place in history as active agents of social change. But they were limited in how far their dissent could reach given the government on numerous occasions attempted a comprehensive depoliticization of the university, except for the Cárdenas years. Feeling constrained by the boundaries of the university the student left broaden their political program to include more direct participation in civil struggles and popular political mobilizations. Student Marxists aligned with the Partido Comunista Mexicana (Mexican Communist Party, PCM) were major advocates of radical thought and gave the youth valuable orientation, though under the thumb of the PCM. The Party initially provided a forum for student radicals to raise their political consciousness and come in direct contact with popular groups. Other students worked independently and were successful in immersing themselves in popular political mobilizations, even armed struggles.

⁹⁴ Nashiki, "El movimiento estudiantil mexicano," 193-194.

Student Militancy, 1950-1966

University issues remained a prevailing concern for students, but they also rode a wave of popular discontent dealing with social reforms and government respect of the Constitution. As the PRI abandoned its revolutionary rhetoric and promoted trickle-down industrialization, student radicals began to join workers and peasants in protesting these policies that excluded the lower classes from the benefits of economic growth. Unions and confederations created during the previous administrations to channel the needs of workers and peasants were beginning to falter and corrupt. Used as a mechanism to contain class struggle, they in turn precipitated conflicts between popular groups and the government. Union boss and leader of the CTM, Fidel Velázquez instituted transformed the confederation into his own personal political machine, realigned it to the PRI, and expelled all opponents including the union's co-founder Lombardo Toledano. State organization meant to channel peasant demands were also plagued by massive venality. Seeing their demands were not being met peasants and workers sought radical reforms through different channels, thus engendering a new age of militancy. Some workers and peasants even tried their luck with the PCM and the Popular Socialist Party (PPS), but with little success.⁹⁵

The first major counter-hegemonic rebellions in which students supported or participated in happened during the 1950s. In a major attempt to challenge the cooptation of working class movements and restore the rights of union democracy. Third, in the cities, young people participated in such major waves of protest as the 1952 presidential

⁹⁵ See Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); Howard Handelman, "The Politics of Labor Protest in Mexico: Two Case Studies, *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 18 3 (August, 1976): 267-294.

campaign of General Henriquez, an old comrade of Cárdenas, whose repression was widely seen as the final gasp of internal democracy within the PRI. Seven years government officials were faced with a major strike led by the railroad workers in which students expressed their solidarity for the cause and after its leaders Demetrio Vallejo and Valentín Campa were imprisoned. Mexican youth also ventured outside city limits and for many their comfort zone by going to the countryside to participate in protest movements against state policies committed to driving peasants off the land to provide cheap labor for urban industries. In Morelos, students supported the peasant struggle of Ruben Jaramillo, who was assassinated with his family by the Mexican military in 1962.⁹⁶ In each of these historical events, regardless of how much students' participation weighed on the success or failure of these movements, they prompted students to develop a rapport with workers and peasants, as well as to find a role within the Mexican tradition of revolutionary activism.

One of the fundamental divisions that would plague the student left developed, between one faction that sought radical social change through non-violent means and another that believed social justice could only be achieved through armed revolution. These struggles had emerged already from student militant debates of the 1950s and 1960s. The radical faction remained committed to supporting popular mobilizations but hesitated to fully engulf themselves in struggles where their social position impeded them from being taken seriously as agents of change. Intervening in the day-to-day decision making of popular mobilizations had the potential of creating tensions between popular groups and students, who were already perceived as being out of touch with reality and

⁹⁶ See Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata*.

having a short track record of working with the masses and leaving their Ivory Tower sanctuary. Anti-revolutionaries also argued that most students had never ventured beyond the city limits and were dubious that the rural population was radical enough to follow their revolutionary leadership, much less allow them to join. By focusing on the drawbacks of aligning with popular groups, many students were convinced to remain simply as supporters or spectators, and not active participants. To further reinforce this notion, the rise of right-wing student groups had a major influence in luring radical students to prioritize the university over popular political struggles.⁹⁷ With these forces, the nascent student-revolutionary left's presence in revolutionary movements was eclipsed in the first part of the 1960s.

Such student militancy became a significant issue for the ruling regime in the context of Cold War anti-communism throughout Latin America. The ruling party feared that middle-class youth might have been plotting with its enemies rather than helping to build a modern, capitalist society. Military coups followed by repressive dictatorships took hold in Venezuela (1948), Cuba (1953), and Guatemala (1954). Fear of the so-called “domino effect” corresponded with an acute upward increase in various Latin American regimes’ arsenal. Those in power distorted the law and reframed their justifications for responding against “subversives” with such voracity by using the politics of fear and paranoia as a tool to garner acceptance from the population.⁹⁸ The United States encouraged hardline policies and counterinsurgency campaigns by providing diplomatic

⁹⁷ See Godinez, *Génesis, desarrollo y consolidación de los grupos estudiantiles de choque en la UNAM, 1930-1990*.

⁹⁸ See Robert S. Robins and Jerrold Post, *The Politics of Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Francis Wheen, *Strange Days Indeed: The 1970s: The Golden Days of Paranoia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010).

support and military training at the School of the Americas.⁹⁹ While maintaining civilian rule, the PRI was dedicated to preventing the spread of communism in Mexico. The PRI considered itself to be the heir to Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa, and the other revolutionaries of 1910. By this logic, anyone who advocated revolution against it must be counter-revolutionary.

The Cuban Revolution of Fidel Castro was the most influential movement in Latin America during the Cold War, and its success in 1959 launched ominous shockwaves all through Latin America. The icon of Che Guevara still provides a beacon of radical dedication, and many in Latin America still dream of *el fusil justiciero* (justice at gunpoint).¹⁰⁰ The humiliating defeat of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar created a widespread radical consciousness throughout Latin America. In Mexico, when student politics had been at its lowest ebb, the Cuban Revolution provided radicals with the assurance they needed in believing that a successful revolution made-up of adolescents and the working class was possible. While many communists had discredited the prospects of armed struggles the Cuban experience reinforced the notion that such a rebellion could be carried out and won through an armed insurrection. According to David Spencer, the Cuban Revolution significantly radicalized numerous student movements, added to the politicization of the university and boosted the relevance of ideologies, specifically focusing on Marxism in its numerous interpretations. Spencer also mentions that political parties became involved in university politics, which enticed

⁹⁹ Lesley Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁰ Mike Gonzalez, "The Culture of the Heroic Guerrilla: The Impact of Cuba in the Sixties," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 3 2 (1984): 65.

students to become leaders of the youth segment of those parties, and the modification of Latin American adolescent politics added to the collaborative efforts of international youth and student groups.¹⁰¹

Although Latin America witnessed the “triumph” of the Mexican and Bolivian Revolutions neither of these episodes achieved the revolutionary change demanded by Castro and Guevara. When Castro ascended to power he was anxious and concerned with increasing the reputation, influence, and prestige of the Revolution.¹⁰² His call for a Latin American insurrection against imperialism, social fragmentation, inequalities and authoritarianism were things earlier revolutions did not sponsor. Radicals all over Latin America came to believe that a socialist revolution was capable of succeeding outside of Europe and without the assistance of the Soviet Union. As Mexican intellectual Juan F. Noyola put it during a speech at the UNAM in January 1961, “The Cuban Revolution is a common heritage of all Latin American nations. At the present moment it is our most valuable heritage.”¹⁰³ Truly, many Latin Americans, especially of the Left, required a historical moment in history like this to assure them that revolutionary reform in Latin America was possible.

The youthfulness of Fidel Castro’s 26th of July guerrilla movement also contributed significantly to its appeal throughout Latin America. News of young and ambitious people filling the ranks of government ministries and directing revolutionary

¹⁰¹ David Spencer, “The Impact of the Cuban Revolution on Latin American Student Politics,” in *Student Politics in Latin America*, ed. David Spencer (Philadelphia: United States National Student Association, 1965), 91.

¹⁰² Spencer, “The Impact of the Cuban Revolution on Latin American Student Politics,” 92.

¹⁰³ Preface to J. Tabares del Real, *La revolución Cubana*, Havana, 1960. cited in Boris Goldenberg, *The Cuban Revolution and Latin America* (Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1965), 311.

policy was heard day after day on the radio and in publications in Mexico.¹⁰⁴ Students were more susceptible to the outcome of the Revolution because it represented the confidence of young adults, their role in the revolutionary process, and provoked Mexican adolescents to espouse radical ideologies and believe they could also potentially lead a successful revolutionary movement. Besides, the changes promised by the Cuban Revolution represented the ability and hopes of the youth and the oppressed in Latin America.¹⁰⁵ It was evident that the oppressed classes as well as students would become allies and join together to struggle against exploitation and social inequalities. Mexican youth were also fully aware that Fidel Castro and other Cuban exiles had traveled to Mexico to plan their Revolution. Castro had first met Che Guevara in Mexico City, the future rebels took their military training on the ranch of a Villista veteran, and they disembarked from the coastal city of Tuxpan, Veracruz on a yacht to carry out their fateful invasion of Cuba.

Nevertheless, Mexican student radicals recognized that social conditions in Cuba were very different; even if they felt sure a similar revolution could be launched in Mexico. According to Che Guevara's doctrine, a revolution could not succeed in overthrowing a democratically elected government. If the bulk of the population was receptive towards the government, the possibilities of a successful revolution were minimal. Cubans struggled against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, who had risen to power illegally, whereas in Mexico a dictatorship did not exist, although there was widespread suspicion of vote fraud in Mexico's electoral process. Fragmentation of the

¹⁰⁴ Guillermo Robles Garnica, *Guadalajara, la guerrilla olvidada: Presos en la isla de la libertad* (Mexico: Ediciones La Otra Cuba, 1996), 14.

¹⁰⁵ Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifice*, 13.

opposition contributed to the ruling party's power and potential challengers sometimes struck deals to support PRI candidates. Often, Mexico's leftist parties, including the PCM and the PPS, expressed their support for the PRI because of its revolutionary rhetoric. Meanwhile, the PAN, the conservative opposition, remained content with the pro-business policies of the government. Guevara himself later confirmed the belief that popular revolution could overthrow a democratically elected government, when he violated his own rule and attempted to ignite a revolutionary movement in Bolivia, a country that in 1954 had undergone a bourgeois revolution similar to the one in Mexico. The guerrilla mission ultimately failed and the CIA and the Bolivian armed forces killed Che in 1967.

Another important difference between the Cuban government of Batista and Mexico under the PRI was the weight of U.S. imperialism. Many Cubans, especially students, deeply resented the longstanding interference of the United States in Cuban policies, which dated back to the revolution of 1898, when Cuban insurgents had defeated the Spanish military, only to see the United States enter the war at the last minute and abrogate Cuban independence with the hated Platt Amendment, which granted the U.S. government the right to intervene in domestic politics. In the decades that followed, North American investors and corporations acquired ownership of vast tracts of farmland as well as a significant portion of the economic infrastructure. The U.S. government also exerted heavy political authority on the "docile dictator" Batista. Even the Mafia had a hand in the gambling, prostitution, and nightclubs of Havana, further catalyzing popular support for Castro and his revolutionary *barbudos* (bearded-ones), as

they were commonly called. By contrast, the PRI was careful to maintain an anti-imperialist public rhetoric, even while covertly supporting the Cold War policies of the United States.

This disparate political alliance reflected an emerging “guerrilla culture” that drew on examples from both the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions. A romanticized image of the heroic guerrilla gained widespread currency throughout the hemisphere, as Fidel Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara became popular icons expressing a sort of revolutionary mysticism. Their example beckoned a major Latin American revolution, as their political doctrines turned Cuban revolutionaries into heroes of the popular classes, including students. Just as Mexican youth admired the Cuban cause and contributed to its romanticizing, Havana believed in the icons of the Mexican Revolution and accordingly constructed centers of comradeship with Mexico.¹⁰⁶ Even president Luis Echeverría expressed his admiration for the Cuban cause, a claim the revolutionary-left widely criticized given the president's strong anti-communist position.

Despite this mutual respect shown by the respective governments, Mexican students recognized a final impediment to the success of social revolution in Mexico in this amiable relationship that Mexico maintained with communist Cuba. Recognizing the value of an anti-imperialist ally in Latin America, Cuban leaders refrained from involving themselves in Mexico's domestic policy and inciting revolutionary unrest.¹⁰⁷ This of course meant that the up and coming armed revolutionary organizations in Mexico were left with little direct international support.

¹⁰⁶ Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, 123.

¹⁰⁷ For more information see chapter 2 in Christopher M. White, *Creating the Third: Mexico, Cuba, and the United States during the Castro Era* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

Finally, there was the problem of divisions among the student radicals, many of whom simply had no desire to initiate an armed movement like Castro's. One sector of the radical left called for a direct assault on the state, while the other, led by prominent figures of the student movement refrained from choosing war. While both factions advocated anarchist, socialist, and communist ideologies, those who had been involved in the 1968 student movement decided to pursue a non-aggressive course of action through social activism and electoral processes. A traditional Marxist revolution was rejected by most of the movement's principal adherents, who continued to be ambivalent about the prospects of an armed conflict, and questioned whether Mexico was prepared for it. Octavio Paz spoke for large numbers of contemporaries when he said: "the temper of the Mexican people is not revolutionary and neither are the historical conditions of the country. Nobody wants a revolution. What people do want is reform: an end to the rule of privilege initiated by the PNR forty years ago."¹⁰⁸ Radical change through political violence did not appear reasonable for Mexico at the moment and therefore the less radical disregarded propositions by the ultra-left.

In the event of an armed revolution, students agreed that the majority of the population would not align themselves with rebels or understand their set of guidelines. If Marxism was to become the leading political ideology (as it was reasoned) some students felt they were unqualified to indoctrinate the popular masses. They sensed that students themselves were incapable of conceiving a tangible program that the masses could comfortably identify with. In the end such actions would generate dubious results that would be unrewarding for the movement. In addition, if aggression and a campaign of

¹⁰⁸ Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude and other*, 232.

terror were employed as the main method of acquiring political support there was the likelihood citizens would turn to the state for protection. This would also lend credence to the government's inevitable claims that any rebels against their power represented not the will of the Mexican people but rather a foreign invention—motivated by the Soviets and Cubans, whose communist objectives threatened Mexico's sovereignty and security. The contentions prepared by the ultra-left did not seem practical and convincing to their peers who were not as radical. The path to an armed conflict seemed to dwindle away. Instead of threatening to polarize the movement in its early period, ultra-leftist factions joined the peaceful student movement, attempted to infiltrate its central committees, mobilized into diverse areas of the country independently, or obtained scholarships to study in universities in Communist countries.¹⁰⁹

Despite innumerable factors working against the revolutionary left, armed revolutionary movements still surfaced with student involvement. Students participated in the short-lived 1965-guerrilla movement led by teacher Arturo Gámiz in Madera, Chihuahua. The birth of Mexico's first modern guerrilla movement was prompted by state-repression and failed promises over land reform. Independent organizations such as the Comité de Defensa Popular (Popular Defense Committee) formed numerous fronts throughout the state challenging governmental authority.¹¹⁰ Agencies like the PDC made efforts to organize the peasantry but the lack of organization and leadership drew

¹⁰⁹ The most popular university for Mexican radical-students outside of Mexico, who were influenced by revolutionary doctrine, interested in learning its principles, and possibly learning methods of initiating a Marxist revolution in their respective countries was at the Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow. Other countries included: France, United States, China and North Korea.

¹¹⁰ Samuel Schmidt, *The Deterioration of the Mexican Presidency: The Years of Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), 83.

peasants away from its agenda. Since *latifundistas* (landowners) controlled most of the land, there were many instances when peasants were encouraged to seize lands that had been previously taken away from them through illegal means. As a teacher in the region, Gámiz observed first-hand these abuses, thus prompting him to take action. He quickly became a recognized speaker and his radicalization became increasingly evident through this discourse and advocacy for direct action, as well as questioning the government's power. After years of working through legal channels, in 1964 he recruited students and peasants to form the Grupo Guerrillero Popular. His decision to go underground was partially influenced by Che's "foco" theory that a small vanguard of guerrilla soldiers could inspire revolutionary consciousness in an oppressed peasantry. But also Gámiz was convinced the conditions for revolutionary change were optimal and could only occur through cross-class alliances. For students with revolutionary tendencies this was an ideal opportunity to put their ideas into practice and become the first student-revolutionaries of the Cold War era in Mexico. In the end, the group was decimated in 1965 when an assault on the Madera Barracks failed. Gámiz and other leaders were killed in the assault but survivors inherited his objective of building an armed struggle to overthrow the state.¹¹¹ In early 1966, survivors and militants who were unable to make the assault organized into a new movement under the leadership of Oscar González from Chihuahua under the name GPG "Arturo Gámiz." The group managed to be active until 1968 when it was repressed and counterinsurgency forces killed González.

The short-lived Gámiz rebellion did not signal the end of armed struggles and students' involvement before the 1970s. According to government documents, between

¹¹¹ For a comprehensive history see Glockner, *Memoria roja*.

1960-1967 at least nine armed resistance movements surfaced.¹¹² Ideologically they were adherents of an array of Marxist tenets and social backgrounds. In these organizations students found a forum to prove their revolutionary credentials and established a foundation for future militants' interest in taking their revolutionary commitment to a new level. Among the dozens of students participating in these armed revolutionary organizations militants like Tiburcio Cruz Sánchez from Oaxaca created a name for themselves as committed revolutionaries. Cruz Sánchez organized student protests in his home state before expanding his political horizons and embracing the armed struggle. He eventually went on to participate in the Union del Pueblo revolutionary movement in the seventies and later founded the EPR.

The ongoing questioning of students as revolutionary agents remained a endemic issue. But groups like the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario Estudiantil (Student Revolutionary Movement of the Left, MIRE) from the UNAM debunked these claims.¹¹³ Militants like Enrique Condés Lara remember his time in the MIRE as inspiring and playing a tremendous role in his revolutionary formation. “We wanted to raise hell and make the revolution. That was what the MIRE was all about.”¹¹⁴ Condés Lara’s claim, simply put, epitomized much of the group’s revolutionary actions and structure. In 1966, the MIRE blew up a statue of former president Miguel Alemán at the new UNAM campus that he had had built, as if symbolically repudiating the

¹¹² Movimiento Latinoamericano de Liberación (MLL), el Partido Obrero Revolucionario Trotskista (PORT), la Unión del Pueblo (UP), el Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria Estudiantil (MIRE), el Movimiento Revolucionario del Pueblo (MRP), la Organización Nacional de Acción Revolucionaria (ONAR), el Movimiento Marxista-Leninista de México (MMLM), el Ejército Revolucionario del Sur (ERS). Cedillo, “El fuego y el silencio,” 125.

¹¹³ See AGN, DFS, 63-1-67 H 17 L 45 and 11-4-73 H-46 L-217.

¹¹⁴ Enrique Condés Lara, Interview with author, January 2010, Mexico City.

government.¹¹⁵ The action generated mixed response from students as well as from the radical student left. Revolution was clearly the ultimate goal of urban guerrilla movements, but as in the seventies, they had a difficult time convincing the Mexican people that they were advocating a just cause. Without popular support, their actions were interpreted as baseless and they thereby gave a bad image to revolutionaries as heartless extremists. Denunciations came from both sides of the political spectrum. Critics from the left added fuel to the growing factionalism by patronizing idealist students. Traditional communists chastised student-revolutionaries for trying to spawn a massive rebellion without knowing how to organize effectively. These factors created an image of students as senseless rebels and a nuisance to society.

For non-violent youth, 1966 and 1967 were years of student mobilizations throughout the country. For the first time the military occupied university campuses. Many activists belonged to the Communist Youth and brought to their respective strikes their own theoretical knowledge and experience, but they were not always welcomed by the independent left. In 1966 once again students from the Universidad Michoacana organized mass demonstrations on campus to achieve reforms. Unable to quell the strike, the governor of Michoacán demanded military intervention, an action that was interpreted as a violation of university autonomy and threat to students in general.¹¹⁶ Across the country students denounced the action and expressed their solidarity with their peers from Michoacán. That same year, students in Sonora organized around environmental issues when they rallied against the exploitation of the Cerro del Mercado. The following year

¹¹⁵ Cedillo, "El fuego y el silencio," 129.

¹¹⁶ Lucio Rangel Hernández, *La Universidad Michoacán y el movimiento estudiantil, 1966-1986* (Morelia: UMSNH/Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2009).

students held demonstrations in Chihuahua, Guerrero, and Sonora to denounce the persecution of radical students and professors, the lack of democracy in the university, and other policies affecting students.¹¹⁷

Universities in Mexico City remained a major hotbed of student dissent against the government. One author described the UNAM as “unmanageable by the 1960s.”¹¹⁸ Student strikes and protests of different magnitudes created a hostile environment between administrators and students that culminated in a strike two years before 1968. During the 1966 strike that eventually led to the resignation of rector Ignacio Chávez (1961-1966) students embraced new forms of organizing that provided structure and respect from outsiders. For instance, activists formed strike committees to guide the strike and coordinate actions effectively,¹¹⁹ leading student organizations with greater national recognition like the Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos (National Center of Democratic Students, CNED) to support their struggle. Student conflicts also occurred between student and universities, not just against the government and administrators. Tensions between the IPN and the UNAM reached new heights and boiled over on numerous occasions. Both sides fought incessantly for the dominant voice and even competed for radical status. This historical rivalry would be put on hold in the 1968, when a student movement began that would transform Mexican society.

¹¹⁷ Salvador Martínez Della Rocca, *Estado y Universidad en México: Historia de los movimientos estudiantiles en la UNAM* (México: Joan Boldó I Climent, 1986), 105-106.

¹¹⁸ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 219.

¹¹⁹ Nashiki, “El movimiento estudiantil mexicano,” 206.

“¡Con la juventud no debe jugarse!”: Mexico 1968

“Don't play with the young people!” This slogan from Mexican student protesters in 1968 captured both their new sense of political importance and their frustration with the government's refusal to engage in a dialogue. Students had a long history of political mobilization in the twentieth-century to maintain their autonomy within the university. They had also joined in wider social movements, from the struggles around socialist education in the 1930s to union protests of the 1950s. What made 1968 different was that for the first time students were leading a protest movement that gained a mass following. According to one author, “They no longer wanted to be treated as immature youth but as citizens.”¹²⁰ They were now setting the political agenda, challenging the authoritarian regime, and helping to shape Mexican society. Yet because students in Mexico City were suddenly at the center of national attention, there has been a tendency to focus exclusively on the events of that fateful summer and to forget that previous student mobilizations had played a fundamental role in forging the political consciousness of those who participated in the 1968 student movement.

Historians have clearly documented the immediate causes of the 1968 student movement, especially the preparations for the Mexico City Olympic Games, the deeply unpopular presidency of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, and the global wave of student protests that year. Mexico was the first Third World nation to be chosen to host the Olympics, and national leaders saw this pageant as a ticket to First World stature. To prepare for it, they promised to spend huge sums of money to modernize the capital and present themselves

¹²⁰ Enrique Condés Lara, *Represión y rebelión en México, 1959-1985*, 2 vols. (México: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2007), 112.

on the world stage. Once the celebration at gaining this honor ended, Mexicans began to ponder whether the nation had the resources for such a spectacle. The state, which ultimately spent about \$140 million dollars in preparing for the Games, claimed that the sums used for urban modernization would benefit the entire country in the long run.¹²¹ Mexican students were not necessarily opposed to hosting the Olympic Games, but when government spending reached unwarranted levels, students and sectors of the popular classes protested the extravagance. The government diverted money from programs intended for those in need to support the construction of sports complexes, apartments for athletes, hotels, and the expansion of the metro system so that people attending the Games could efficiently move around from one event to another. Government spending was also used to advertise the Games as a tourist spectacle and “showcase” to the world how far Mexico had developed.¹²²

The vast sums of money spent to modernize the city and host the Olympics created tensions between the state and its citizens, in particular the working class. Despite efforts by the state to depict a progressive society, the popular classes were upset when they detected that the administration was trying to promote artificial illusions of Mexico, when realistically it was a country that was still fragmented; it was a place where the government made little attempt to dissipate socioeconomic divisions. Citizens’ uneasiness was justifiable for various reasons. First, even if the Games earned Mexico

¹²¹ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State: Student Conflicts, 1910-1987*, 246.

¹²² See Eric Zolov, “Showcasing the ‘Land of Tomorrow’: Mexico and the 1968 Olympics,” *The Americas* 61 2 (October 2004): 159-188; Kevin B. Witherspoon, *Before the Eyes of the World: Mexico and the 1968 Olympic Games* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Kevin Brewster, ed., *Reflections on Mexico '68* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

international respect, it would do little to benefit the lower classes since most of the revenue earned during the event was going to be used to pay off creditors from other countries. Although the Games generated employment for vendors, construction workers, and custodians, these were temporary jobs. And of course, few in the popular classes could afford to attend the ceremonies and sporting events.

For students, the spectacle of the Olympics demonstrated the arrogance of the regime headed by President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, which embodied “all that was wrong with Mexico.”¹²³ Never a popular figure, the President was obsessed with power and political loyalty. On the political spectrum he positioned himself squarely in the anti-reformist, conservative wing of the PRI, putting economic growth above social programs intended to close the gaps between the popular classes and the industrial elite. Thus, he adopted policies intended to restrain labor rights and encourage foreign investment.¹²⁴ During his tenure as Secretary of Gobernación, the Ministry dedicated to internal security, there were numerous skirmishes between government authorities and unions.¹²⁵ In particular, he was in charge of repressing the railroad workers’ strike using the ambiguous law of social dissolution. Díaz Ordaz hoped to weaken the impetus of worker

¹²³ Julia Sloan, “The Emperor’s New Clothes: President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, the 1968 Student Movement, and the Crisis of Mexico’s Institutionalized Revolution,” *South Carolina Historical Association* 75 (2002): 80.

¹²⁴ Enrique Kauze, *Mexico Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810- 1996* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 665-75; Hector Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910-1989* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 159-98. Cited in Julia Sloan, “The Emperor’s New Clothes: President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, The 1968 Student Movement, and the Crisis of Mexico’s Institutionalized Revolution,” *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* 75 (2002): 76.

¹²⁵ Before becoming president in 1964, Díaz Ordaz was a conservative when it came to labor organizing. He reduced the influence of labor movements through strict enforcement of the Law of Social Dissolution, a controversial article in Mexico’s penal code meant to prohibit any activities that were intended to undermine Mexico’s sovereignty. It was initially ratified to defend Mexico from the threat of fascist and Nazi sympathizers during the Second World War. See Sloan, “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” 76-77.

and peasant dissent by imposing these sorts of laws. To make a personal example, he sanctioned the arrest of Valentín Campa and Demetrio Vallejo, two well-known communist leaders for their part in the rail workers' strike.¹²⁶

Despite disapproval from both his party and the populace, then-president of Mexico, Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964), selected him as his successor. Díaz Ordaz should have won the presidency effortlessly, but it was hampered by the fact that he failed to handle the strike with fairness. After the election, fraud was declared by opposition groups paving the way for a plethora of new and old political rivals.¹²⁷ Díaz Ordaz repeatedly used inflammatory rhetoric to articulate his policies—leading many citizens and colleagues to question his conservative demagoguery before even taking office. A pompous individual obsessed with authority he used his influence to ensure that policies he believed were pertinent to the political development of Mexico were implemented. Finally, he was considered “obsessive about order and discipline.”¹²⁸ Loyalty to Díaz Ordaz was key to success of civil servants under his administration. He was notorious for scolding politicians in his party who went against his ideas or who were assumed to be disloyal to the PRI. As a president, Díaz Ordaz strongly believed that it was his duty to maintain order, which explains why he could not bear to see “rowdy protestors” criticizing his administration.¹²⁹ This of course made his administration seem authoritarian, an accusation the student movement used to rally support.

¹²⁶ Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism After the Revolution*, 90.

¹²⁷ Sloan, “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” 77.

¹²⁸ Preston and Dillon, *Opening Mexico: The Making of Democracy*, 64.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Students within the counterculture felt personally attacked by Díaz Ordaz, who accused them of turning against their parents and deviating from traditional family values. According to one student at the time, Manuel Ruiz, Mexico's youth wanted to explore music, poetry, revolutionary literature, or simply find a location where students "could feel free, talk about what you wanted, do what they wanted, dress as you wanted, then you had to go to a place where you could hear rock."¹³⁰ Ruiz also scolded Díaz Ordaz's negative sentiments against the growing counterculture movement. According to him, the president "didn't like the fact that rock had become the focus for kids....and they began to make up all sorts of bullshit....it was just not true what they began to say about prostitutes going there and that drugs were sold....There was marijuana, but it wasn't in style yet. People barely knew about it."¹³¹

Despite the animosity felt by many students toward the President, their focus extended beyond personalism to a one party state that had deviated from its revolutionary mission, made free elections into a farce, and lost touch with the people. In their political discourse, students created a counter-image of the current political system, one that defied the state's official propaganda and legitimacy. Students appropriated components of the Revolution by referring to their movement as a prolongation of it; however, this political mindset was modified. Even though the PRI also embraced the legacy of the Revolution and claimed that it had framed its ideological roots and political agenda from it, deeming itself the "official party" of the Revolution, students contended that the PRI

¹³⁰Alberto Domingo, "Cafés a go-go," quoted in Federico Arana, *Guaraches de ante azul: historia del rock mexicano* (Mexico City: Posada: 1985, vol. 2, 135-36, cited in Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 100.

¹³¹ Ibid.

instead betrayed its legacy, objectives, and aims of building a more equitable society. Turning their backs on workers, peasants, and indigenous communities, PRI leaders had reestablished a bureaucratic-elitist state based on personal and special interests, corruption, and despotism.¹³²

Another expression of discontent with government authoritarianism came in February 1968, when popular union leader Valentín Campa applied for parole. Having been imprisoned nine years earlier for his role in organizing the railroad workers strike of 1959, he submitted a petition for his release in accordance with Mexican law. In a move seen by many as a personal vendetta by Díaz Ordaz, the government denied his request because of his ongoing “convictions and political associations” within prison walls.¹³³ Campa protested the state’s decision by initiating a hunger strike, and his cause was quickly taken up by student protesters, who saw his fate as an exemplar of a wider issue of Mexican authoritarianism: political prisoners. While Campa did not suffer direct violence by prison guards during the hunger strike, the pain and suffering he experienced during his protest were in response to acts of state-repression. Although it did little to pressure the state to repeal the hated law of social dissolution and free political prisoners, the protest “helped to raise students’ consciousness.”¹³⁴

In addition to the Olympic Games and the anti-democratic government, the spread of international student movements and national liberation struggles set the tone for the 1968 student movement in Mexico. Historian Eric Zolov has described this global flow of

¹³² Ibid, 247.

¹³³ Gilberto Guevara Niebla, *1968: Largo camino de la democracia* (México D.F.: Ediciones Cal y Arena, 2008), 151.

¹³⁴ Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism After the Revolution*, 111.

radical ideas and culture, which took many names and followed many different paths. For example, the rise of the New Left brought a new wave of theoretical ideas and organizational insights to radical spaces. The writings of Herbert Marcuse reverberated in discussions. The counterculture movement transcended international boundaries and made an enormous impression on Mexican youth. This movement gave students an outlet to express themselves in ways that defied the so-called “revolutionary family”—transforming itself into a significant counter-hegemonic force.¹³⁵

With a revolutionary consciousness already heightened, students responded to provocations with heightened radicalism in the summer of 1968. Soccer games, which are always major events in Mexico, provided one such trigger. On July 22, 1968, when students from the Issac Ochoterena preparatory school organized a soccer match against vocational schools 2 and 5, next to La Ciudadela market, close to downtown Mexico City, a dispute arose.¹³⁶ As the two teams argued about the game, longstanding inter-school rivalries boiled over and a street fight broke out. Riot police, or *granaderos* were called in to intervene, and in quelling the scuffle they used excessive physical force against the students. A day after the event, two demonstrations were registered to take place in Mexico City. One crowd of protestors was commemorating the Cuban

¹³⁵ The international literature on 1968 is vast. For the sake of brevity, the following is a small representation of some works. See Jeremy Veron, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and the Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Partisan Students and Workers in 1968* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che* (London: Verso, 2002); George N. Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1985); Lorena Oropeza, *Raza sí! Guerra no!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹³⁶ Salvador Martínez Della Rocca, “El movimiento estudiantil-popular de 1968,” in *Voces y ecos del 68*, ed. Salvador Martínez Della Rocca (México D.F.: Editorial Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2009), 27.

Revolution while the other, organized by the National Polytechnic Institute IPN, was holding a rally that manifested against the *granaderos*' invasion of Vocational School Number 5. Unfortunately, one group of IPN student marchers took the wrong route, not authorized by the city. Riot police interpreted this as a provocation by out-of-control students. Joined by right-wing student porros (thugs), the police attacked the literally misguided students, leaving two dead and many injured.¹³⁷

From these incidents grew further tensions. Large bands of students from the IPN, UNAM and other surrounding universities in Mexico City responded by taking to the streets and rioting. Despite the fact that the military had assaulted both the UNAM and the IPN, students from both institutions continued to operate separately during the early stages.¹³⁸ Buses were taken over by students and burnt, and molotov cocktails were used to start fires in various parts of the city. Students even ventured into the Zócalo where government officials witnessed the discomfort of the students for the state's aggressive response to a demonstration that was non-violent. Afraid that students would instigate additional social disorder, the state took the manifestations from the students as a social threat to stability.¹³⁹ This subsequently triggered a confrontation with the state that would end in disasters and stain Mexico's "democratic" image.

The administration of Díaz Ordaz, aware of the political crisis caused by student protesters in Paris and deeply concerned about their international public image on the eve of the Olympics, was not inclined to deal lightly with students who challenged traditional notions of their place in society. Simply put, students were supposed to dedicate

¹³⁷ Hodges and Gandy, *Mexico Under Siege*, 94.

¹³⁸ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State: Student Conflict, 1910-1971*, 250.

¹³⁹ Soledad Loaeza, "México 1968: Los orígenes de la transición," *Foro internacional* 30, no. 1 (1989): 73.

themselves to their studies and not involve themselves in altercations with the state. Conservative and liberal families alike believed that it was in the students' best interest not to get involved in politics. Mexican students were considered too immature for politics. They were a sector of society who, like the working-class and peasantry, were not knowledgeable enough to understand politics.

Students refused to accept these notions, but they admittedly remained inexperienced "with the techniques of mass mobilization."¹⁴⁰ When students began organizing in July 1968, the absence of organizational skills was noticeable. Not only did they lack trained leaders, there were important internal divisions, particularly between the two main universities. Students from the IPN criticized cohorts from the UNAM for always being on the side of the PRI, especially since the party allocated funds and often appointed former UNAM graduates to political posts in the government. On the other hand the IPN was considered to be a more plebeian university, where students came from modest families. There were hardly any prominent politicians among the former graduates of IPN. Tensions like these prevented earlier efforts at creating an united front among students.

These divisions suddenly came to an end on July 29, 1968, when the government escalated the conflict beyond all reason, as troops fired a bazooka to put down a protest at the Preparatory School of San Ildefonso. The rector of the UNAM, Javier Barros Sierra, who had been appointed with the acquiescence of PRI officials, strongly condemned the government assault. In early August Barros Sierra headed a remarkable demonstration

¹⁴⁰ Hellman, *Crisis in Mexico*, 174.

march that numbered approximately 50,000 students and sympathizers.¹⁴¹ Barros Sierra's presence provided a sense of legitimacy to student demands, while citizens expressed their solidarity with the students.¹⁴² The rector denounced the "Stalinist totalitarianism" of the PRI, which came as a considerable blow to government officials who had considered him an ally within the university.¹⁴³ His criticisms were all the more courageous because, despite formal autonomy, the university depended on financial support from the government.¹⁴⁴ A few days later a *mitín* ("meet in") was organized next to the UNAM rectory. Large numbers of students congregated in the grassy quad to hear various student leaders speak about the assault on students. At 10 am students walked out of their classes with the company of many professors to attend the rally. The number of attendees ranged somewhere between 20,000 to 30,000 people. Many witnesses were impressed to see that such a multitude of students could be organized.¹⁴⁵

Up to this moment, the students had been a diffuse group and not particularly radical. The government portrayed the students as extremist and anti-establishment, questioning their patriotism by connecting them with a worldwide communist conspiracy. Nevertheless, the ideas espoused by '68ers were essentially reformist and far from extreme or ultra-leftist. Precisely because of the vitriolic labels applied by the establishment, students appropriated for themselves the label radical, although their rhetoric did not necessarily correspond with such militancy. Radical was a loose term that

¹⁴¹ Preston and Dillon, *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy*, 64.

¹⁴² Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifice*, 57.

¹⁴³ Gastón García Cantú, *Javier Barros Sierra, 1968: Conversaciones con Gastón García Cantú* (México D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1972), 97.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

¹⁴⁵ Gilberto Guevara Niebla, *La libertad nunca se olvida: Memoria del '68* (México: Cal y Arena, 2004), 61-62.

had different meanings for people within the student movement. As one former revolutionary put it, “this was a time when being a radical was trendsetting.” Lines were drawn and people did not want to be left out of what could potentially be a historical moment “therefore they called themselves radical to feel accepted.”

Poet and activist José Revueltas has been called the “intellectual author” of the 1968 student movement. Certainly his association with Mexican youth made him a target for the state. As a result of his radical participation in the 1968 student movement, he was sentenced to sixteen years in prison, where he published one of his most renowned books, *El Apando*.¹⁴⁶ Revueltas’ celebrity image within the radical left community attracted students and intellectuals to manifest their support, but his beliefs did not actually guide the movement. He believed the student movement would inevitably launch itself into an armed struggle, but it needed to incorporate the working-class and peasants to attack the “bourgeois dictatorship” and establish a “proletarian government.”¹⁴⁷ In his mind, students needed to take the initiative, and as a symbolic measure, take over the University. He presciently pushed students to go underground for protection against the repressive modes of the government.¹⁴⁸

Instead of a single charismatic “caudillo,” leadership of the student movement coalesced around the Comité Nacional de Huelga (National Strike Committee, CNH), which sought to coordinate protest activities under one umbrella.¹⁴⁹ Since June, students

¹⁴⁶ Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth Century Mexico*, 263. See also José Revueltas, *El Apando* (México D.F: Ediciones Era, 2005).

¹⁴⁷ Roberto Simón Crespi, “José Revueltas (1914-1976): A Political Biography,” *Latin American Perspectives* 6, 3 (1979): 110.

¹⁴⁸ José Revueltas, *México 68: Juventud y revolución* (México D.F: Ediciones Era, 1978), 48.

¹⁴⁹ González Marín, *Diálogos sobre el '68*, 86.

from the UNAM and the IPN contemplated how the student forces could work more efficiently together and what measures were needed in order to make this feasible.¹⁵⁰ Representatives of student organizations met frequently to discuss how they could improve the orientation of the student rebellion. The CNH was formally inaugurated on August 2, 1968. Assemblies of students elected two representatives from each university and faculty, and each school had one vote in the CNH.¹⁵¹

Some critics of the CNH argue that it did not have a specific ideological purpose and that its importance lay in the members' enthusiasm for democratic struggle and emancipation.¹⁵² According to organizers who witnessed the first meeting of the CNH, there was an assortment of representatives from different political backgrounds: Trotskyites, Maoists, Communists, even *panistas* and *priistas*. According to some former leaders, that is what made the CNH so interesting; its imagination, discourses and diverse points of view.¹⁵³ Militants within the leadership included Gilberto Guevara Niebla, Professor Heriberto Castillo, José Moreno de Alba, Luís Tomas Cervantes Cabeza de Vaca, and Marcelino Perelló. Most of them, including Guevara Niebla and Perelló, were members of the Juventud Comunista (Communist Youth, JC) or had been affiliated with other leftist organizations before forming part of the leadership of the CNH. Nevertheless, there were many other viewpoints represented within the organization and students sought ways to resolve internal conflicts through democratic means. The CNH was able to show the state that it was an organization that legitimately represented the

¹⁵⁰ Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 119. see also Guevara Niebla, *La libertad nunca se olvida: Memoria del '68*, 99.

¹⁵¹ Barr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth Century Mexico*, 260.

¹⁵² González Marín, *Diálogos sobre el '68*, 86.

¹⁵³ González Marín, *Diálogos sobre el '68*, 88, 89, 100.

interests of all universities involved and that therefore it could engage in a political dialogue with the government.¹⁵⁴

One of the first demonstrations of student unity through the newly formed CNH was a march throughout the streets of Mexico City on August 13, with students from local universities and preparatory schools. The number of participants is unclear but some people estimate that there were between 70,000 and 200,000 students and supporters marching in the streets.¹⁵⁵ Earlier the CNH had announced a six-point plan that was intended to give the movement more concreteness. The plan called for:

1. Freedom of all political prisoners
2. Dismissal of police chiefs and a lieutenant-colonel
3. Abolition of the *granaderos*
4. Abrogation of the article in the penal code concerning the “crime against social dissolution”
5. Compensation for the families of dead and wounded students.
6. Determination of the responsibility for the July repression¹⁵⁶

These demands were directed towards the state and sanctioned by committee representatives from each school – they were not intended to attack the authenticity of the Revolution. Instead, they aimed to disclose the inconsistency between the codes of the Mexican Constitution and the policies of the PRI government.¹⁵⁷ These six points were

¹⁵⁴ La Fiscalía Especial para los Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado (FEMOSPP), “El movimiento estudiantil de 1968,” (2001), 36.

¹⁵⁵ Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, 132.

¹⁵⁶ “Las demandas del los estudiantes de agosto, 1968,” *El Día* 4 August 1968 cited in Paul E. Sigmund (ed.), *Models of Political Change in Latin America* (New York: Praeger Publisher, 1970), 34.

¹⁵⁷ Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism After the Revolution*, 114-115.

significant because they extended beyond students to encompass the interests of other social classes. For instance, the freedom of political prisoners recognized the widespread nature of government repression. In another early manifesto, the CNH demonstrated its political program was intended to support the needs of all Mexicans: “These have been days of anguish and tension for the people of Mexico. The National Polytechnic Institute and the Autonomous University of Mexico have been brutally and aggressively assaulted. The situation was created by the hysterical and absurd attitude of the police force, which is completely opposed to democracy and despised and disrespected for its continual attacks on the whole population.”¹⁵⁸

After the CNH made these announcements, it became clear to ordinary people that “thugs” and “conspirators” did not drive the student upheavals of the past few weeks as news reports and government propaganda had claimed. In reaching the working classes, however, the students also had to overcome the opposition of bosses within the CTM, the official union run by the PRI. CTM leaders took preventive measures to stop students from influencing workers. However, in a second statement composed by the Committee, more lucid points and remarks were emphasized in the hope of illustrating a different image of the student rebellion, a depiction that demonstrated that the student rebellion was legitimate and encompassed issues concerning the overall population. One important characteristic of the movement had to do with the enormous will power of the students.

In order to obtain the support and understanding of the masses, the CNH organized political brigades to better communicate their objectives. These brigades were

¹⁵⁸ “Las demandas del los estudiantes de agosto, 1968,” 33.

told to mobilize into communities from different political and social backgrounds in order to convey their message to broader sectors of society.¹⁵⁹ These arguments began to win over popular support for the student movement, which was gaining momentum throughout the city. Demonstrations were planned in different parts of the city in order to convey the message of solidarity with the masses. Government officials monitored the demonstrations carefully, but held back from further violent assaults by thugs or riot police. While the government contemplated how they would respond to the demands set forth by the CNH, they also studied how much the student movement in Mexico resembled the May Protests in France. Government authorities were beginning to admit that they had underestimated the student sector for too long.

August 27, 1968, saw one of the largest manifestations in Mexican history. A total of approximately 400,000 Mexicans from different social categories marched to the center of Mexico City and pressured the Díaz Ordaz administration to consent to a public dialogue with the students.¹⁶⁰ During the rally students carried signs and other types of propaganda challenging the PRI and its obsolete rhetoric of revolution. Some signs carried by the protesters directly ridiculed the facial features of President Díaz Ordaz by depicting him as a monkey. Together male and female students marched the streets each defying the conservative image of students.

Female militants assumed important positions in the formative stage of the student movement and continued to act as major actors until the massacre. Whereas in previous expressions of student dissent women remained relatively absent, in 1968

¹⁵⁹ FEMOSPP, "El movimiento estudiantil de 1968," (2001): 35.

¹⁶⁰ Preston and Dillon, *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy*, 67.

female militants broke down gender barriers by contravene traditional norms. People like Ana Ignacia Rodríguez Márquez and Roberta Avendaño held seats on the CNH,¹⁶¹ while other women joined one of the many brigades doing consciousness raising on the streets. For apolitical women the involvement of female students in the mobilizations signified a lack of respect for traditional values. But while breaking gender barriers in 1968 precipitated family tensions and divisions, female activists continued their involvement in the struggle.

The PRI had long maintained power through a policy of divide and conquer, so it was only natural that they seek to foment dissent within the student population. Loyalist organizations were small in number but counted on the financial and ideological support of the regime. One such group was the Federación Nacional de Estudiantes Técnicos (National Federation of Technical Students, FNET), which had been founded in 1936 by the PRI and was well established at the IPN by 1968.¹⁶² Most discussions of the student movement treat the FNET as just another student organization, but there is evidence that in fact it served as a front for the PRI. Certainly, it sought reconciliation with the government, encouraging the governor of Mexico City, Regent Alfonso Corona de Rosal, to accept a couple of demands to placate students.¹⁶³ Because the PRI was willing to meet with FNET, the student group became a conduit for negotiations with PRI delegates. Despite offering important advantages to the student movement, some leaders of the group, as well as other student organizations at the IPN, began to accuse the FNET of

¹⁶¹ Frazier, Lessie Jo, Deborah Cohen, "Defining the Space of Mexico '68: Heroic Masculinity in the Prison and 'Women' in the Streets," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 83, 4 (November 2003): 637.

¹⁶² FEMOSPP, "El movimiento estudiantil de 1968," (2001), 12.

¹⁶³ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 249-251.

playing both sides of the political spectrum. Following these small skirmishes the IPN and its student organizations began to stage their own marches independently of the FNET. Government officials soon recognized that the FNET's clout in the rebellion was beginning to deteriorate.¹⁶⁴

More menacing was the Movimiento Universitario de Renovadora Orientación (Movement for University Renovation and Orientation, MURO), an ultraconservative student organization that formed cells within various universities.¹⁶⁵ MURO leaders were not afraid to confront leftist students openly, and the PRI employed them as thugs to repress certain marches and intimidate participants. In the weeks following the August 27 demonstration, marches were planned. Most of them were supposed to culminate in the Zócalo, but on many occasions local gangs assaulted marchers before they could reach their final destination. An eyewitness to one of these events stated that during one march students were attacked without provoking riot policemen, who beat students as they proceeded into the plaza.¹⁶⁶ After students reached the Zócalo the armed forces were reluctant to attack or instigate confrontations with them since hundreds of observers watched as students congregated.

As street violence escalated in early September, the government continued to refuse any dialogue with the student movement, and rejected demands that the government fire prominent police officials. Students responded to this refusal to speak with a "Silent March" coordinated by the CNH, intended to show that the students were

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 253. No real concrete evidence was ever presented to support these accusations but the fact that the FNET was a splinter group of the PRI was enough for many to label them as traitors.

¹⁶⁵ See Édgar González Ruiz, *Muro, memorias y testimonios: 1961-2002* (Puebla: Gobierno del Estado de Puebla : Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2003).

¹⁶⁶ Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifice*, 41.

non-confrontational. Indeed, with the Olympic Games fast approaching, the government added extra security measures to prevent student agitators from embarrassing the government and jeopardizing the inauguration of the Games. While government officials monitored closely student marches and rallies, demonstrations by anti-communist groups were orchestrated. In early September, 12,000 citizens congregated in Mexico City to denounce communists and outside agitators, further supporting the state's version. They yelled out "Long live the Virgin of Guadalupe!" and "Long live the riot police!"¹⁶⁷ On one occasion men with machine guns attacked numerous cars owned by the marchers. In addition to these acts of vandalism, nine cars were stolen.¹⁶⁸ There was speculation that the terrorism was sponsored by elements of the police dressed in civilian clothing in conjunction with members of MURO.¹⁶⁹

In an effort to contain the student movement on September 18, under presidential orders, the Mexican military took the unprecedented step of occupying the UNAM campus. About 10,000 soldiers, supported by tanks, took part in the operation.¹⁷⁰ Students secluded themselves in classrooms and refused to surrender. Families were unable to locate their children and also get information about their well-being. Still, students refused to use force to resist the occupation of their campus. The government sought to justify the occupation as a necessary step to impede extreme agitators, who had allegedly infiltrated the University. During the take over, 700 people were arrested,

¹⁶⁷ José Falconi, "Manifestación anti-comunista en la Plaza de México," *El Herald de México*, September 9, 1968.

¹⁶⁸ Raul Garín, *La estela del movimiento estudiantil: Una reconstrucción histórica del Movimiento estudiantil del 68* (México: Itaca, 1998), 265.

¹⁶⁹ DFS, AGN, 11-4-68 H 158-164 L 39.

¹⁷⁰ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 261.

although the majority of the CNH's central committee managed to escape before being apprehended.¹⁷¹ In the following weeks many students were detained and taken to undisclosed areas to be tortured. On September 26, 1968, the government reported that it arrested five of the top ten leaders of the CNH.¹⁷² Detainees were either taken to the Lecumberri Penitentiary or to Military Camp No. 1 in Chapultepec. Nevertheless, even if the police arrested prominent leaders of the CNH, their efforts to contain the protests proved fruitless because there was no single "leader" within the student movement.

Díaz Ordaz combined the military occupation with a renewed attempt to split the leadership of the movement by allowing dialogues with people who were considered more tractable. These dialogues, when they occurred in brief periods, were coordinated by delegates, which included the President of the PRI, Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, Corona del Rosal, and Francisco de la Vega. These officials also attempted to make use of the PCM's alleged involvement and authority in the movement to convince them to help close down the rebellion. However, the PCM made little effort to comply with the PRI.¹⁷³ Even with these measures the students barricaded in the UNAM refused to leave and surrender the campus to the military. After numerous attempts to push students out, the State Secretariat agreed to leave the UNAM once the proper authorities of the University sanctioned the withdrawal. CNH leaders continued to insist on the demands of

¹⁷¹ FEMOSPP, "El movimiento estudiantil de 1968," (2001): 48.

¹⁷² "Sitrep 1800 September 25," U.S. Embassy in Mexico. *National Archives, Washington, DC*, RG 59, 1967-69 Pol 13-2 Mex, Box 2340 (1968): 1.

¹⁷³ Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth Century Mexico*, 262.

the student revolt and would not agree to end the strike and return to class until students took an official vote.¹⁷⁴ Finally the army removed its troops on 1 October.¹⁷⁵

Student leaders like Guevara Niebla and others began to notice a change in some of his constituents' attitudes. The level of apprehension among various leaders reached new extremes. The government's repression and persecution of alleged leaders of the student rebellion was causing some of the rebellion's leaders to take extra precautions in order to assure their safety. Since the CNH was often considered too large for a movement of this sort, it made it more difficult for leaders to be detained.¹⁷⁶ Guevara Niebla notes that on one occasion, student leader Sócrates Amado Campos Lemus began to carry a gun. The CNH had a strict policy against its members being armed. However, certain circumstances required that leaders of the student movement assure their own protection.¹⁷⁷ Since the government never was able to capture many of the CNH's leadership, as it changed constantly, selective targets were not necessarily their strategy. There was however an instance where Campos Lemus had been arrested by the police and allegedly tortured.¹⁷⁸ In order to prevent events like this from happening again, student leaders were urged to be accompanied by other members of the student movement for protection and to avoid apprehension.¹⁷⁹

Ultimately a delegation of the CNH agreed to meet with representatives of Díaz Ordaz's administration at the home of the former rector of the UNAM, Barros Sierra, at

¹⁷⁴ "Sitrep September 30, 1968," U.S. Embassy in Mexico. *National Security Archive* RG 59, 1967-69 Pol 13-2 Mex, Box 2340 (1968): 1.

¹⁷⁵ Salvador Hernández, *El PRI y el movimiento estudiantil de 1968* (México D.F.: Ediciones "El Caballito", 1971), 111.

¹⁷⁶ Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis*.

¹⁷⁷ Gilberto Guevara Niebla, "Volver al '68," *Nexos* 16 190 (1993): 32.

¹⁷⁸ Garín, *La estela del movimiento estudiantil*, 263.

¹⁷⁹ Guevara Niebla, "Volver al '68," 32.

9:00am on 2 October 1968. Representing the CNH were Guevara Niebla and de Alba; for the president it was Andrés Casos and de la Vega.¹⁸⁰ During the meeting a somber and tense mood surrounded the room. Guevara Niebla claims that during the meeting both representatives of the Díaz Ordaz treated the CNH leaders like “irresponsible imbeciles.” The meeting rapidly fell apart. The PRI representatives criticized the student movement by informing them that students “were putting in danger an entire generation of young Mexicans” and that sooner or later they were going to have to comply with the state regardless of the conditions.¹⁸¹ The attitudes expressed by the PRI negotiators were explicable for two reasons. First, the popular classes were beginning to side with the student strike. Second, the Olympic Games were going to be inaugurated in the next couple of weeks, which pushed the state to look anxiously for a way to settle with the students before more international attention arrived. Nevertheless, they remained intractable and disinclined to compromise with the student delegation.

On October 2, 1968, the CNH planned a *mitin* in the historic *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* (Plaza of the Three Cultures). Defying speculations the government was preparing to crush the student movement, leaders pressed on with their plans to hold the peaceful rally just north of the Zócalo. The venue for the assembly had been a historically contentious site where the indigenous past, colonial religion and national modernization were singly represented by Mexica ruins, a deteriorating church, and an apartment complex development. Later that evening thousands of protesters and bystanders would amass in the Plaza to join their comrades in chants and songs that had become the

¹⁸⁰ FEMOSPP, “El movimiento estudiantil de 1968” (2001), 60.

¹⁸¹ Guevara Niebla, “Volver al ’68,” 33.

rallying call of the movement, and to listen to speeches student leaders. It was an astounding site; nothing appeared unorthodox, yet less than three months since its inception the student movement was about to culminate that evening.

Information reached military personal about the planned rally, to be followed by a protest march from Tlatelolco to the IPN.¹⁸² Regardless of how the talks went with the representatives of the state, the mitín was still planned to go ahead. Military contingents were ordered to situate themselves in apartment complexes parallel to the Chihuahua Building, where they could see the Plaza from above. Meanwhile soldiers dressed in civilian clothing took positions in buildings overlooking the Plaza.¹⁸³ Elements of the Olympic Battalion were ordered to surround the Plaza de las Tres Culturas before the students' arrival, and prepare themselves for the gathering. Other versions specify that *granaderos* and *porras* were also implicated for the assault on Tlatelolco and were working with various contingents of the armed forces. President Díaz Ordaz still, presumed that there was a plot against him, an effort by domestic and international conspirators to humiliate his presidency prior to the Games.¹⁸⁴

At 5:30 pm on October 2, approximately 15,000 citizens assembled in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas where earlier that morning the CNH had constructed a wooden stage for its leaders.¹⁸⁵ The *mitín* was not meant to rally students exclusively but also other sectors of society in solidarity with the movement. A multiplicity of groups made up the crowd, including workers, parents, children, and photographers as well as students,

¹⁸² Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 263.

¹⁸³ FEMOSPP, "El movimiento estudiantil de 1968," (2001): 61.

¹⁸⁴ José Caberera Parra, *Díaz Ordaz y el '68* (México D.F.: Editorial Grijalbo, 1982), 169.

¹⁸⁵ Hernández, *El PRI y el movimiento estudiantil de 1968*, 112.

highlighting the popular support for the student movement.¹⁸⁶ Minor waves of fear rippled through the crowd as tenants spotted military personnel and other suspicious individuals in the apartment complexes adjacent to the Plaza. CNH leaders arrived late to the rally, and the chosen speaker, González Alba, proceeded to the third floor of the Chihuahua Building, where a sound stage with large speakers had been set-up.¹⁸⁷ While CNH members made impromptu speeches bolstering the student cause, military contingents openly began to close in on the Plaza. Such a presence was common, and CNH leaders continued with the rally, even though the number of soldiers was greater than usual and helicopters were hovering overhead. Unsettled by this presence, the central committee of the student movement chose to immediately end the *mitin* in order to allow their cohorts to disperse peacefully and without agitation.

At approximately 6:10pm two helicopters dropped low over the plaza, shining powerful stadium lights into the crowd, and discharge flares into the sky. Attendees leaving the Plaza tried to remain composed, but many were becoming increasingly hesitant and anxious.¹⁸⁸ Citizens started to feel something was dreadfully wrong as they became aware of troops massing around the perimeter of the Plaza. Suddenly, the troops opened fire and hysteria broke out. Children and even some adults were trampled by the crowds desperately seeking safety from the bullets that tore through their ranks. Tenants in the apartment buildings surrounding the Plaza watched helplessly as people died below.

¹⁸⁶ Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle*, 43.

¹⁸⁷ Preston and Dillon, *Opening Mexico*, 70.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 71.

Operation Galeana, as the mission was named, lasted for hours. It only took the military thirty minutes to overrun and secure the Plaza, but small skirmishes continued in the buildings as officers hunted down fleeing student protesters. According to government statements, the military had invaded the plaza in response to gunshots fired from the apartment complexes.¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, officials presented no evidence of student agitators firing first. Moreover, these claims were contradicted by the positioning of groups of military snipers in the surrounding buildings with direct firing lines on the crowds below. Observers had witnessed the snipers scouting out positions earlier that morning. Some even claimed to have seen men firing into the crowd and onto the stage. Indeed, soldiers and policemen had dressed in civilian clothing to penetrate the gathering and detain leaders of the student movement. They wore white gloves or handkerchiefs on their left hands to avoid being shot mistakenly by snipers or other police. Afterwards, government ruffians distinguished by their white gloves marched into the surrounding buildings, where they suspected that students and leaders of the CNH were hiding.¹⁹⁰

After the bloody conflict, bodies of children, bystanders, and students, both male and female, lay motionless in the Plaza. Countless bodies were riddled with bullet holes, while others were unidentifiable as a result of being trampled by hordes of participants attempting to flee the violence. Medical personnel were prevented from attending to the wounded and were restrained by military contingents from entering the Plaza. Berta Cárdenas de Macías, a tenant in one of the Tlatelolco housing units overlooking the

¹⁸⁹ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 264.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Plaza, claimed that the army was not allowing the “Red or Green Cross through” and that the ambulances were ordered to “turn off their sirens and their lights.”¹⁹¹

According to Captain Gutiérrez Barrios’s report after the massacre, 1043 people were arrested: 363 were transported to the Military Camp no. 1, 83 were sent to the Judicial Police headquarters, and 597 were sent to jails and prisons of the Federal District, which also included the Lecumberri. Obscure and unconvincing as it may seem, his report indicates that only 26 people were killed, four of them women, and one a soldier. Other reports put the number of people killed at over 100 dead.¹⁹² To this day we still do not know exactly how many people were killed. But the brutality continued the next day as military and police personnel continued to round up suspected students and “agitators” who had been hiding in the housing units around the plaza. Military personnel were seen climbing up and down stairs, knocking on every single apartment door, searching for students. Gerardo Martínez, a student at the UNAM School of Economics recalls seeing students in the apartment he was hiding chewing up and swallowing their student identification cards.¹⁹³ Acts like this were common in the days after the massacre; although the term “student” had been transformed into a pejorative in the previous months it was now a term that threatened people’s lives. At Military Camp No. 1, leaders and activists were tortured by military officials. One could argue that the era of the “disappeared” began in Mexico following the massacre at Tlatelolco. Several students were never seen again. Families were told their children had died during the riot and were

¹⁹¹ Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, 223.

¹⁹² FEMOSPP, “El movimiento estudiantil de 1968,” (2001): 70.

¹⁹³ Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, 241.

too mutilated to be recognizable, when in reality they were alive, being tortured in military camps and afterwards many were murdered.

Scholars agree that the 1968 student rebellion during its 120 days of struggle turned into a movement of the masses.¹⁹⁴ It defied traditional attitudes about students and their lack of political agency. It was an enthusiastic movement led by charismatic figures who were able to bring together students and different sectors of the popular masses in opposition to the government.¹⁹⁵ Its militancy filled a vacuum left by the cooptation of many working class unions and peasant confederations. In international perspective, it is no surprise because the student sector in many developing nations is considered the most well-informed and politicized, whereas proletariat and peasant communities are often subordinated by the upper classes.¹⁹⁶ Elements like these expose how and why students progressively became leaders of revolutionary movements and deemed themselves the last aspiration for sociopolitical adjustment in Mexico.

The government crushed the student movement in the massacre at Tlatelolco, but in doing so they revealed the PRI's authoritarianism and lack of legitimacy. To countries around the world Mexico exemplified a modernized and stable democracy on the verge of First World status, as well as a model for developing nations searching for a point of reference to benefit their own growth. Following the massacre this false illusion quickly eroded, prompting a reevaluation of Mexican democracy from within and outside the country. Eliminating opposition through repression was commonplace in Mexican

¹⁹⁴ Poniatowska, *Fuerte es el silencio*, 52.

¹⁹⁵ González Marín, *Diálogos sobre el '68*, 46.

¹⁹⁶ Flores Olea, "México, un desafío al sistema," in *La rebellion estudiantil y la sociedad contemporánea*, 123.

politics, but typically stifling insurrections and civic mobilizations was carried out with fewer spectacles and inconspicuously. Shockingly, the state went against its own policy when “before the eyes of the world”¹⁹⁷ they killed hundreds of students and innocent bystanders days before the 1968 Olympics. The actions taken on October 2 set off a series of stumbling blocks in post-1968 Mexico that courted a new wave of resistance against the PRI’s hegemony that threatened to further cripple the party’s intentions to rectify its image in the face of public outcry.

The memory of 1968 manifests itself in a variety of ways. From personal reflections by former activists, documentaries, cultural forums, and testimonies, even from a paranormal angle¹⁹⁸—these modes of understanding 1968 assure that its legacy is a part of the national narrative. No one can deny the 1968 student movement occurred because its legacy and impact on Mexican political culture has become a part of the national narrative and absorbed as a pivotal moment in popular political history. The 1968 student movement also marked an apogee of student radicalism in Mexico. Students demonstrated they were capable of leading a (popular) massive counter-hegemonic movement to challenge the ruling party’s authoritarianism, contest its counterfeit image of national unity, coerce it to respect the 1917 Constitution, and demanded social justice and basic human needs. This all after decades of being marginalized by society and the government for being purportedly apolitical, disconnected from reality, and their positionality as a privileged social group. Yet, in 1968, society was forced to reevaluate preconceived ideas of students and admit parts of the Mexican youth were in fact

¹⁹⁷ The official slogan of the 1968 Olympiads.

¹⁹⁸ In 2010, a popular Mexican paranormal show, “Extranormal” traveled to the Plaza of Tlatelolco to investigate whether the famous site of the massacre was haunted.

politically savvy individuals who desired to be taken seriously as a vibrant and proactive social group. Though, while the student movement changed political culture in Mexico and exposed the ruling party's lack of legitimacy, the political and social problems 1968 sought to resolve through its ephemeral uprising were left unfinished.

Chapter Two

The Regional Dynamics of the Mexican Urban Guerrilla Movement

“I'm seventeen and I'm crazy. My uncle says the two always go together. When people ask your age, he said, always say seventeen and insane.”- Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

In the aftermath of the Tlatelolco massacre, the Mexico City student movement had been largely decapitated, but the brutality of regional dirty wars encouraged small groups of youth to go underground. The armed struggle gained momentum in 1971, when the arrest of student militants inflamed the regime's Cold War paranoia. A second massacre of peaceful student protesters on Corpus Christi 1971, this time by paramilitaries, confirmed that the democratic opening was a mirage and encouraged many students who opposed the regime to turn from peaceful mobilizing to armed struggle. Although historians have asserted that the student radical-left was in crisis after 1968, the rise of armed struggles and social movements in the 1970s challenges this long established interpretation. Student leaders, former activists, social critics, and historians have all focused on the failure of the Mexico City student movement to revive immediately following the brutal crackdown at Tlatelolco. The problem with this interpretation—and it is a common one in Mexican historiography—is its failure to look beyond Mexico City and see the existence of widespread student dissent in the provinces.¹⁹⁹ Regional movements emerging from state universities in Sinaloa, Jalisco, Chihuahua, and Nuevo León, among others, demonstrate the escalation of student

¹⁹⁹ See Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle*; and Guevara Niebla, *La libertad nunca se olvida*, 325.

militancy rather than its decline after 1968.²⁰⁰ Although they were outraged by government repression of peaceful demonstrators in Mexico City, students began to mobilize based on local political causes, including university corruption, the infiltration of student government, and the paramilitarization of pro-government student groups. Student radicalism also blended with wider political dissent among campesino and worker movements, which likewise addressed local demands for democracy and social justice.²⁰¹ Urban guerrilla movements, inspired by local grievances, thus emerged from provincial university campuses across Mexico as early as 1970 to launch a violent challenge against the ruling party.

The widely respected cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis once suggested: “1968 became the vaccine in Mexico to prevent the emergence of guerrillas.”²⁰² But in this case, he spoke too soon. More than thirty armed revolutionary organizations were active between 1969 and 1981.²⁰³ This chapter focuses on the intertwined histories of the FER and the Enfermos, who mobilized in response to local issues at the University of Guadalajara and the Autonomous University of Sinaloa, respectively. There are a couple of reasons for this choice of case studies, starting with their prominence within the student revolutionary movement of the 1970s. As one participant recalled, these two

²⁰⁰ Alfredo Angulo, *La hora de los mártires: Apuntes para una historia del movimiento estudiantil y guerrillero en Guadalajara (1970-1977)* (Guadalajara: Taller Editorial La Casa del Mago, 1997); Rubén Duarte Rodríguez, *Días de fuego: El movimiento estudiantil sonorense de los años 70* (Hermosillo: Universidad de Sonora, 2003); Sergio René de Dios Coronoa, *La historia que no pudieron borrar: La guerrilla sucia en Jalisco, 1970-1985* (Guadalajara: Taller Editorial La Casa del Mago, 2004); Alfredo Mendoza Cornejo, *Organizaciones y movimientos estudiantiles en Jalisco de 1963 a 1970* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1994); Lucio Rangel Hernández, *La Universidad Michoacana y el movimiento estudiantil, 1966-1986* (Morelia: UMSNH, Instituto de Investigaciones-Históricas, 2009); Liberato Teran, *Sinaloa: Estudiantes en lucha* (Culiacán: Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, 1982).

²⁰¹ See Sánchez Gudiño, *Génesis, desarrollo y consolidación de los grupos de estudiantes de choque en la UNAM*.

²⁰² Glockner, *Memoria Roja*, 304.

²⁰³ Sierra Guzmán, *El enemigo interno*, 19.

groups “made valuable contributions to insurgent politics and political culture during this period and afterwards.”²⁰⁴ Moreover, the FER and the Enfermos embodied the culture of rebellion and made the greatest contributions to insurgent politics during the urban guerrilla experience. When guerrilla fighters formed a national guerrilla organization under the auspice of the Liga in 1973, militants from both the Enfermos and the FER formed the core of the organization.

The FER and the Enfermos were also important because they reinvented the image of student militants by redefining themselves through the adoption of the student-proletarian moniker. Which group and when the term began to be used as a form to define militants’ new revolutionary identity is unknown, but what is evident is that both organizations were at least instrumental in establishing a foundation for the meaning. Each group carried this concept further than many other political organizations by engaging in new forms of political organizing in the barrios and working-class students, thus countering the common image of student guerillas as middle-class visionaries divorced from the realities of working-class life. The Enfermos, in particular, put the concept of the student-proletarian into practice by drawing linkages between students’ incessant involvement in peasant and worker mobilizations in Sinaloa. Since the early 1960s students always appeared alongside underrepresented groups to demand reforms and basic human needs. Together they shared victories, but also unwavering repression by local officials and *gorilas*.²⁰⁵ In turn, these experiences forged a resilient cross-class

²⁰⁴ Esparza, former member of the Liga, interview with author, February 2010, notes and digital recording, Mexico City.

²⁰⁵ This term has been typically used to identify riot police, but in the 1970s expanded to include government thugs and student organizations loyal to the local government or PRI. Sergio Arturo Sánchez

partnership. It became almost innate for students, workers, and peasants to unity when either group mobilized. While *feroces*²⁰⁶ lacked a natural alliance with the working-class dozens of militants had a deep-rooted affinity to the barrios around Guadalajara. Before the group's campaign against the FEG began in 1970, the initial members belonged to the Communist Youth but lacked a foothold in proletarian communities, much less with working-class youth from the U of G. This all changed when militants came into contact with the Vikingos, a politicized youth gang from the *barrio bravo* of San Andrés.

Student-guerrillas groups generally believed the revolution had to be fought on two fronts: in the factories and countryside as well as the universities in order to redeem it from "bourgeois influence."²⁰⁷ Both groups envisioned regaining the control of the university in order to serve the needs of marginalized groups, and promote popular education. In this way, they hoped to raise class-consciousness by teaching Marxist theory and instilling a sense of revolutionary purpose among undecided youth. Such a consciousness was necessary for the success of the armed insurrection, against the government, capitalism, and the ruling class. The PRI used the university since the end of the 1910 Revolution to promote a national culture, official history, and reinforce its revolutionary nature, particularly during the Cárdenas administration. However, this program slowly evaporated in post-1940 when conservative regimes eradicate fragments of Cárdenas' radicalism and socialist education, yet the PRI continued see itself as

Parra, "Violencia política en Sinaloa: El Caso de los 'Enfermos' 1972-1978 (Los lugares y medios para la radicalización)," *Rhela* 11 (2008): 205-224; "Acerca del movimiento enfermo de Sinaloa," Mandeville Special Collections Library, UC San Diego, Reel 3 Series 9.

²⁰⁶ Nickname given to members of the FER. Literally translates to "ferocious."

²⁰⁷ FER, "La política del FEG contra el proletariado estudiantil de Guadalajara," Mandeville Special Collections, UC San Diego, Reel 3 Folder 2, 1-2.

upholding the legacy of the Mexican Revolution. Both organizations planned to use the university as a forum to create a new revolutionary culture that challenged the official propaganda of the PRI. This chapter argues that student-guerrillas in a way attempted to reinstate the ideas of socialist education promoted during the Cárdenas regime to form a new radical citizen. This of course meant challenging the ruling party's revolutionary character, which more than anything infuriated nationalists within the party. Even though Echeverría's populism flirted with socialist tendencies, it did not live up to the revolutionary lefts' expectations. Student-guerrillas berated the genuineness of his radical undercurrent and believed it to be to light.

Student-guerrillas saw the university and the proletarian demands as inextricably interconnected, and they criticized students who refused to engage in student activism, or worse, assume they had control over their education. In guerrilla communiqués student-revolutionaries target non-violent activists who they identified as reformists and acted as upholders of the state's bourgeois project in the education system by refusing to engage in revolutionary actions on the campuses. Also, numbers communiqués explained how non-violent and passive students were complicit in preserving the state's authority over the proletariat by demanding the government respect the Constitution; a document urban guerrillas believed only served the interest of the bourgeoisie.²⁰⁸ Student-guerrillas believed that by allowing the state to continue producing adherents of its official propaganda the end result would be dire circumstances for popular groups and students. A reformist stance was not enough to impede the PRI from utilizing educational spaces as

²⁰⁸ "Al detachmento estudiantil del proletariado. Al proletariado general," Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre, "Estado de Oaxaca," AGN, DGIPS, caja 1920, 4-5.

factories to produce the perfect and complacent citizen. Unless students took a more revolutionary stance on regaining control of the university, this dilemma would continue to remain in place.

More broadly, by setting these student guerrilla movements within the historical context of two geographically adjacent but socially distinct Mexican states, this chapter reinforces the thesis of Jeffrey Rubin's work on grassroots movements in Juchitán, Oaxaca, which showed that the ruling party's hegemony had already begun to erode within the provinces even during a time of supposed democratic opening.²⁰⁹ While the historiography of Mexico in the 1970s has largely focused on worker and peasant militancy to explain how politically marginalized communities were challenging the PRI in the provinces, student movements and urban guerrilla struggles were clearly part of this wider challenge against the regime. This chapter, based in part on daily transcripts from the DFS and the Secretaria de Gobernación describing the rise of student disturbances and revolutionary activity in the provinces, demonstrates that the PRI was losing its grip over the middle and working-class sectors who formed the basis for its corporatist rule. A regional perspective also demonstrates the "home-grown" nature of urban guerrilla movements and re-writes a Cold War state interpretation that asserts revolutionaries were agents of an international communist conspiracy.

²⁰⁹ Jeffrey W. Rubin, *Decentralizing the Regime: Ethnicity, Radicalism, and Democracy in Juchitán, Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

From the Ashes

The guerrillas took up arms for an immense and fair cause; to end a period of crime, poverty...and to build a better future.”²¹⁰ - Lourdes Uranga, member of the FUZ

In the wake of Tlatelolco, the Mexican government had continued its crackdown on radical culture with the goal of eradicating all vestiges of student dissent. Despite the ebbing of student militancy in Mexico City, youth radicalism remained a leitmotiv in government rhetoric. In 1968, Congress voted to authorize the use of force to suppress activists, and less than a year after the massacre, Mexico City’s police force received substantial upgrade in their arsenal.²¹¹ Díaz Ordaz exploited the politics of fear by pursuing his Cold War discourse. Sergio Aguayo Quezada compared the atmosphere after 1968 to the anti-communist witch-hunts of McCarthyism.²¹² Claudio Palacio Rivas a student and member of the PCM recalls that after 1968 security agencies launched a campaign “to arrest the entire world.”²¹³ One student who went by the name “El Pato” (The Duck) declared his shock that “decent people” including his elementary school teachers were imprisoned for “crimes they never committed.”²¹⁴ It is impossible to say exactly how many people were taken into custody during this period, but student testimonies and police records alike indicate a sharp increase in surveillance and detentions.²¹⁵ Still, even though the government was not discreet in discriminately picking up students, Secretary of Defense García Barragán denied prisoners were being

²¹⁰“Declaración de Lourdes Uranga en conferencia de prensa,” Centro de Investigaciones Históricas Sobre los Movimientos Sociales (CIHSMS), CD archive.

²¹¹ Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 131.

²¹² Aguayo Quezada, *1968: Los archivos de la violencia*, 272.

²¹³ Dios Corona, *La historia que no pudieron borrar*, 47.

²¹⁴ Héctor Ibarra Chávez, *Juventud rebelde e insurgencia estudiantil: Las otras voces del movimiento político y social en México en los años setentas* (México: Ce-Atl, 2010), 59.

²¹⁵ See information in Galería 1 about the immediate post-massacre period.

tortured and held at Campo Militar No. 1.²¹⁶ Political paranoia after 1968 prompted the targeting of any expressions against cultural authority. For instance, the governments' leeriness of the hippie/counterculture movement caused it to execute absurd measures like ordering law enforcement in Acapulco to cancel a presentation of *Hair*.²¹⁷ Actions like these embodied the governments hope to disrupt *rebeldía* across all fronts, and not only in spaces where the discussion of radical ideas were more popular.

On top of direct repression, government officials undermined leftist student organizations and encouraged right-wing thugs to take control within universities and preparatory schools. In 1969, the president banned prominent student groups in Mexico City, including two JC bastions: the Federación de Estudiantes Campesinos Socialistas de México (Federation of Socialist Student-Peasants of Mexico) and the CNED. Many affiliated students were expelled from universities.²¹⁸ The regime also cultivated groups of *porros*, like the MURO, to represent students. Adopting pseudonyms like León de la Selva” (lion of the jungle) and “el Nazi,” porros choreographed violent assaults against defenseless young students. At the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria 7, armed thugs ransacked offices and destroyed books, media, and cafeteria furniture.²¹⁹ Students who sought to resist were met with even greater violence. As Mexico City youth remained under fire student agitation in Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Monterrey, and Guadalajara were beginning to form a strong presence in the university and broaden the scope of their

²¹⁶ “No hay detenidos en el Campo Militar No. 1: García Barragán,” *Novedades*, October 16, 1968, 1.

²¹⁷ See Agentes 412, 504, and 511 of the PJJ, *C. Jefe de la PJJ*, Telex 10 942, Acapulco, 14:30 horas 3 de enero 1969: AGN, galería 2, fondos IPS, vol. 1472, exp. Hair (3), cited in Condés Lara, *Represión y rebelión en México*, vol. 2, 175.

²¹⁸ Castellanos, *México armado*, 172.

²¹⁹ Sánchez Gudiño, *Génesis, desarrollo y consolidación*, 266.

political agendas. Taking advantage of the state's disregard for the growing student movements outside of Mexico City, the student left experience minor repression at first, though enough to become a commanding force.

Despite their growing militancy, the first wave of student revolutionaries made little progress in the immediate aftermath of Tlatelolco. Already in December 1968, schoolteacher turned revolutionary, Genaro Vázquez Rojas, issued a communiqué from the mountains of southern Guerrero calling for students to reject reformism and seek the “total liberation” of the masses. Another revolutionary teacher and founder of the Party of the Poor rural guerrilla movement, Lucio Cabañas, also took his guerrilla force into the mountains in the same state. Like Vázquez, he invited students to join his struggle. Only a small handful accepted the call, however.²²⁰ Likewise in Mexico City, two urban guerrilla groups formed, the Lacandones, named for the Lacandon jungle of Chiapas, and the Frente Urbano Zapatista, after the campesino hero of 1910. The Lacandones were typical of these initial small-scale urban guerrilla movements. Founded by students at IPN in 1967, they went underground after 1968 in self-defense against police and paramilitary repression. According to Carlos Salcido, a former leader of the group, he and other dissidents had considered the prospects of an armed resistance as early as 1967, but they never compromised the nonviolent character of the student movement before Tlatelolco.²²¹ Although many of the future Lacandones had participated in minor political

²²⁰ Genaro Vázquez Rojas, “Al los combatientes del patrótico movimiento estudiantil,” Campamento revolucionario “José María Morelos,” montañas del sur de Guerrero, diciembre 1968, mimeo. Cited in Condés Lara, *Represión y rebelión en México*, 137. The Autonomous University of Guerrero was a major bastion for Cabañas' movement, but otherwise he had little support from students outside of his native state.

²²¹ Condés Lara, *Represión y rebelión en México*, vol. 2, 136.

activities, none held leadership positions in the student movement, and they were generally too young to be taken seriously by the CNH, which assigned them to youth brigades. David Jiménez Sarmiento, another founding member and future leader of the Liga, had organized his peers at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria No. 9, and by the age of eighteen the DFS already had a file on him.²²² While the Lacandones were predominantly male, the organization also had a small number of women guerrilla fighters, including Olivia Ledesma Flores, an Economics student at the IPN. She had participated in the 1968 student movement as a *brigadista* at the Vocational School No. 5, painting propaganda on walls, distributing communiqués, and attending as many meetings as possible.²²³ Together with her parents and grandmother, she survived the massacre at Tlatlolo, and thereafter joined the armed movement.²²⁴ In the tradition of urban guerrilla warfare, the Lacandones orchestrated a number of “expropriations” and assaults on businesses in Mexico City. They met with only minor success, but still managed to survive until 1973 when they merged with the Liga.

The election of Echeverría (1970-1976), as president in 1970 seemed to herald a new sense of openness, but despite his populist demeanor, he remained committed to a repressive one-party state. Despite his complicity with Tlatlolo, as Minister of Interior in 1968, people were generally optimistic about his political program called *apertura democrática* (democratic opening) to restore political stability, and his willingness to

²²² Alberto G. López Limón, *David Jiménez Sarmiento: Por la senda de la revolución* (México: Editorial 23 de mayo, 2006), 10.

²²³ Carlos Salcido García, “Testimonios sobre la vida de Olivia Ledesma Flores,” in *Memoria del primer Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres Ex-guerrilleras*, ed. María de la Luz Aguilar Terrés (n.p), 99, 101.

²²⁴ AGN, DFS, 28-15-1-73 H-225 L-2; The Lacandones were highly influenced by Maoism and Che Guevara thought. For more information see AGN, DFS, 28-15-1-73 H-30 L-4.

reconcile with students in the wake of the 1968 student massacre.²²⁵ His presidential campaign signaled a democratic opening intended, even as class conflict had become increasingly prevalent throughout the nation. Moreover, the economic gains of the so-called Mexican Miracle were increasingly lost with rising unemployment. Nevertheless, he rallied on with a populist agenda, unaware that armed struggles would prove to be the biggest challenge to his administration.

In his first year in office he invited critics of the state's policies to openly express their discontent without fear of repercussions.²²⁶ Echeverría spent tremendous energy trying to win the minds and respect of students. He often tailored his speeches directly for students in the hopes that he could simultaneously eradicate the stigma of Tlatelolco.²²⁷ Parts of his administration recognized that even though the student movement had experienced certain failures their virtues were an important and influential driving force for the country.²²⁸ As a demonstration of solidarity and trust, Echeverría sanctioned the release of the political prisoners held from the 1968 student movement.²²⁹ But this act only occurred after the UNAM went on strike from to insist on amnesty for the political prisoners.²³⁰ Guerrilla movements were outside of Echeverría's political program. They were deemed not real citizens, rather internal enemies of the state that were, on the contrary, attempting to impose a totalitarian program under the veneer of national liberation and

²²⁵ See Amerlia M. Kiddle and Marâ L.O. Muñoz, ed., *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), Samuel Schmidt, *The Deterioration of the Mexican Presidency: The Years of Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991).

²²⁶ Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis*, 189.

²²⁷ Elena Poniatowska, *Fuerte es el silencio* (México D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1980), 66, 68.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

²²⁹ Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis*, 190.

²³⁰ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 267-268.

social justice. Yet, even though Echeverría criticized radical politics his own party accused him of being a socialist in sheep's clothing and resulting in rumors that the military was preparing for a coup.²³¹ While the coup never transpired the business class continued to question Echeverría's political tendencies.

When Echeverría assumed the presidency in 1970 Cold War rhetoric was minimal. Even as revolutionary movements surfaced in the provinces, the new administration was relatively unfazed by student dissent outside of the city. Security forces and officials assumed local governments were more than capable of dealing with dissent. Even when urban guerrillas in Mexico City orchestrated expropriations, officers simply reported them as criminal acts and refrained from labeling them revolutionary or romanticize militants.²³² Another example that indicated a sharp decrease in Cold War scare tactics concerned the university. Echeverría knowingly portrayed Mexico's tolerance of all political ideologies by not being concerned with the teaching of radical literature in schools and university. Attempting to censor the university and regulate the type of works students read undermined his populist standpoint, as well as his intentions of reconciling with the youth. Even during the darkest periods of the dirty war radical politics continued to be tough. But much like his predecessor, he circumvented violating university autonomy by installing spies and *porros* at the UNAM and IPN to identify student-revolutionaries, monitor them, and weed them out.

Another reason why officials in the PRI interpreted student militancy as unarmful had to do with the ruling party's evaluation of the current state of youth

²³¹ Agustín, *Tragicomedia mexicana*, 123.

²³² Salvador Castañeda, interview with author.

activism. Still in the early 1970s the student-left in Mexico City offered little effective opposition because it was factionalized, lacked leadership, or a new approach.²³³ The imprisonment of prominent figures from the student movement, including Álvarez Garín, Guevara Niebla, Cabeza de Vaca, Castillo, and others, deterred successors from taking their place. Moreover, because the student movement had depended on the guidance of a small circle of leaders, the activists next in line lacked the leadership skills to reorganize students. Many 68ers retired completely from political activism while others sought less confrontational forms of social and political protest. For example, some joined the counterculture, known as La Onda (The Wave).²³⁴ A number of former *brigadistas* adopted a Maoist approach and left the city for rural communities and growing shantytowns, perhaps hoping to dodge state-repression, yet they were confronted with unexpected hurdles. For many it was their first time travelling outside the city. Rafael Sebastián Guillén (or Subcomandante Marcos), who followed in the same footsteps more than a decade later, recalls how “it seemed the jungle wanted to spit us out and ‘purposely’ make conditions intolerable.”²³⁵ Other less time adapting to their new surrounds and immediately integrated themselves into already functioning civic movements in southern Mexico, particularly Oaxaca.²³⁶

As non-violent activists searched for new avenues to restart their activists careers, the revolutionary left was growing increasingly impatient and disillusioned by the lack of

²³³ Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis* 184; Álvarez Garín, interview with author; Condes Lara, *Represión y rebelión en México* vol. 1, 130.

²³⁴ “After the massacre there was, in a fundamental sense, nowhere for youth to turn by La Onda.” Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 132-140.

²³⁵ See Zapatista film “A Place Called Chiapas.”

²³⁶ See Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez, *Movimiento popular y política en Oaxaca: 1968-1986*. (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990).

revolutionary will manifested by their peers. A number of radicals belonging to the JC, namely from Chihuahua and Monterrey lost their faith in the working-class and student-left. To further push the agenda for revolutionary action militants and the PCM split in 1970 following a heated debate. The passivity of workers and low morale following 1968 led to mounting tensions between the PCM and increasingly militant Communist Youth.²³⁷ When the JC met again in 1970 for its Third Congress, youth leaders arrived prepared to engage in an ideological battle with their older comrades.²³⁸ A tense and uncomfortable atmosphere hovered over attendees as they waited for the conference to begin. Well-known student activist Raúl Ramos Zavala from Monterrey explained the fissures of the PCM's political agenda. Like dozens of other speakers, Ramos Zavala vilified the PCM for being out of touch with the people, as well as their paternalistic treatment of the JC. He complained the PCM was inundated with reformists, complacent with the ruling party's political program and that under the thumb of the PCM the political autonomy of youth activists was highly restricted. No persons had ever officially called for the JC to splinter off from the PCM for good, but on this occasion Ramos Zavala proposed the measure. Five months after the Third Congress the break was official, though not everyone relinquished their affiliation with the PCM. With the break, thousands of former PCM affiliates returned to their schools and colleges eager to begin a new era of political activism. As students in Mexico City entertained the possibility of armed resistance in 1969, word spread slowly in the classrooms, radical spaces, and even

²³⁷ Barr Carr, "Mexican Communism 1968-1981: Eurocommunism in the Americas?," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 17, 1 (May, 1985): 201.

²³⁸ Gustavo Hiraes Morán, *La Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre: Orígenes y naufragio* (México: Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1978), 12.

transcended into the prisoners. When news reached former leader Guevara Niebla, he had this to say: “to go underground means doing nothing.”²³⁹ For Guevara Niebla, the armed struggle had the potential of seriously hurting students’ legitimacy as political actors. He realized the student movement was seriously wounded and there was little chance of creating a new one, but more importantly, he feared that revolutionary tendencies, which he had fought against consistently during 1968, were compromising years of work by advocating direct action. Despite Guevara Niebla’s lambasting of guerrillas, hostility towards the initial student-led urban guerrilla movements remained minimal.

The break from the JC was a pivotal moment of the revolutionary left. Hundreds of militants eagerly returned to their respective universities to rally their peers and inform them of a new revolutionary action program. Initially there was little motivation, as expected, but the growing discontent in universities allowed radicals-turned-revolutionaries to feed off students’ frustrations to build a new revolutionary movement. Zavala and a student from Chihuahua, Diego Lucero distinguished themselves as the leading proponents of the armed struggle. Their experiences in their own universities played a major role in forming their political consciousness. But future student-guerrillas were not only ideologically disconnected, but also geographically. While many formed bonds during their times with in the JC, the issue of now creating a new revolutionary movement from within the universities was an unresolved problem that did not come together until 1973.

²³⁹ Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, 7. Apart from his political disagreement with the armed struggle option, his antipathy for guerrillas was also influenced by the death of his cousin at the hands of urban guerrillas.

Meanwhile, Cold War fears returned when on March 16, 1971, Mexico City newspapers delivered an ominous warning: “Conjura Roja Contra México” (Red Plot Against Mexico), ran the headline in *La Prensa*. The article informed readers that government security services had raided the Veracruz safe house of a clandestine organization calling itself the Movimiento de Acción Revolucionario (Movement of Revolutionary Action, MAR). The arrests shocked many Mexicans, who had been led to believe that the government had contained the student protests of 1968. But government documents and confessions by detainees revealed they were disconnected to the student movement and were instead trained in North Korea.²⁴⁰ The appearance of social peace was decisively dispelled a few months later, on Corpus Christi day, June 10, 1971, when Mexico City student protesters were attacked by paramilitaries called *halcones* (hawks) wielding clubs and firearms. In the wake of this second massacre, the Communist Youth’s Third Congress and the National Student Forum convened to demand a new level of radical student commitment to social change. These events marked a new period of student-led armed resistance in Mexico.

While the Lacandones struggled to learn the skills of urban guerrilla warfare on the margins of Mexico City, the MAR represented a more far-reaching movement, founded by Mexicans studying at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow and trained in guerrilla warfare by the North Korean military. The group was also quite diverse. Its leader, Fabricio Souza, was a schoolteacher from Michoacán, and many of the initial nineteen members had participated in the democratization struggle at the University of Michoacán in 1966. Others arrived from the University of Morelia in Michoacán, the

²⁴⁰ “Boletín de Prensa,” AGN DIGPS, caja 0192, 41.

Saint Nicolas University in Hidalgo, and universities in the northern state of Chihuahua.²⁴¹ Some members of the MAR had prior political experience in the JC, but others, like Salvador Castañeda, had previously led an apolitical life. In the early 1960s, he had arrived in Mexico City with little money from his home on a Chihuahua *ejido*, hoping only to help out his family.²⁴² He was awarded a scholarship by the *Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Mexicano-Ruso* (Institute of Mexican-Russian Cultural Exchange) to study at the Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, where he was first initiated into the study of historical materialism and where he joined compatriots in discussing politics and socio-political conditions in Mexico.²⁴³ None of the initial founders were in Mexico during the 1968 massacre, and the armed struggle had been a recurring theme in their reading groups.²⁴⁴

As the students moved toward revolutionary options, Souza consulted with delegates from the Soviet, Vietnamese, and Cuban governments in the hopes of obtaining assistance. All three nations denied their requests for diplomatic reasons.²⁴⁵ Souza subsequently turned to North Korea, traveling to Pyongyang in November 1968. Perhaps because the regime did not have diplomatic relations with Mexico, Souza succeeded in gaining their support. Upon his return to the Soviet capital, Souza received \$25,000 from the North Korean embassy to recruit at least fifty revolutionaries in Mexico and transport

²⁴¹ Ochoa, *En las profundidades del MAR*, 51. See also DFS/ 11-207-71/11/91 in FEMOSPP, “La guerrilla se extiende por todo el país,” (2001), 15.

²⁴² Salvador Castañeda, interview with author, Mexico City, April 2010.

²⁴³ AGN- 0192, PGR: Boletín sobre consignación de 19 individuos adiestrados en Corea del Norte, 15 de marzo de 1971, 5.

²⁴⁴ Víctor Payá and M. Campos Díaz y Sánchez, *Excelsior*, 17 March 1971. cited in Juan Miguel de Mora, *Las guerrillas en México y Jenaro Vásquez Rojas*, 410.

²⁴⁵ Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism After the Revolution*, 132.

them to North Korea for training.²⁴⁶ As a preventative measure Souza was recommended to move recruits in three successive sets to any suspicion from the Mexican government. The first 20 guerrillas concluded their training in 1969 and returned to Mexico in small groups to avoid attention from security forces. Souza and his followed immediately established revolutionary schools in Chapala, Jalisco; Puebla, Puebla; Mexico City; San Miguel de Allende and Salamanca, Guanajuato; and Zamora, Michoacán. Their haste in trying to expand strategically across the country may have played a role in their downfall.²⁴⁷ Within two years, security forces had swept up the leadership, although other members continued the armed struggle. Almost immediately following this revelation Mexican state officials formally expelled five Soviet diplomats residing in Mexico after discovering the Soviets had a hand in facilitating students' travel between Mexico, the USSR, and North Korea.²⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Secretary of Defense Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz declared: "The Mexican military...is totally capable of facing any subversive organization."²⁴⁹

Despite assurances from the military, the Echeverría administration was clearly shaken, and it soon escalated the conflict with student protesters. Less than four months after mug shots of *maristas* covered the pages of major newspapers, on June 10, 1971, a group of Mexico City students coordinated a solidarity march with their peers on strike at the Autonomous University of Nuevo León. That afternoon, students gathered at the

²⁴⁶ Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism After the Revolution*, 132.

²⁴⁷ Verónica Oikión Solano, "El Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria: Una historia de radicalización política," in *Movimientos armados en México, siglo XX*, ed. Verónica Oikión Solano and Marta Eugenia García Ugarte (Zamora: Colegio de Michoacán/CIESAS, 2008).

²⁴⁸ Ochoa, *En las profundidades del MAR*, 33.

²⁴⁹ "El Ejército, plenamente capacitado para hacer frente a cualquier intento de alterar la paz," *El Día*, 18 de marzo de 1971, 1.

metro station outside the Normal School northwest of the city center. Before they could begin marching on the Zócalo, a paramilitary group called the *Halcones* (Hawks), armed with long sticks and guns, viciously attacked the students. In the ensuing melee, hundreds were injured and as many as thirty people were killed. Photographs taken by Armando Lenin Salgado show members of the *Halcones* firing weapons at the demonstrators.²⁵⁰ Other pictures show injured *Halcones* being carried off in ambulances by military personnel while wounded marchers lay unattended. Heberto Castillo, a leader of the 1968 student movement wrote “with the assistance of the Department of the Federal District and with the leniency of the police the *Halcones* brutally attacked reporters, broke their cameras, and even went into hospitals to kill those injured.”²⁵¹ Responsibility for the attack is disputed. The government claimed at the time that thugs had acted without official support, but declassified documents have confirmed what people believed at the time, that top government officials had instigated the assault.²⁵²

The Jueves de Corpus Massacre, also known as the Halconazo, marked a major turning point for the radical left. Before 1971, students were largely undecided on the armed struggle, and only a few urban guerrilla movements had been formed. After the Halconazo, increasing numbers of armed revolutionary organizations began to surface and the government grew less tolerant of opposition. Thus, Echeverría’s *apertura democrática* appeared to be more like a dream rather than a reality, as the state revealed

²⁵⁰ Armando Lenin Salgado, *Una Vida de Guerra* (unpublished), 2009, 117-121.

²⁵¹ Heberto Castillo, “El Halconazo,” *Proceso*, 14 de julio 2002, 38.

²⁵² Ibid; Jacinto R. Munguía, “El Ejército supo del Halconazo,” *La Revista* 26, 26 de julio a 1 de agosto 2004, 16, 17-18; Rogelio Cárdenas Estandía, *Luis Echeverría Álvarez: Entre lo personal y lo político* (México: Editorial Planeta, 2008), 98-99, 102.

its authoritarian nature. Student protest was brutally repressed in Mexico City, but in the provinces, a new generation of students was attaining a revolutionary consciousness.

The Enfermos and the Student Movement in Sinaloa

“Yes, we are sick with the red virus of communism. And there is no medicine that can cure us!”²⁵³ - Propaganda at the Autonomous University of Sinaloa

Sinaloa, along with Jalisco, was an important center of youth militancy, and President Echeverría sought to defuse a potential crisis by arranging a personal meeting with student leaders at the Autonomous University of Sinaloa (UAS). When Secretary of Education Víctor Bravo Ahúja arrived on October 8, 1971, to prepare the ground for a presidential visit, his presence generated a vitriolic response from the student population. Arriving at the auditorium to make the announcement, Bravo Ahúja was greeted with aggressive insults from a restless crowd. He explained that the president’s visit was to assess first-hand the student disturbances at the UAS, which “greatly worried” the government.²⁵⁴ Echeverría’s proposed gesture of mediating between students and the university administration corresponded with the PRI’s goal of improving relations with students after 1968. But the Sinaloenses refused to play by the government script and instead transformed the assembly into a radical *mitín*. Leaders of the Federation of University Students of Sinaloa (FEUS) informed Bravo Ahúja that they had no desire for a private dialogue with the president. They had already made their demands to university administrators and saw no need for further discussion. The presidential visit was

²⁵³ “¡Sí, estamos enfermos del virus rojo del comunismo. Y no hay medicina que nos cure!”

²⁵⁴ Liberto Teran, *Sinaloa: Estudiantes en lucha* (Culiacán: Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, 1982), 13, 15.

cancelled, and within a year, radical faction of the FEUS went underground as the Enfermos, one of the most powerful of the student urban guerrilla movements in Mexico.

The harsh reception given to Bravo Ahúja at the UAS embodies a larger tradition of rebellion in the state of Sinaloa. What makes this regional movement particularly striking was the coordination between student activists and peasant and worker groups.²⁵⁵ In 1972, hundreds of campesinos orchestrated land seizures in response to the local government's inability to solve land reform issues. Adhering to the tradition of cross-class solidarity, students rallied at the UAS in support of their cause. Later that year, students also expressed solidarity when bus drivers went on strike in the state capital of Culiacán. Thus, popular political mobilizations found expression in the university, giving students far greater revolutionary credibility in Sinaloa than in Mexico City. Moreover, students' early experience in popular organizing gave them an opportunity to fine-tune their political consciousness and develop a reputation as trustworthy and dependable political actors.²⁵⁶ Therefore, the history of student radicalism is intertwined with the history of class struggle in Sinaloa.

Camilo Valenzuela, a former leader of the Enfermos, repeatedly used the word “we” when speaking of the history of rebellion in Sinaloa. He meant not only the importance of the Enfermos within the state's radical left tradition, but also their affiliation with earlier mobilizations from the 1950s.²⁵⁷ Most *sinaloenses* who joined the student movement in the seventies were born during a period of rising worker and

²⁵⁵ Rafael Santo Cenobio, *El Movimiento Estudiantil en la UAS (1966-1972)* (Culiacán: Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, 2005), 11.

²⁵⁶ Teran, *Sinaloa*, 20-21.

²⁵⁷ Camilo Valenzuela, “El movimiento de los Enfermos,” in *La guerrilla de los 70 y la transición a la democracia*, 84.

peasant militancy, and family histories of land seizures and strikes made rebellion very real to them. As a result, a number of student militants from modest socio-economic backgrounds never felt detached from working-class political aspirations.²⁵⁸ Even the sons and daughters of middle-class professionals became politically involved in radical student politics, developing a collective student identity that bridged class divisions.

While the student movement expanded over six years (1966-1973) the height of student militancy peaked in 1971. Hundreds of students mobilized transformed the UAS into a battleground where state intervention became commonplace, and violent confrontations between protestors and state sponsored thugs were ordinary occurrences. In general, these conflicts were nothing out of the ordinary in Sinaloa student movement history. The democratization of the university had been a recurring topic of discussion in student circles since the early part of the post-revolutionary era.²⁵⁹ The first time students organized into a movement it was against the antidemocratic structures in place at the UAS in 1966, fought for the institutionalization of a thorough university reform, and a new president they decried as puppet of the PRI. In 1966 students succeeded in coercing the government to meet the demands and carry out the reforms stipulated in their proposal, only to rise up again in the early seventies against a new wave of challenges that put in jeopardy the reforms their predecessors fought for less than a decade earlier.

²⁵⁸ For more information see, “La violencia política en Sinaloa: El caso de los “Enfermos,” 1972-1978 (Los lugares y medios para la radicalización), 207.

²⁵⁹ Teran, *Sinaloa: Estudiantes en lucha*, 18.

Precursors to Student Radicalism

Sinaloa's political history is deeply rooted in struggles for state sovereignty against the centralist power of the government and class conflict between elites and campesinos.²⁶⁰ A mountainous northwestern state, stretching along the Sea of Cortés, it was largely isolated from national life during the nineteenth century. Following the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the rich farmland of its numerous river valleys made it an important center for growing fruits, vegetables, and any other cash crops. A tomato boom in the 1930s made Mexico an important exporter to markets in the United States. As the agricultural sector boomed so did the competition for land, and wealthy investors abused their political influence to force campesinos to sell the best land.²⁶¹ The growing encroachment of capitalist agriculture precipitated indigenous rebellions and campesino antagonism, which were summarily repressed by Calles, to the delight of local landowners.²⁶² The balance between state sovereignty and class conflict was promptly reversed in the mid-1930s, when the Cárdenas administration intervened in local relations, hoping to make Sinaloa a model of small-scale ejido farming.²⁶³

In the 1950s, the PRI's corporatist bureaucracy sought to clamp down on social reform, but it did not completely succeed in blocking worker and peasant activism. Land distribution was halted after the Cárdenas' years, and by the late 1950s, frustrated

²⁶⁰ Sergio Arturo Sánchez Parra, "La rebellion de Gonzalo Escobar en Sinaloa," in *Cultura, política y sociedad: Miradas y reencuentros en el noroeste, noreste, centro y sur de México*, ed., Carlos Maciel Sánchez, Rigoberto Rodríguez Benítez, Alfonso Mercado Gómez (Culiacán: Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa and Casa Juan Pablo, 2006), 201.

²⁶¹ See Eduardo Frías Sarmiento, "La experiencia mexicana en la producción de tomate: Sus primeros pasos, 1925-1932," in *Cultura, política y sociedad: Miradas y reencuentros en el noroeste, noreste, centro y sur de México*, ed. Carlos Maciel Sánchez, Rigoberto Rodríguez Benítez, and Alfonso Mercado Gómez (Culiacán: Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, 2006), 255-272.

²⁶² Sergio Ortega Noriega, *Breve historia de Sinaloa* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999), 276.

²⁶³ Ortega Noriega, *Breve historia de Sinaloa*, 293-294.

campesinos had begun to clash violently with private agricultural businesses. The Confederación Nacional de Campesinos (CNC) sought to co-opt aggressive peasant leaders, just as union boss Fidel Velázquez worked within the CTM to quell worker militancy. In an attempt to alleviate political tensions in the state, Díaz Ordaz sanctioned projects appearing to benefit workers and peasants, but genuinely they only bolstered his modernization agenda. For instance, during part of his administration he facilitated the construction of the Río Humaya dam and sold it as a measure to increase agricultural productivity, and benefit growers and laborers.²⁶⁴ Workers and peasants recognized the emptiness of PRI promises—leading to a sudden spike in worker and peasant militancy in the late fifties and early sixties.

Student radicalism meanwhile also began to surge around this time, starting with the struggle for university autonomy. Inspired in part by the example of the Cuban Revolution of 1959, students recognized their political irrelevance outside of the university. Feeling duped and manipulated by the ruling party, they sought to challenge authority by first regaining control of their institution.²⁶⁵ The UAS, situated in the capital of Culiacan, was originally founded in 1873 as a Normal School. Activists within the student body lobbied state legislators and university administrators, finally receiving formal autonomy in 1965, but that was only the beginning. The university rector and his administrators still remained enormously powerful in running the university, while a *Junta de Gobierno* (governing body) served as a puppet for the state congress.²⁶⁶ The *Junta's* powers included the ability to expel students and fire teachers without any

²⁶⁴ Ortega Noriega, *Breve historia de Sinaloa*, 294.

²⁶⁵ Teran, *Sinaloa: Estudiantes en lucha*, 35-40.

²⁶⁶ Santo Cenobio, *El Movimiento Estudiantil en la UAS (1966-1972)*, 65.

explanation. Administrators soon targeted students who openly expressed radical ideas or incited others to protest. Students quickly launched speeches and teach-ins denouncing the state government's lack of respect for university autonomy and for jeopardizing academic freedom.

In late 1966, students continued the struggle for genuine autonomy with a strike against rector Julio Ibarra Urrea when the Junta reelected him without allowing students to vote on the matter. Over the years, students had come to detest Ibarra for his mismanagement of university funds and for the unethical appointment of high-ranking officials, although the administration had not actually repressed student dissent, as on other campuses around the country.²⁶⁷ The exclusion of students from participating in his election made a mockery of the autonomy they had so recently won. At the helm of the strike was the School of Economics, with its charismatic leader Luis Ceceña Cervantes. Like a number of guerrilla leaders in the seventies, he perceived that the university had been diverted from a producer of knowledge for the masses into a propaganda instrument for the state, although few of his fellows had such a developed political consciousness. Regardless, widespread administrative corruption mobilized students to demand Ibarra's resignation. Initially it appeared he would fight to retain his seat, but the magnitude of support for the strike quickly demonstrated that he had lost control of the university. Ibarra resigned the same day.

While students succeeded in "opening the university" their ability to create an environment where Ibarra had no other choice but to abdicate his power also represented

²⁶⁷ See "Lo que el pueblo desconoce del Doctor Julio Ibarra Urrea," in Teran, *Sinaloa: Estudiantes en lucha*, 129.

a defeat for the local political elite and the ruling party. The success of 1966 gave the student-left a sense of accomplishment that underpinned their agency as students following decades of lacking a voice in policymaking pertaining to their education. Although they initially pledged to improve conditions on the campus, a radical shift also became increasingly noticeable that expressed itself through a newly refined student agenda that included broader political aspirations. While students' control over their education was still up in the air, they at least shook the political ground and revealed the ruling elite's weakness and dependability on the education system to preserve its official history and propaganda. There were still a number of problems left to resolve but the political elite no longer felt they wholly controlled the university.

The short-lived strike had made a long-lasting impression on students' political consciousness and helped to create a new student-militant at the UAS. Over the next four years, students sought to consolidate their power within the university while debating ways of extending their influence to the wider society. The first step was in founding a student organization, FEUS, in 1967 to represent the interests of the student body. FEUS advocated a number of changes in university governance to benefit students and encourage activism. The creation of the Casa de Estudiante Universitario "Rafael Buelna" (University Student House) provided what militants called "our first liberated zone." Creating possibilities for marginalized youth was also an important goal for FEUS. Given the group's adherence to supporting popular education they played a major role in the construction of popular preparatory schools.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁸ Escuela Preparatoria Popular Emiliano Zapata (1968) and the Preparatoria Popular Nocturna. Teran, *Sinaloa: Estudiantes en lucha*, 33, 34

Perhaps as a result of the success of the UAS student strike in 1966 the nascent Confederación Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos (National Conference of Democratic Students, CNED) chose Culiacán as the location for its First Congress. Discussions revolved around a number of issues pertaining to the state of student movements throughout the country, but mostly addressed the repression against them. Three years into Díaz Ordaz's presidency student movements were surfacing in a number of states, including Michoacán, Tabasco, Mexico City, and Sinaloa. While each represented different stages of student militancy, their presence was enough to earn the attention of the government and trigger a violent response. As the First Congress drew to a close the ambiance remained intense as students returned to their respective schools eager to share the ideas and strategies discussed at the meeting with their peers.

Unlike activists from the U of G, the student-left at the UAS were open supporters of the 1968 student movement, and their participation in the CNED gave FEUS members an even more inside perspective into the events surrounding the strike. From the moment students took the streets in Mexico City the FEUS announced their unconditional support. Delegations from UAS traveled in numbers to the capital to observe student actions and participate in any way they could. From Sinaloa, the FEUS called out to people to join in solidarity with their comrades in the capital, but as student disturbances gained momentum in 1968, Sinaloa governor Leopold Sánchez Celis suspended the university's budget as a preemptive move to quell UAS students' solidarity with their peers in Mexico City.²⁶⁹ The act infuriated students who felt they were being "locked out" in a

²⁶⁹ De la Garza, Ejea, Macias, *El otro movimiento estudiantil*, 71.

clear abuse of power. The university budget was eventually restored, but it added fuel to the growing discontent at the UAS.

After Tlatelolco, students in Sinaloa were devastated to hear news of the massacre, but also understood the importance of remaining firm in their solidarity, regardless of the consequences. Rallies were held demanding a thorough investigation of the massacre and reprimanding the responsible parties. Other protests sought to pressure officials to release political prisoners. In one of the first major post-1968 actions engineered by students in the provinces, demonstrators marched to the state capital to protest the incarceration of their 1968 peers, but were expelled from the area by security forces.²⁷⁰

Like radical students at the University of Guadalajara, the FEUS envisioned the UAS as a space where class antagonism was obsolete and the sons and daughters of marginalized society could participate in the making of Mexican history.

In the aftermath of Tlatelolco, factions began to appear within FEUS as members sought to reevaluate their place within the university and also how students were going to confront the challenges of an increasingly authoritarian regime. The moderate wing, headed by Arturo Guevara Niebla, continued to believe that social change was possible by working within established political institutions. The radical wing consisted largely of Communist Youth militants, who ultimately formed the nucleus of the Enfermos. At the time, they proposed major changes to the group's ideological orientation, but they were

²⁷⁰ Rito Terán Olguín, "El 68: Un movimiento nacional," *Revista de la Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa* 3 (October 1998), 46-51.

not yet advocating armed struggle.²⁷¹ Thus, although student-revolutionaries are often accused of charging ahead recklessly without having thought clearly about the ramifications of their actions, there was nothing precipitous about the Enfermos' decision three years later to go underground.

The 1970 Strike and the Birth of the Enfermos

Student activism never completely dissipated following the conclusion of the 1966 strike. Activists were on a permanent lookout for illegal maneuvers by the university administration, as well as monitoring the political conditions outside their educational space. Between 1967 and 1970 the political ambiance at the UAS was relatively placid compared to previous years. The presence of a strong student-left with radical undertones remained visible on the campus. Walls were constantly thronging with posters announcing radical public events, reading groups, and other relevant affairs appealing to the leftist community at the UAS. These events assured that a culture of rebellion remained present on campus in case students were required to immediately mobilize. Having observed the difficulties their peers encountered when attempting to resurrect a dormant radical ambiance at their respective universities, militants at the UAS hope to dodge this challenge by having their peers constantly on alert and prepared to take swift action. When Gonzalo Armienta Calderón was elected the new rector of the university without students' approval, radical leaders easily ignite a new era in student militancy in Sinaloa.

²⁷¹ Teran, *Sinaloa: Estudiantes en lucha*, 39.

From February 1970 to November 1971, students at the UAS were on strike to protest to installment of Armienta Calderón as the new rector of the university by Governor Alfredo Valdés Montoya's. Students decried the appointment arguing it violated university code, disrespected student agency, and clearly exemplified an abused the power by the governor's office. Students were outraged by this maneuver and saw Armienta Calderón as a pawn to assure the governor's authoritarian control over UAS.²⁷² The election of Armienta Calderón signified the first steps in regaining control of the university by the ruling elite and an attempt by the PRI to transform the university into a "factory" to bolster its official propaganda. For the government, Armienta Calderón was the ideal candidate because he lacked no prior experience in education, was a staunch anti-communist, champion of ruling party's official propaganda, and a close friend of Echeverría. This combination of "credentials" allowed for Armienta Calderón to easily fit the qualifications of a puppet rector in service of the state. Worse still, he was a long-time resident of Mexico City, unfamiliar with the political culture of Sinaloa, and thus represented the latest instance of the central government violating local autonomy. Because Armienta Calderón lacked a comprehensive understanding of Sinaloa's history of proletarian and peasant militancy, cross-class alliances, much less youth activism, his actions against students immediately pinned him as an enemy of the working-class as well.

On February 25, 1970, students seized control of the university to prevent the newly elected president from assuming his position. Noticing the widespread student

²⁷² Armienta Calderón was only backed by a small number of conservative students and teachers, as well as Law students who went by the name of *mazatlecos*. See De la Garza, Ejea, Macias, *El otro movimiento estudiantil*, 166; Santo Cenobio, *El Movimiento Estudiantil en la UAS (1966-1972)*, 91.

enmity, Armienta Calderón announced that he would resign “if students didn’t accept me.”²⁷³ Yet, it would take him more than a year to actually live up to that promise. Alarmed state officials called in the police and hired thugs to “regain control” of the university.²⁷⁴ Moreover, the new administration purged the faculty of members who were seen as closely aligned with the student movement. Both current students and veterans from the early 1960s struggle for autonomy decried the intervention in university affairs, the selection of a president without consulting the student body, and the “violation of the sanctity of university autonomy.”²⁷⁵ Leaders of the FEUS mobilized brigades and organized rallies at the university that numbered in the thousands. Despite not everyone attempting the demonstrations openly supported the strike, the university administration used quantitative measurements to justify their aggressive intervention. Few rallies ended in violence in the early stages of the student movement, but increased as the radical faction of the FEUS grew increasingly impatient with the university’s administrations negligence and disregard for students’ demands. Confrontations were a recurring element of the student movement by late 1970 as Armienta Calderón’s anti-communist rhetoric revealed itself. He argued that his actions were justifiable given they were meant to prevent the university from “falling into the hands of communists.”²⁷⁶ But what in fact the state government and university administration were performing was a comprehensive witch-hunt against dissidents who disagreed with the party’s official propaganda.

²⁷³Teran, *Sinaloa: Estudiantes en lucha*, 45.

²⁷⁴De la Garza, Ejea, Macias, *El otro movimiento estudiantil*, 115.

²⁷⁵“Acerca del movimiento enfermo de Sinaloa,” Mandeville Special Collections Library, UC San Diego, Reel 3 Folder 1.

²⁷⁶*Oposición*, April 15, 1970. 1-2.

A substantial portion of the students in the movement were from working-class backgrounds,²⁷⁷ and the people of Sinaloa believed that by supporting the movement they were fighting for *their* children's future. By the end of the year, workers who were on strike in Culiacán began to join student rallies, causing many in the state government to fear that they were reliving the summer of 1968. As early as 1971, the government stationed police and military on campus, supported by pro-government student groups, merely to keep Armienta Calderón in power.²⁷⁸ Students considered the occupation to be illegal and clashes were inevitable, while pro-government students welcomed the installment of the military on campus. Unaligned and pro-government students feared their passivity or opposition against the movement put them in a precarious situation and walking targets for leftist harassment. True, a number of confrontations between activists and apathetic students were triggered, but the number of leftist students injured were unreported, while the number of non-activists were inflated. Responsibility for the violence on campus was generally attributed to the FEUS who in response accused university administration of working in conjunction with local authorities to taint the image of the student movement. That same year government forces killed two student protesters, Juan de Dios Quiñónez and María Isabel Landeros, and the FEUS led the protest against the governor and the university president.²⁷⁹ In the resulting uproar, Armienta Calderón finally yielded to the student opposition and resigned, but a new rector was imposed in his place, and the campus occupation continued. Rather than try to

²⁷⁷Valenzuela, "El movimiento de los Enfermos," 87.

²⁷⁸ Teran, *Sinaloa: Estudiantes en lucha*, 50.

²⁷⁹ *La verdad negada*, Centro de Investigaciones Históricas de los Movimientos Sociales (CIHMS), 211.

compromise with students, the government responded with more aggression—still believing the students would eventually fold.

As political repression escalated serious talks regarding forms of self-defense resonated in radical circles. The move towards the armed struggle appeared less faint and an obvious avenue to take for the growing radical faction of the FEUS, but many still found it too precipitous. On the other hand, leaders of the movement agreed on a self-defense strategy and allowed many to respond to aggression with force when the situation warranted the action. Even though responding with force against state repression would justify more government intervention, students were willing to take the risk but in the long run also expose the state's weakness, inability to quell the movement, and authoritarian nature. While this change in policy failed to reduce confrontations between students and government agents, it did accelerate the radicalization of what would become the nucleus of the Enfermos. Also, student radicals used the intensification of local repression as a gauge to denote just how much the local and federal government feared students, and how much power they had acquired over the years. As a result students began to rally under the banner of “student power” to celebrate their militancy and also demonstrate that Mexican youth were also embroiled in popular political mobilizations.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ A. Tecla Jiménez, *Universidad, burguesía y proletariado* (México: Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1976), 17.

A Serious of Revolutionary Events

In April 1972 students from universities across the country convened at the Foro Nacional Estudiantil at the UNAM to discuss the situation of student activism, to listen to militants speak about the state of their own student movements.²⁸¹ Immediately the factionalism between the moderate and revolutionary left became clear when the first discussions took place. The much larger moderate wing advocated for change by using the same institutions in place, especially after Echeverría announced his program of democratic opening. Student-revolutionaries, on the other hand, compared accepting the president's scheme to co-option, petty bourgeois, and dishonoring the lives of students perished as a result of state repression. Under the motto "we don't want *apertura*, we want revolution!" the revolutionary-left encouraged students to break from fruitless political strategies and baseless rhetoric, and think more along the lines of a new revolution. Valenzuela, then leader of the FEUS was invited the Procesos, a rising revolutionary group led by Ramos Zavala from Monterrey, to support their proposal for the creation of a national guerrilla coordination.²⁸² Valenzuela refused the invitation arguing the FEUS was still in no position go underground, even though Ramos Zavala venerated the Sinaloa's student movement and how far it had advanced in integrating the student movement with broader popular struggles. Moderate students contested these accusations by condemning champions of the armed struggle for being "dreamers and illusionists" and veering the student-left towards self-destruction and a massacre. But

²⁸¹ For a extensive collection of comunicués and manifestos given or distributed at the Foro see Arturo Martínez Nateras, ed. *¡No queremos apertura, queremos revolución!: Materiales del Foro Nacional Estudiantil* (México: Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1972).

²⁸² Castellanos, *México armado*, 194.

regardless of where one stood on the debate each path seemed to bring the risk of state repression. In the end, the meeting appeared to further marginalize the revolutionary wing and precipitate the creation of a number of independent student organizations. The hopes of creating a national student movement crumbled and just like student-revolutionaries predicted: a large chunk of the student-left was co-opted or repressed despite using non-confrontational strategies. In the end, the Foro failed to unite both sides, leaving the small contingency of pro-armed struggle advocates to leave disillusioned.

Despite the Foro failing to live up to revolutionaries' expectations student radicals from Sinaloa did not lack a forum to profess their agenda. For peasants 1972 represented a renewal in activism, as landless farm workers unable to achieve security through official land reform began to conduct land invasions. The further radicalization of the FEUS was also prompted by a famous event in June 1972, when radical students joined campesinos in a land invasion of *El Tajito*, an area outside of Culiacán. Anticipating a confrontation with repressive forces students were prepared to “respond to government repression, with revolutionary violence.”²⁸³ The military attempted to stop the illegal invasion, killing two campesinos and arresting a number of student activists. Government officials then proceeded to assault the Student Housing Building at UAS, injuring a number of students. In a symbolic declaration of war, the Enfermos burned down PRI offices in Culiacán.²⁸⁴ Immediately following this attack, the *chemones* a division within the FEUS divorced themselves from the organization and condemned the vandalism

²⁸³ Reinaldo Ramos a prominent latifundista (large landowner) in the area was originally owner of El Tajito. Valenzuela, “El movimiento de los Enfermos,” 89. De la Garza, Ejea, Macias, *El otro movimiento estudiantil*, 116-117.

²⁸⁴ De la Garza, Ejea, Macias, *El otro movimiento estudiantil*, 117.

carried out by its radical faction. Unaligned students also denounced the violence provoked by the radical faction of the FEUS. Students openly told militants “you’re all sick,” implying that the activists were “sick communists.”²⁸⁵ As sympathetic activists observed how the FEUS underwent serious internal divisions and pressured to choose between organizations many sadly gave up and refused to participate in any political action.

The land invasion experience help to jump-start a radical shift in the FEUS. The moderate side of the group fell while the radical faction acquired large support and recruited a vast number of new militants that shared its revolutionary aspirations. Yet, those visions were unclear and did not form a part of the FEUS’s ideological platform. But given the power the radical faction had garnered in the last year, it was able to become the dominant voice of the organization. Though radicals paid dearly for their actions. Members of the FEUS could no longer move around freely without having to be on the defensive constantly to avoid being assaulted by *gorillas* (pro-government thugs). This increased their sense of solidarity with campesinos, which confronted the wrath of *guardias blancas* (white guards) hired by landowners to intimidate agrarian reformers. The labor movement in the city also faced harassment by police. Hundreds of students were arrested—creating an unprecedented population of political prisoners in Sinaloa. The state government justified these actions in order to return order to the university and crackdown on instigators. Interestingly, while students previously had accused the state government of neglecting higher education, officials now justified involvement in the student conflict on the grounds of protecting the sanctity of the university.

²⁸⁵ Castellanos, *México armado*, 195.

In this context, Rafael Santos Cenobio observed, “university students embraced the petitions of poverty-stricken classes, and defended their causes unconditionally.”²⁸⁶ The explosion of simultaneous civic and radical movements set the foundation for cross-class alliances, and the participation of students in the strikes and land invasions to regain peasant lands. Sergio Arturo Sánchez Parra went even further, noting that student demands for self-government had been replaced with talk of “revolution, revolutionary violence, death to the bourgeoisie and the state, [and] guerrillas.”²⁸⁷ The radical wing of the FEUS took up the name the Enfermos in favor to distinguish themselves from the petty-bourgeois reformists in the student movement. By the spring of 1972, land seizures and bus strikes coupled with the student rebellion had transformed Culiacán into a battlefield. In the April and edition of the student newspaper, *Caminemos*, the Enfermos published a new political program calling for the unification of students and popular groups in a single front. Given that the struggles of peasants, workers, and students were intertwined, revolutionaries believed it made more sense to join forces and build a larger movement strong enough to shake the state apparatus.²⁸⁸ Going from being a student rebellion to a popular struggle appeared plausible given the positive track record between all three social groups. But this manifesto soon revealed fault lines within the FEUS. Groups like the *chemones* believed that taking on a revolutionary stance was counter-productive since it would only trigger more repression not only against students but now the entire population. Trying to forge an alliance with other social groups under these

²⁸⁶ Santo Cenobio, *El Movimiento Estudiantil en la UAS (1966-1972)*, 89

²⁸⁷ Sergio Arturo Sánchez Parra, Political Violence in Sinaloa: The Case of the “Enfermos” 1972-1978 (Places and Means for the Radicalization), *Rhela*, 11 (2008): 210.

²⁸⁸ *Caminemos*, No.7, abril de 1972 cited in Sánchez Parra, Political Violence in Sinaloa

circumstances was irresponsible because it would be too difficult to coordinate their diverse goals.

While the Enfermos participated in raising revolutionary consciousness on the streets, they never retreated from their ultimate goal of transforming the university into a “popular” space. Yet there was still an absence of a concrete political line that “organically” linked the student movement with broader popular struggles, until July 1972. That month the coordinating commission of the FEUS, largely controlled by the revolutionaries, presented the most controversial and at the same time fundamentally significant documents that would epitomize the ideology of the urban guerrilla experience. The *tesis de la universidad-fábrica* was the revolutionary-lefts description of the situation in the universities in which it used a Gramscian as well as traditional Marxist approach to understanding the university as factory producing the dominant culture. According to the *tesis* it was necessary to “sabotage” the production of the bourgeoisie’s culture.²⁸⁹ In essence it declared war on cultural hegemony and the ruling party’s official propaganda, which upheld a false consciousness in which subordinate groups were made to believe they were actually a part of national development and that elites as well as the ruling party respected a popular version of Mexican history. From this document we are given a different perspective into how students interpreted what the revolutionary war against the state. It concludes that an intellectual war is as much needed as a class war to eradicate tinges of the previous state apparatus.

The *tesis* also touched on the issue of class struggle, though this part tended to be the most controversial. According to its premise, the student and the proletariat are both

²⁸⁹ Tecla Jiménez, *Universidad, burguesía y proletariado*, 18.

producers because each sold their labor in different respects. Because the state from an early period transformed the university into “knowledge factories” and used students to “effectively work to perpetuate the system,”²⁹⁰ students compared the way they were being exploited to worker exploitation. According to the third and fifth principles of the thesis, the “means of production constitute buildings, laboratories, and fieldwork” in which students and teachers are the working-force that use these resources to produce their knowledge. That being so, “both the teacher and the student are considered workers.”²⁹¹ Therefore, by 1973 it became common for students to adopt the student-proletarian moniker as a new identity that linked the student led armed struggles with the plight of workers and peasants. But while this was an innovative and creative manner of drawing connections between students and workers, the *tesis* can under fire by both sides of political spectrum and the revolutionary left. According to Condés Lara, former member of the MIRE, the theoretical claims delineated in the document are “unconvincing and farcical.” The basis of his disagreement is based on the notion that students once again believed they shared the same dilemmas as their parents, when in fact many lived modest lives before going underground. Second, it was unconvincing because students were not a social class, thus class struggle did not apply to them. Yet, despite these critiques and a wide-range of others, the ideas posited in the thesis galvanized students to embrace their social backgrounds and prompt others to rethink their political passivity and their understanding of the university.

²⁹⁰ Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism after the Revolution*, 131.

²⁹¹ Tecla Jiménez, *Universidad, burguesía y proletariado*, 26.

Within this context and functioning in a semi-clandestine manner the Enfermos took the initiative to incite popular groups revolutionary spirit by coordinating demonstrations and participating in land seizures alongside peasants and poor urban families searching for housing. Between 1972 and 1973 two other salient communiqués “El que hacer en el movimiento estudiantil” and the “Definición de la Universidad”²⁹² added to the debate concerning the university-factory, and were distributed during rallies. They also participated in the public transportation driver strike to protest working conditions and also expressed solidarity with urban residents upset by state-mandated increases in bus fares. A bus strike in October 1972 offered the Enfermos an opportunity for coming out victorious and attracting many students who had previously wavered in joining the militants. Given the Enfermos presence, the government once again responded with unwavering repression against students, but in the midst of all the chaos also inflicted harm on defenseless bus drivers. Government repression affected the entire student-left but not everyone saw it as unwarranted. Student empathetic to the violence against revolutionaries clamored for accountability and denounced the excessive use of force by the police. Despite disagreeing with the Enfermos’ methods of challenging social and political authority, student power and camaraderie compelled the leftists to demand the safe return of their peers.

The violence on the streets and the university finally pushed the Enfermos underground in October 1972. Though by this time the Enfermos' movement reverberated across the country and garnered immense veneration and helping forge a potential alliance with student revolutionaries in the city of Monterrey. Students at the

²⁹² Tecla Jiménez, *Universidad, burguesía y proletariado*, 25.

Autonomous University of Nuevo León, had been active since mid-1971. Ramos Zavala led the majority of the movement against the local governments authoritarian actions against students. As student militancy grew throughout the country Ramos Zavala more than anyone pushed for the need to create a united front to bring together all independent revolutionary groups under one command. Given the similarities in the rise of both student organizations-turned revolutionary, the Procesos believed the Enfermos had the potential of being a powerful guerrilla force. In parallel with revolutionary organizations in other states, the Enfermos developed a radical interpretation of history to support their claims that society was at a critical juncture at the brink of social revolution. Working within established institutions was meaningless. Disenchanted with the traditional student left, the Enfermos went from seeking the radical transformation of Sinaloa to the liberation of the masses through an armed struggle.

From 1972-1973, the Enfermos waged urban guerrilla warfare against the government. The long history of alliances between students and popular groups appeared to initially pay off as workers and peasants continued to support the Enfermos cause. The group set up *comites de lucha* to function as liaisons and propaganda distributors. Going directly to people and students was emblematic of the Enfermos, and they continued to use these brigades to spread their new solution to Mexico's dilemmas. Speaking in a Marxist revolutionary tone, students professed that the revolution was coming and the destruction of the authoritarian state was surely imminent once the revolutionary vanguard was in full operation. Discourses like these were ubiquitous in political rallies and demonstrations, but not necessarily because they were planned. Enfermos regularly

interrupted rallies to spread their message and along the way created a romanticized image of themselves. Students often attended rallies simply in the hopes of catching a glimpse of the revolutionaries “in the flesh and blood.”²⁹³ But not all of the political rallies were triumphant, and on various occasions, police and pro-government thugs summarily forced Enfermos to retreat.

From Mexico City the government watched as local officials lost control of the university and allowed student militancy to get out of hand. Revolutionary actions by the Enfermos were an almost daily occurrence that proved to be a double-edge sword. Rather than joining the movement students began fearing the Enfermos and disassociating themselves with anyone they believed belonged to the group. Many students were forced to break long established friendships. Distrust was rampant as well. Often students refused to chime in conversations where the language was too “subversive” as a precautionary measure to avoid being wrongfully accused of being a revolutionary. When students could no longer take the ongoing violence between government forces and the Enfermos on campus, students turned on the group by demanding the expulsion of all revolutionaries from the UAS.²⁹⁴ The challenge now for the Enfermos was to return credibility to their movement. They first started by diminishing the level of actions they performed. Confrontations occurred less on the campuses and more on the streets. By moving the armed struggle from the university as much as possible and instituting an intellectual war program the Enfermos hoped to alleviate the tensions between non-

²⁹³ AGN, DFS, 100-23-1-72 H-95 L-25.

²⁹⁴ AGN, DFS, 100-23-1-73 H-244 L- 23

activists and them. Little change occurred once this change in policy was instituted but the confrontations on the streets continued to intensify.

Unfortunately, the ongoing split between the moderate student left and those who adhered to revolutionary ideals did tremendous harm to unity within the Mexican student movement. Arturo Guevara Niebla, one-time leader of the 1968 student movement, became one of the most outspoken critics of direct action, and has maintained this position ever since. He denounced the Enfermos, in particular, for compromising the essence of student radicalism and facilitating its “lumpenization.”²⁹⁵ He also characterized the radical faction of the student movement in Sinaloa as “morbid” and argued that despite their intention of working alongside the proletariat in conflicts with landowners and businessmen, they jeopardized the likelihood for change by performing senseless violent acts against property.²⁹⁶ Indeed, by 1973, the Enfermos’ credibility was rapidly dwindling and students either abhorred or tremendously feared the group. Violent confrontations escalated at the UAS, not only between students and officials, but also on students disagreeing with the Enfermos. Interestingly, the majority of critiques against the tactics followed by the Enfermos came from former ‘68ers, who at the UNAM organized assemblies to discuss the state of students disturbances in Sinaloa. As the critiques intensified there was a real feeling the Enfermos were plotting to carrying out selected assassinations against those who were at a variance with their political objectives. At one assembly organized at the UNAM, Salvador Martínez Della Rocca informed attendees that rumor had it the Enfermos were planning to kill him, Guevara

²⁹⁵ Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en las calle*, 80; AGN, DFS, 100-231-73 H-277 L-23

²⁹⁶ Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en las calle*, 84.

Niebla, and another *compañero*.²⁹⁷ The truth of these allegations is debatable, but they carried tremendous importance at the time.

The rise of the Enfermos embodies the ongoing repression against the opposition, the ruling party's failure to amend its relationship with students, and the travesty of Echeverría's populism. Not only did these student-revolutionaries defy the PRI's regional control, but they forced the ruling party to admit to a reality difficult to swallow: regardless of how brutal the 1968 student movement had been and the persecution of students after the fact, student militancy did not dissipate. The hiatus in Mexico City allowed students in the provinces to pick up where their comrades left off and they added their own twist to student radicalism. The notion of being historical actors and shaking the state apparatus was appealing, but had to be done in stages, not precipitously. Therefore, Enfermos and *feroces* sought to focus on regional issues before broadening their political horizons.

The “Ferocious” and the “Vikings”: Guadalajara *Insurgente*

“The FER was created in the barrio. That's the most important thing to know.”²⁹⁸ - Bertha “Tita” Gutiérrez Campos

The FER, whose members were called the *feroces* (ferocious) from their acronym FER, mobilized in response to political conditions at the University of Guadalajara and became one of the most celebrated of Mexico's urban guerrilla movements. The group belonged to a long history of student mobilization at the University of Guadalajara

²⁹⁷ AGN, DFS, 11-4-73 H-2 L-226.

²⁹⁸ Bertha “Tita” Gutiérrez, interview with author.

against authoritarianism, censorship, and administrative corruption. FER particularly sought to counter the machinations of a conservative student group, the FEG, which had dominated the university for a decade, employing PRI-style political tactics to preserve its hegemony over other student organizations.²⁹⁹ Thus, the FER counters the image of students as disconnected from the concerns of the broader society. Not only did they seek to democratize the university before going underground, the group's strong proletarian background allowed it to connect with politically and socially marginalized students. Despite their peaceful intentions, within a year members were forcefully pushed underground through repeated attacks by the Mexican government and FEG. As the FER took up arms, they quickly connected with a street gang called the "Vikings" from the barrio of San Andres. But even with these proletarian credentials, the FER were poorly prepared for the rigors of urban guerrilla warfare and lacking in ideological uniformity, disciplined, membership, and military training.

The battles between FER and FEG were the latest example of a longstanding tension between radicalism and conservatism within the history of Guadalajara. Situated in western Mexico, the state of Jalisco has been dubbed a land of tequila, mariachis, and *mexicanidad*. The growth of the tequila industry in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries led to increasing concentration of landholding, as entrepreneurs sought out high-yielding agricultural land for maguey production.³⁰⁰ Declining living standards forced many small farmers to abandon the land and move to the city in search of work. In 1922, many of these recent migrants launched a tenant revolt that shook Jalisco's political

²⁹⁹ By 1971 the FEG had seventy thousand affiliates. AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-12-1-71 H-80 L-19.

³⁰⁰ Rafael Torres Sánchez, *Revolución y vida cotidiana: Guadalajara, 1914-1934* (México: Galileo, 2001), 67-71.

landscape. On the whole, however, Jalisco's had only an insignificant participation in the Mexican Revolution of 1910.³⁰¹ Indeed, the state was at the center of the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929), a conservative Catholic reaction against revolutionary land reform and anticlericalism.³⁰²

One of the leading *jalisciense* champions of the Mexican Revolution was José Guadalupe Zuno, a young political leader who became governor of the state in 1923 at the age of thirty-four.³⁰³ His political astuteness engrossed him in battles with conservative politicians who defied the Revolution and catered to vestiges of the “former Mexico.” Like many other populist leaders of the 1920s, Zuno built a political base among dispossessed workers and peasants.³⁰⁴ In his first year in office, Zuno signed into law the Ley del Trabajador del Estado de Jalisco to regulate worker-employer relations and guarantee the right to strike.³⁰⁵ Zuno also campaigned for greater educational opportunities for marginalized youth in Jalisco, declaring, “an illiterate *pueblo* would never be free.”³⁰⁶ He argued that the entire state would benefit from the creation of professionals and intellectuals.³⁰⁷ In 1926, he founded the University of Guadalajara and

³⁰¹ María Teresa Fernández Aceves, “Las mujeres graduadas en la universidad de Guadalajara,” in *Historia social de la Universidad de Guadalajara*, ed. Carmen Castañeda (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara/CIESAS, 1995), 101.

³⁰² Fernández Aceves, “Las mujeres graduadas en la universidad de Guadalajara,” 101. For more information on the Cristero War see Jean Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People Between Church and State 1926-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³⁰³ When Obregón ran for president of Mexico the majority of Jalisco favored him over the other aspiring candidate. Zuno was identified as being an *orbregonista jalisciense*, or follower of former general and president Álvaro Obregón. Laura Patricia Romero, *Jalisco desde la Revolución: La consolidación del Estado y los conflictos políticos*, vol. 3 (Guadalajara: Estado de Jalisco/ Universidad de Guadalajara, 1987), 21; José María Muriá, *Breve historia de Jalisco* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994), 156.

³⁰⁴ Tamayo, *Jalisco desde la Revolución*, 192.

³⁰⁵ María Muriá, *Breve historia de Jalisco*, 159.

³⁰⁶ Alma Dorantes, “Los discursos sobre la Universidad de Guadalajara,” in *Historia social de la Universidad de Guadalajara*, 124.

³⁰⁷ Armando Martínez Moya and Manuel Moreno Castañeda, “La escuela de la revolución,” in *Jalisco*

the Polytechnic School to bring together students from diverse social-economic backgrounds and introduce them to new forms of thinking and instill a sense of moral purpose.³⁰⁸ Between new educational opportunities and agrarian and workplace reforms, Zuno allowed marginalized citizens of Jalisco to move up the social and economic ladder.

While the U of G appeared to embody the egalitarian vision of the Revolution, students quickly discovered that they would have to fight for political agency. Both politicians like Zuno and university administrators feared the consequences of allowing students to engage in politics during their studies and restricted their activities. A faction of the small student body at the U of G refused to abide to these limitations, and within a year after the university's inauguration, they demanded autonomy under the auspice of the Confederación de Estudiantes de Jalisco (Confederation of Students from Jalisco, CEJ). The group quickly splintered when law students walked out, and as a result, the campaign for autonomy initially failed.³⁰⁹ But the goal of autonomy resurfaced a decade later during the struggles over socialist education.³¹⁰ This time, students had a powerful ally in President Cárdenas, who encouraged the formation of student organizations and entrusted them with the task of assuring the implementation of a popular education. This political responsibility served to radicalize factions of the student population, while putting students from privileged backgrounds in contact with more marginalized youth. In Jalisco, the Federación de Estudiantes Socialistas de Occidente (Federation of Socialist

desde la revolución, vol. 7, ed. Mario Alfonso Aldana Rendón (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1988), 164.

³⁰⁸ Fernández Aceves, "Las mujeres graduadas en la universidad de Guadalajara," 103.

³⁰⁹ Alma Dorantes, *El conflicto universitario en Guadalajara, 1933-1937* (Guadalajara: Secretaría de Cultura/INAH, 1993), 57.

³¹⁰ Laura Patricia Romero, "Los sectores medios universitarios y la política en Guadalajara," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 53, 2 (Apr.-Jun., 1991), 209.

Students from the West, FESO), became the leading force in support of Cárdenas's program of corporatism and educational reform. During its heyday the FESO was a major influence at the U of G, upholding a progressive curriculum and overseeing the institutionalization of socialist education, even using force when necessary.³¹¹

Cardenista efforts to enfranchise workers and peasants through a corporatist state would eventually prove a hindrance to democratic government as his successors moved politically rightward. Socialist education was repealed in 1946 with the "pretext that foreign ideologies have no place in the university."³¹² Even before that time, many prominent citizens withdrew their children from the U of G and founded a rival Autonomous University of Guadalajara (UAG) to promote their Catholic, conservative ideals.³¹³ After 1950, even the political landscape at the U of G was transformed as powerful families sought to infiltrate the campus by funding pro-government student groups and by transforming the curriculum into a mouthpiece for the state's official propaganda. Therefore, when student-revolutionaries surfaced in the seventies, eradicating the ruling party's control of the university initially had precedence over the armed struggle. Although the effectiveness of Cárdenas's efforts to create a "revolutionary new man" are debatable, this ideal would be revived in the 1970s by students seeking to forge a collective identity based on past instances of student militancy.

³¹¹ Dorantes, *El conflicto universitario en Guadalajara, 1933-1937*, 252.

³¹² Tecla Jiménez, *Universidad, burguesía y proletariado*, 10-11. See also Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics and in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

³¹³ Romero, "Los sectores medios universitarios y la política en Guadalajara," 209.

Conservative attempts to eradicate the remains of Cardenismo from the U of G focused in particular the student organization, FESO. By the early 1950s, the group was on the verge of political irrelevancy as its membership plummeted and policies ossified. Nevertheless, the FESO continued to resist the ruling party's unwillingness to support popular education and its policies in favor of big business that served to marginalize the lower classes. The PRI responded by maintaining that national unity was still a top priority, but that student groups such as FESO were not in unison with the ruling party's goal of economic development and were purposefully destabilizing the university campus.³¹⁴ According to the PRI, the university's one and only function was to support initiatives that coincide with the political and economic circumstances at the moment. Because economic growth had replaced social reforms, the ruling party expected the student groups it helped create would be supportive of these new directions.³¹⁵

With the growth of anti-communist rhetoric in the mid-1950s, the ruling party became increasingly fixated on eradicating student groups with socialist inclinations such as FESO.³¹⁶ The first signs of this anti-democratic tendency appeared in the mid-fifties as student radicals and leftist leanings groups came under fire for advocating "foreign ideas." Student leaders correctly perceived these charges as a threat to intellectual freedom and an attempt to censor the curriculum. Nevertheless, university administrators, whether or not they sympathized with radical groups, were pressured by political

³¹⁴ Alfredo Mendoza Cornejo, *Organizaciones y movimientos estudiantiles en Jalisco de 1963-1970* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1994), 11.

³¹⁵ See Howard Handleman, *Mexican politics: The Dynamics of Change* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); and Alex M. Saragoza, *The Monterrey Elite and the Mexican State, 1880-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988).

³¹⁶ Alfredo Mendoza Cornejo, *Organizaciones y movimientos estudiantiles en Jalisco, 1948 a 1954*, vol.3 (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1992), 11.

authorities to turn a blind eye to violations of academic integrity or risk losing their positions.³¹⁷

The FEG and the Competition for the University

The creation in 1949 of a rival student group, FEG, formed a second front in the PRI's efforts to control the University of Guadalajara. Founded by Carlos Ramírez Ladewig, FEG was intimately connected to powerful political families in Guadalajara. Ramírez Ladewig's father, Margarito, had served as interim governor of Jalisco from 1927 to 1929 and was José Guadalupe Zuno's foremost political rival. Both men maintained influential political networks, or *camarillas*, within the ruling party. Ramírez Ladewig had been a rising force within the FESO, holding the post of secretary in 1948, before splitting with the group.³¹⁸ Ostensibly motivated by revolutionary and anti-imperialist ideals, the FEG became an interest group for Guadalajara's elite and, in the words of FER activists, "faithfully" aligned itself to the "revolutionary ideology of the bourgeois state."³¹⁹ The FEG gave the impression that it represented all social groups within the university and soon began acting as a liaison between students and university administrators. Ladewig considered himself an admirer of the Mexican Revolution, sympathized with progressive ideas, and committed to upholding popular education, yet

³¹⁷ Manuel Mora, "En la búsqueda por la democracia: La participación en la ciudad desde el protagonismo de los jóvenes," in *La democracia de los de abajo en Jalisco*, ed., Morge Alonso and Juan Manuel Ramírez (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1996), 311-316.

³¹⁸ Hermenegildo Olguín Reza, *Las horas del diluvio: A la sombra del árbol y lejos* (Guadalajara : La casa de los cuentos del mago ciego tallador de vidrios, 1995), 14.

³¹⁹ Donald Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism after the Revolution*, 133; Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligenica en México* (México D.F.: Grijalbo, 2001), 51; Quote from FER, "La política de la FEG contra el proletariado estudiantil en Guadalajara," Mandeville Special Collections Library, UC-San Diego, Reel 3 Folder 2, 2. On the CNED, see AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-16-1-67 H-15 L-8.

his ideas were informed by the ruling party's revolutionary nationalism, a concept in which the state controlled what was revolutionary and anti-state. Therefore, he constructed the ideology of the FEG to fit a state-definition of revolutionary.

By the early 1960s, with support from the PRI, FEG had achieved dominance within student politics at the U of G. A number of groups sought to challenge the FEG, including moderates such as the *Asociación de Estudiantes Técnicos* (Technical Students Association), or the *Federación de Estudiantes Católicos Universitarios* (Federation of University Catholic Students), as well as the more radical *Juventud Comunista de Guadalajara* (Communist Youth of Guadalajara) and *Federación Revolucionaria de Estudiantes Unidos* (United Revolutionary Federation of Students). The FEG, like their national political sponsors, met these challenges with a combination of stick and carrot, coopting rival student leaders and violently repressing those who refused to join.³²⁰ The group also began extending its power into high schools and preparatory schools throughout the city. From a young age students were exposed to political violence on their campuses and grew up either loathing the FEG or joining its ranks. Ladwig Ramirez regularly met with ruling party officials and local politicians to discuss the state of Jalisco's education system. In these meetings he embellished the predicaments facing the university and requested the state continue investing in the group and in exchange the FEG would see that student disturbances were contained or eliminated. His father responded favorably to Ladwig Ramirez's requests by funneling money into the group, supporting the ideological training of FEG militants, and inconspicuously infiltrating the university's administrative body by assigning positions of power to loyalists. From the

³²⁰ Mendoza Cornejo, *Organizaciones y movimientos estudiantiles en Jalisco de 1963-1970*, 9.

presidential residence of *Los Pinos*, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz applauded the partnership forged by both sides and exalted their initiatives to create a “safe and comfortable space” for students to demonstrate their intellectual capacities.³²¹

The value of the FEG to the ruling party became particularly evident in 1968 as the student movement gained force in Mexico City. As the movement began to take shape that summer, students at the U of G were largely detached from events in Mexico City, and the *Fegistas* launched a belligerent offensive to prevent the contagion of student radicalism from spreading to Guadalajara.³²² When student leaders from Mexico City dispatched brigades to the provincial university, their liaisons were violently besieged by awaiting *fegistas*.³²³ Likewise, students at the U of G who manifested their solidarity with 68ers encountered similar consequences. The repression of 68ers and sympathizers spoke to the severity of the ongoing political, social, and cultural crisis at the U of G. Censorship percolated into traditionally leftist departments judged to be safe spaces for radicals, and political violence reached its apogee when *fegistas* expanded to murdering students considered viable threats.³²⁴ As the Olympics approached in late summer and the government became increasingly concerned about public order, military commanders in Guadalajara issued machine guns to *fegistas* in order to crack down on any potential

³²¹ *Los Pinos* (The Pines) is the name given to the President’s official residence. DFS, AGN, 100-18-29-966 H-168 L-15.

³²² Castellanos, *Mexico Armado, 1943-1981*, 197; The Department of Philosophy and Letters was the only school in solidarity with the 1968 student movement. Sergio Rene Dios Corona, *La historia que no pudieron borrar: La guerra sucia en Jalisco, 1970-85*, (Guadalajara: La Casa del Mago, 2004), 54.

³²³ See Renato Flores’ testimony in Castellanos, *Mexico Armado, 1943-1981*, 197 and Gil Olivo, “Origenes de la guerrilla en Guadalajara en al decada de los setenta,” 551, and Carlos Sepúlveda Luna, *Diez*. no. 31 (Dec. 1989) cited in Angulo, *La hora de los mártires*, 19.

³²⁴ Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism after the Revolution*, 128.

student disobedience.³²⁵ The group's effectiveness in impeding the opposition was complemented by its talent in persuading students in believing communist tendencies were menacing their civil liberties and education.³²⁶ A FEG leader, in turn, published an article in Guadalajara's *El Sol*, claiming to speak on behalf of students from high schools, preparatory schools, and trade schools, requesting the President to use force to eliminate the student rebellion.³²⁷ Following the massacre at Tlatelolco on October 2, the FEG manifested unconditional support for Diaz Ordaz and hailed the actions taken by the military.³²⁸

Youth Radicalism and the *Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario* of Guadalajara

Although FEG had managed to control the U of G for a decade, its actions in 1968 provoked a rise in student militancy and demands for democracy, leading to the creation of the FER in 1970. Hundreds of students were involved in violent clashes to regain control of the university from the FEG.³²⁹ According to Aguayo Quezada, it was inconceivable to think that in the seventies Guadalajara would become an revolutionary stronghold and center of political violence. The image of the city as “placid and beautiful” was seriously compromised by the wave of assassinations, disappearances,

³²⁵ FEMOSPP, “La guerrilla se extiende por todo el país,” (2001): 2.

³²⁶ Professors participated in the monitoring, often times reporting to administrators the presence of radical leftists in their classrooms. Instructors were also obliged to turn-in their own colleagues.

³²⁷ AGN, DFS Exp. 100-12-1-968 H-334 L-15.

³²⁸ Castellanos, *México Armado, 1943-1981*, 197. According to Palacios Rivera, a former member of the Mexican Communist Party, following his first incarceration in the wake of the massacre he was detained every week only because the police were curious. See Dios Corona, *La historia que no pudieron borrar*, 47.

³²⁹ Antonio Orozco Michel, interview with author, July 2008, tape recording, Guadalajara, Jalisco; Miguel Topete, interview with author, July 2008, tape recording and notes, Guadalajara, Jalisco. By 1971 the FEG had seventy thousand affiliates. AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-12-1-71 H-80 L-19.

assaults, revolutionary violence, and more importantly put into question the ruling party's domination over the provinces.³³⁰ Unlike Sinaloa, in Guadalajara the tradition of rebellion was not so well defined and only manifested itself in small spurs. Frankly, political strife was concentrated in the universities and out of the public's view. Because residents had little experienced with political violence compared to other regions, there was little cause for concern when confrontations between opposing student groups escalated. Initially rather than taking sides during student conflicts, the majority of society simply participated as observers.

Fed-up with the brutality, the lack of academic freedom, and a curriculum that served largely as propaganda for the ruling party, a number of leaders who would later form the backbone of the FER began meeting. Activists within the schools of Philosophy and Letters, Economics, and Law—all JC strongholds—were determined to form a single bloc to free the U of G from FEG control.³³¹ One of the initial leaders of this inchoate opposition was Andrés Zuno, youngest son of Guadalupe Zuno. The scion of such a distinguished political family offered the student opposition enormous political capital, a tool they would need if they were going fight the FEG on different fronts. Though hardliners within the FER were leery about working with someone directly connected to the political class and they constantly distrusted Zuno Jr.'s political ambitions.³³² Nevertheless, the group accepted him and went forward with the plan. Secretly gathering on and off campus, militants addressed the crisis at the U of G, while also analyzing

³³⁰ Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, 145. The author also affirms this facilitated the arrival of the “señores de la droga.”

³³¹ Jaime López, *10 años de guerrillas en México, 1964-1974* (México: Editorial Posada S.A., D.F., 1974), 95.

³³² Antonio Michel Orzoco, interview with author.

mistakes made by the Mexico City student movement, including the 68er's failure to mobilize proletarian youth.³³³ The group also debated the use of violence, deciding to carry weapons, but only for self-defense, since they anticipated confrontations with *fegistas* once they went public.³³⁴

The relatively unfavorable historical track record of student-worker alliances in Mexico demonstrates the leeriness of Mexican youth displayed by the proletariat and peasantry. The FER sought new ways to organize the masses by building on the methods of previous popular political mobilizations and armed struggles. Recognizing that their status as students immediately created a social barrier between them and the working classes, they felt the need to “authenticate” their struggle. The FER worked to find schemes to facilitate the radicalization of workers and peasants, proving they all shared a common plight. Against these odds the FER sought to ease the politicization of popular groups by first recruiting proletariat youth in order to gain a foothold in working-class communities. This strategy would have a twofold outcome: it forged a student-proletarian identity amongst militants and garnered the attention of armed revolutionary organizations eager to put into practice the strategies hatched by the FER. While it might appear the situation in Sinaloa established a foundation for the student-proletarian concept, students in Guadalajara despite being detached by what was occurring in Sinaloa best applied the idea before it was actually attributed to the *tesis*. In the end, these contributions to insurgent politics make the FER one of the most celebrated urban

³³³ See Gilberto Guevara Niebla, *1968 largo camino a la democracia*, 69; Esteban Ascencio, ed. 1968: *Más alla del mito* (Mexico D.F.: Ediciones Milenio, 1998).

³³⁴ Topete, interview by author.

guerrilla movements amongst former revolutionaries and according to one ex-revolutionary, “a phenomenon.”³³⁵

Therefore, recruiting and indoctrinating proletarian youth took priority over organizing workers. Leaders divided the FER into two branches. One was responsible for organizing in the university, the other in charge of recruiting in proletarian neighborhoods.³³⁶ The group working within the university initially focused on family, friends, and other close associates of the founders. The notion was that a collective identity would bring cohesion to the group and help overcome fear of FEG thugs.³³⁷ Meanwhile, in looking beyond the university, FER leaders turned to the barrios and *colonias populares*, former villages that had been engulfed by urban sprawl during the so-called Mexican miracle. These included Tlaquepaque, Analco, San Onofre, Chapalita, Del Fresno, Oblatos, Tetlán Río Verde, Lomas de Polanco, Cruz del Sur, Santa Tere, la Unidad, among other communities. While in the social imaginary of the urban guerrilla these neighborhoods embodied the FER, one stands uncontested as the most esteemed, the barrio San Andrés.³³⁸

By raising consciousness in the barrio, revolutionaries anticipated their political program for radical change would be taken seriously if they drew a clear linkage between the plights of workers, peasants, with those of students. Members of the FER lodged the argument that because politicians were not working-class or peasants, they were unsympathetic to issues plaguing proletarian and rural communities, yet they were

³³⁵ José Luis Esparza, interview by author, March 2010, Tape recording, Mexico City.

³³⁶ Dios Corona, *La historia que no pudieron borrar*, 57; Bertha Lilia Gutiérrez, interview with author.

³³⁷ Bertha “Tita” Gutiérrez, interview with author.

³³⁸ FEMOSPP, “La guerrilla se extiende por todo el país,” (2001): 3.

making decisions affecting their daily lives.³³⁹ Though, before this cross-class alliance could materialize *feroces* had to authenticate their student-proletarian identity. Therefore, recruiting and indoctrinating proletarian youth became a prerequisite ahead of organizing workers. Leaders, thus, divided the FER into two branches. One was responsible for organizing in the university, the other in charge of recruiting in proletarian neighborhoods.³⁴⁰ Like their peers in Sinaloa, the FER wanted to be more than a simple student group only out to improve their own social group's political dilemmas. Student activism was limited and need to expand its horizons by interlinking their demands with broader social issues. Leaders believed barrio youth were genuine revolutionaries who merely required ideological orientation but would provide *feroces* with an "authentic" lens into proletarian life.³⁴¹

Rebellion in the Barrios

"Being young and not revolutionary is a biological contradiction." – Salvador Allende

Located in the eastern part of Guadalajara, San Andrés was a traditionally proletarian community founded in the early part of the twentieth century. Migrants hoping to take advantage of the economic boom and the rapid industrialization built it from the ground up. Thousands of men traveled from the countryside to the cities in search of work and a better life, and when conditions permitted, their families followed them to the city. While many prospered, the city lacked the infrastructure to accommodate the influx of workers. As a result, immigrants had to build their own

³³⁹ Michel Orozco, interview with author.

³⁴⁰ Dios Corona, *La historia que no pudieron borrar*, 57; Bertha Lilia Gutiérrez, interview with author.

³⁴¹ Angulo, *La Hora de los Mártires*, 19.

houses on the fringes of the city. As Guadalajara's infrastructure underwent a comprehensive upgrade at midcentury, the surrounding barrios did not share in the city's improvement program, paving the way for their subsequent alienation. Thus, the surroundings acted as a "laboratory for the radicalization of youth."³⁴²

One group that provided a core of support for the FER was a barrio gang from San Andrés called the *Vikingos* (Vikings). Youth took the moniker in the early 1960s to symbolize their loyalty to their barrio. Beyond its geographic connotation youth who identified as Vikings appropriated the rebellious identity attached to the name. According to Sergio Aguayo Quezada, a close associate of the *Vikingos*, these youth derived their radicalization in the 1960s not only from economic deprivation "but more likely a sense of irrelevance that characterized the decade."³⁴³ Gangs provided a space for building solidarity around a common identity. Antonio Orozco Michel, a former *feroz*, recalls that in gangs, youngsters quickly realized they shared the same aspirations, shortcomings, and lack of alternatives as their peers.³⁴⁴ From language to clothing, working-class culture was fundamental to the construction of a counter-identity against the ruling party's hegemonic ideal of *Mexicandad*. While upper-class youth made every effort to distinguish themselves from *los lumpenes* (the lumpens), proletarian youth often strove to preserve their barrio identity, even when they had educational opportunities. Doing so had risks, however, because outside the barrio, politicians and law enforcement categorized the group as a gang of delinquents, apolitical, and perpetrators of

³⁴² See "Documentos del Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario (FER)" AGN, DFS, 100-12-1-70 H-325 L-17; "Ha muerto otro Gran Camilo" Carta del FER, personal document.

³⁴³ Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, 157.

³⁴⁴ Orozco Michel, *La fuga de Oblatos*, 41.

indiscriminate violence fueled by “class resentment.”³⁴⁵ Likewise, the Vikings’ gangster-like behavior encouraged the criminalization of barrio youth. Law enforcement rarely entered San Andrés but outside its borders *Vikingos* faced daily discrimination. Police routinely victimized students on the streets, leading to a number of isolated skirmishes and arrests. Incidents like these only strengthened prejudices against barrio communities, and encouraged unaligned youth to join the Vikings.³⁴⁶

Even before establishing a presence in schools and the U of G, the Vikings performed their own style of resistance against the local and federal government by protecting their communities, through acts of vandalism, petty crimes, and territorial protection. These actions were often counterproductive and served to keep out federal and local officials—further marginalizing disadvantaged communities. While Vikings were not apolitical, their socio-economic background and reputation for being unruly impeded their political ambitions. In the absence of any political organizations willing to take the Vikings under their wing, militants sought to build a reputable name for themselves in the realm of student politics by establishing a presence in preparatory schools, high schools, and eventually the U of G.³⁴⁷ Given that it was typical *Vikingos* would be attend preparatory schools affiliated to the U of G, also meant they were politically controlled by the FEG.³⁴⁸ As the group became increasingly politicized through daily student life, many Vikings transformed into dynamic political actors in youth struggles at preparatory schools as well as U of G and “wished to study and

³⁴⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-12-1-71 H- 81 L-19.

³⁴⁶ Bertha Lila Gutiérrez, interview by author, Guadalajara, July 2008.

³⁴⁷ Lucio Rangel Hernández, *La Universidad Michoacana y el Movimiento Estudiantil 1966-1986* (Morelia: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 2009), 65.

³⁴⁸ Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, 158.

continue participating in politics.”³⁴⁹ As a result of their political activism, Vikings began to challenge the FEG directly, and based on their rough street life, they were ready for the confrontations. Taking note of the street fights between Vikings and *Fegistas*, members of the FER decided to approach the former both as a potential ally and as a link to other barrio youth.

The alliance, forged in the mid-1971 proved a fortuitous one for both sides, complementing the strengths of the two organizations. Although lacking a common ideology, the Vikings and *feroces* shared an abhorrence of authority, elitism, and particularly the FEG. The Vikings supplied the FER with militants and a foothold in the barrio, while *feroces* reciprocated with ideological training. While not every Viking joined the FER, the political program professed by *feroces* attracted the more politicized members of the Vikings, who immediately joined the FER.³⁵⁰ Together, they had begun a program to radicalize the barrios by late November 1970. The campaign was meant not only to unite students against the FEG, but to also raise consciousness. Members of the FER initially carried out meetings and discussions with barrio youth, though prominent Vikings also demonstrated political astuteness in leading discussions on various topics related to the social and political issues.³⁵¹ Vikings and *feroces* encouraged their comrades to take a more proactive role in their daily political lives and demonstrate to society students could also be involved social actors.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 158. Accurate numbers are hard to come by, and interviewees were unclear exactly how many were politically active. “Many” seemed to be the common response.

³⁵⁰ Topete, interview with author.

³⁵¹ Michel Orozco, interview by author.

Indoctrination proved to be another challenge for militants. Initially, Andrés Zuno volunteered to oversee the theoretical education of the Vikings through regular sessions on Marxist theory and the principles of organizing.³⁵² His most successful student, Arnuflo Prado Rosas “El Compa,” a longtime resident of San Andrés who was lionized for his dedication to the barrio, and eventually became a leading member of the FER.³⁵³ Armando Rentería was another leader in the campaign to educate barrio youth, and he spearheaded the creation of more than 80 *comités de barrio* (barrio committees), some of them made up entirely of women.³⁵⁴ The *feroces* presence in the San Andrés barrio was unquestionable. The group had succeeded in winning a large number of barrio youth in addition to other students at the U of G and its affiliated schools. But besides networking with barrio youth in San Andrés, with the help of the Vikings’, the FER expanded into other barrios around Guadalajara. According to Ramón Gil Olivio, “the Vikings’ barrio origins was key” to the FER because they were able to obtain “paper and medicine on the black market.”³⁵⁵ In geopolitical terms, the barrio was also a “safe space” since even the police dared not venture inside, and the FEG knew they would be walloped on the Vikings’ home turf.

While a branch of the FER was busy organizing barrio youth, the other group continued with the counterhegemonic struggle at the U of G, thereby challenging the ruling party’s official propaganda.³⁵⁶ With a workable political-line that united students

³⁵² Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, 160.

³⁵³ Angulo, *La hora de los mártires: Apuntes para al historia del movimiento estudiantil y guerrillero en Guadalajara, 1970-1977*, 18.

³⁵⁴ Laura Castellanos, “Cuando los Vikingos se hicieron feroces,” *La Jornada* (online), <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2003/12/07/mas-laura.html> (accessed March 18, 2009).

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁶ Topete, interview by author; Gutiérrez, interview by author.

across class boundaries and that embraced the struggle to regain control of universities, the FER garnered the attention of student groups across the country, although that also brought them to the attention of federal and local authorities.³⁵⁷ Following the ideas of Gramsci, revolutionaries understood their struggle as a joint military campaign and intellectual war against the ruling elite. Urban guerrillas represented the new wave of radical intelligentsia who sought to become an active voice and avenue for workers and peasants to channel their needs and build alongside students a strong revolutionary front against the state. While not all militants were on the same intellectual level, leaders were very clear in their manifestos and discourses that the battle to overthrow the State also needed to be a war of ideas.³⁵⁸ Once the subaltern classes expropriated the university, they would be able to reclaim other spaces as well, facilitating the complete eradication of elitist culture. In struggling to regain control of the university the FER sought to inculcate counter-hegemonic ideas into the minds of potential militants, and enlist students in the struggle. It is not coincidental that frontal battles against police and secret service agents mushroomed in universities and preparatory schools around the country. Declassified police documents unveil a number of disturbances caused by the infiltration of the local police and counterinsurgency units on campuses and student-related rallies.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-14-1-70 H-247.

³⁵⁸ AGN, DFS, 11-239-73 H-1 L; *Madera* no. 3 (1974): 27, 74-76.

³⁵⁹ AGN, DFS, 100-23-1-73 H-237 L-23; AGN, DGIPS, caja 2731, Estado de Sinaloa, Información de El Fuerte, 11 Septiembre de 1974, 39; AGN, DFS 100-231-73 H-277 L-23, A number of columns were published in the local newspaper *El Sol de Sinaloa* published by the *Consejo Universitario Paritario* of the Autonomus University of Sinaloa blaming *Los Enfermos*, which were going through a process of “lumpenization” for the “bloody deeds” occurred a week ago at the University.

Indeed, according to former *feroces*, the U of G had been transformed into a center of political power in the service of the state and was overrun by PRI loyalists.³⁶⁰

The FER went public and launched its first major assault to regain control of the university in September 1970 with an attack on student housing, which had been overrun by “free loaders.”³⁶¹ At approximately 3 o'clock in the morning, the FER activists entered the student-housing complex at the U of G, killing no one but beating a number of residents.³⁶² At this time, Zuno, the official spokesmen for the action, informed the press about the creation of the FER.³⁶³ As a representative he revealed “the free students had decided to take over the student residency in order to drive out the gangsters and vandals who occupied the building” (meaning supporters of the FEG).³⁶⁴ During the operation the Vikings proved to be an indispensable asset by carrying out most of the dangerous actions. From within the housing complex, the FER outlined their demands for the democratization of the university, the expulsion of the FEG, the prosecution of *Fegistas* responsible for crimes against students, and the guarantee of public education to all young people. University administrators responded to the takeover by ordering police to surround the complex and forcefully remove the protesters. *Feroces* retreated without any major incident but many unaffiliated students saw this attack on the FEG as a heroic deed. Thus, the FER awakened a dormant student left, though in doing so, they triggered

³⁶⁰ Ramon Gil Olivo, “Origenes de la guerrilla en Guadalajara en al decada de los setenta,” in *Movimientos Armados en Mexico, siglo XX*, ed. Veronica Oikion Solano and Marta Eugenia Garcia Ugarte (Michoacán: Colegio de Michoacán, 2006), 551.

³⁶¹ Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism after the Revolution*, 133.

³⁶² Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, 162.

³⁶³ AGN, DFS, 100-12-1-70 H-149 L-17.

³⁶⁴ Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, 161.

further political repression on the campus of the U of G, in preparatory schools, and on the streets of Guadalajara.

The FEG responded to this provocation in its typical violent fashion and soon the two organizations were engaged in a bloody struggle for control of the university. Days after the takeover, *feroces* coordinated rallies in departments throughout the U of G to promote the newly founded student group and explain its intentions. The rallies attracted hundreds of curious students and created quite a commotion for administrators. Half way through the rally, a contingent of *fegistas* burst onto the scene with guns blazing. The *feroces* returned fire, and FEG leader Fernando Medina Lúa was shot and later died from his wounds.³⁶⁵ Unaccustomed to such armed resistance, *Fegistas* retaliated with a vengeance to Medina Lúa's death by attacking a gathering organized by the FER at a Vocational School. Led by their new president, Manuel Delgado, a squadron of *Fegistas* disrupted the congregation by firing into the crowd. The ambush left two members of the FER dead: Barolo Suárez Torres and Francisco Villagómez Miramontes, the first official casualties in the war.³⁶⁶

With a civil war erupting on the campus, administrators U of G along with ruling party officials in Guadalajara and Mexico City sought to contain the bleak situation. Even before the FEG carried out an orchestrated attack on members of the FER, the local government was already in the process of foster a bad image of the group. Because students from the U of G with communist tendencies formed the FER, the local

³⁶⁵ Orozco Michel, *La fuga de Oblatos*, 47.

³⁶⁶ Dios Corona, *La historia que no pudieron borrar: La guerra sucia en Jalisco, 1970-85*, 59.

government immediately presumed the group was ideologically militaristic.³⁶⁷ The governor of Jalisco denounced the FER as a band of delinquents who were disturbing the peace and creating disorder in schools. Nevertheless, the FER continued its protest actions and propaganda campaign, decrying venality in university politics, demanding academic freedom, a voice in policy making, and denouncing the FEG. In response, the FEG argued that the radical student group embodied a crisis of the Mexican educational system, perverting the minds of defenseless students.³⁶⁸

The FER had now reached a critical point and had to decide whether to escalate the conflict. With the death of two comrades, hardliners within the group argued that self-defense was no longer enough and it was necessary to undertake a full-scale guerrilla war. Zuno argued for a more peaceful approach, yet militants within the group were already suspicious of his intentions. They acknowledged his crucial role in facilitating the organization's growth but were leery about working with someone directly connected to the political class and distrusted his political ambitions. When the FER went underground Zuno refused to follow his comrades. Militants criticized his lack of revolutionary commitment and considered him unable to detach himself from a petty bourgeois lifestyle.³⁶⁹ These militants also believed that the FEG presence was merely a proxy for the PRI, who were the real enemies of the working classes. Besides evaluating their own situation, *feroces* followed the persecution of students in other parts of the country. They watched, read, and discussed how repressive forces aligned to the government were discriminately targeting people of their social category. Many felt it was time to “fight

³⁶⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-2-1-70, H-307-304.

³⁶⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-12-1-71 H- 262 1-19.

³⁶⁹ Antonio Michel Orzoco, interview with author.

back” and demonstrate students were not going to allow state-sponsored violence against their peers or any other activists to continue without resistance.³⁷⁰

Unable to weather local, state, and FEG violence, the FER went underground in 1972. At the time the FER went underground the group had approximately 154 militants, although many refused to become guerrilla fighters.³⁷¹ Police documents indicate that more than 100 other members had already been imprisoned for participating in activities deemed a threat to national security.³⁷² The nucleus headed by Alfredo Campaña López and other members of the JC advocated a comprehensive overhaul of the organization into an urban guerrilla movement.³⁷³ With its substantial student membership, the FER orchestrated various bank robberies, expropriation of arms, and established safe houses throughout the city.³⁷⁴ By 1971 the FER had nine brigades operating in Guadalajara.³⁷⁵ The money and arms that were expropriated helped to fund and support their revolutionary movement, but it was never used for “populist” reasons. Put differently the group did not perform Robin Hood-style actions in the communities. Their idea of revolution was still focused on organizing proletarian youth before actually beginning their insurrection, and they took their time to do so. To continue its growth by radicalizing youth, the FER formed more than seventy cells and dispersed them

³⁷⁰ Miguel Topete, interview with author.

³⁷¹ Ramírez Abundis, “Los setentas: Utopía y ‘guerra sucia’ en Guadalajara,” Anexo 1, 41; Angulo, *La hora de los mártires: Apuntes para al historia del movimiento estudiantil y guerrillero en Guadalajara, 1970-1977*, 18.

³⁷² Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, 170.

³⁷³ Gil Olivo, “Orígenes de la guerrilla en Guadalajara en al década de los setenta,” 558.

³⁷⁴ Dios Corona, *La historia que no pudieron borrar: La guerra sucia en Jalisco, 1970-85*, 64.

³⁷⁵ Angulo, *La hora de los mártires: Apuntes para al historia del movimiento estudiantil y guerrillero en Guadalajara, 1970-1977*, 55.

throughout the city of Guadalajara and its surroundings.³⁷⁶ These cells immersed militants into student circles where they singled out specific persons they thought were likely to sympathize with their new political line. Revolutionaries continued drawing students with their student-proletariat premise while also benefiting from growing discontent on campuses.

A serious blow to the FER's structure occurred that same year when its charismatic rising leader, and Viking, "El Compa" was assassinated in Guadalajara in 1970 by the FEG.³⁷⁷ Police reports concluded a group aligned with the FEG called *Los Gordos* (The Fat Ones) orchestrated the murder of "El Compa."³⁷⁸ His death drew national attention; hundreds of people from around the country attended the funeral. According to one former member of the FER, Benjamín Ramírez Castañeda, "Prado Rosas was a fundamental part of the organization who unified the San Andrés barrio and other student organizations within and outside the U. de G."³⁷⁹ Politically, Prado Rosas' death did little to affect the FEG's tactics, but it did inspire even more Vikings to join the guerrilla struggle. FER members responded to his sudden death by taking over a radio station in Guadalajara and announcing their objectives to the people. In the same message, they called on students to rise against the injustices of the FEG. They followed the broadcast with an English translation to inform the American colony of the city.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁶ Ibid, 558.

³⁷⁷ AGN, DFS, 100-12-1-70 H-113 L18 and AGN, DFS, 100-12-1-70 H-128 L-18.

³⁷⁸ AGN, DFS, 100-12-11 H-119 L-10, H-120, H-124, and H-128. The funeral was delayed as a result of a recommend autopsy. Also, the family was initially unable to pay for the funeral as well as the burial. For a detailed account of the death see José de Jesus Morales Hernández "El Momia," *Memorias de un guerrillero: La guerra sucia del México de los 70's* (Guadalajara: N.p., 2006).

³⁷⁹ Dios Corona, *La historia que no pudieron borrar: La guerra sucia en Jalisco, 1970-85*, 68.

³⁸⁰ AGN, DFS, 100-12-11 H-119 L-10 and H-120. The name of the English-language radio in Guadalajara was *Frecuencia Modulada* HLFM. Following the taking over of the radio station, broadcasters continued to

Finally, in an act of vengeance, the FER killed Javier Agustín García Gariby, a FEG associate and possibly Prado Rosas's assassin.³⁸¹ Because El Compa was a venerated barrio hero and leader, the Vikingos took the death particularly personally. His death took an enormous toll on morale

The *fegistas* realized the gravity of his passing had the potential of sinking the FER into oblivion. In the wake of El Compa's death, Guillermo Gomez Reyes, a prominent figure in the FEG, guaranteed the elimination of the FER.³⁸² Yet the FEG leadership was driven by a measure of its own despair, fearing that the PRI would lose confidence in the group and shift their support to another organization, just as FEG had benefitted from the decline of FESO. Indeed, government officials embarrassed by the uncontrolled violence began abandoning their support for the FEG, who in turn vocalized their discontent toward politicians. One *fegista* even met with members of the state government to provide the names and addresses of their rivals. In an attempt to assure that FER crimes would be at the top of investigators' priority list, the FEG threatened to "personally locate each and every Viking and kill them" if nothing was done immediately.³⁸³

Never losing site of the importance of radicalizing students, the FER created an armed revolutionary organization during a period in Latin America radical history where students were still considered improper agents of revolutionary change. Even though they

receive incessant phone calls from members of the FER threatening to return to the station and hijack airtime. Executives at the radio station condemned the threats and filed an official complaint with the local government—bypassing law enforcement. Nevertheless, there was never an investigation to corroborate the FER were the actual callers.

³⁸¹ Angulo, *La hora de los mártires*, 18.

³⁸² AGN, DFS 100-12-1-71 H- 213 L-19.

³⁸³ AGN, DFS, 100-12-1-70 H- 137 L18.

spoke of emancipation, utopias, and revolutionary change in their communiqués building a strong collective identity was essential and had precedent over any other politico-military maneuver. The group's aspirations of revolution, eradicating social injustices, and emancipate the proletariat from the grasp of the bourgeoisie, led militants to have little empathy towards their enemies. This was especially the case after students felt they were being systematically targeted and killed by the government. Perhaps thinking the PRI was out to eradicate an faction of the student left was an exaggeration, yet daily police records reveal that in Guadalajara security forces were forced to take "certain measures" to ensure the safety of citizens.³⁸⁴ Thus, the *feroces* remained largely on the defensive and weathered repression as best as they could. All of this changed in 1973 when fighters in Guadalajara joined with comrades from other regions to forge a national guerrilla front against PRI authoritarianism.

Attempts at National Unity, The *Liga*

Young friend: Do you feel revolutionary? Do you think the hour is approaching for our people? In that case proceed with seriousness. The revolution is not a game. Cease to laugh. - Julio Cortázar

Student militancy was definitely on the rise by this point, with revolutionary organizations surfacing in almost every state, except in the Yucatan Peninsula. Each group professed to represent the vanguard of the masses, but although urban guerrilla organizations thought in terms of national issues their actions were largely localized.

³⁸⁴ See the entire public versions on the FER available at the AGN. Almost daily reports on the "State of Jalisco" explicitly indicate how security forces were dealing with student militancy. Where there is no evidence to suggest the FER was responsible for a bank robbery, inciting a political demonstration, or provoking a confrontation the DFS appeared to always blame the group for the action.

With the exception of the MAR, whose surviving members had established fronts in Veracruz and Central Mexico, the groups were focused on local issues and failed to reach beyond their home territory. Nevertheless, many recognized that the failure to coordinate was seriously hampering their ability to challenge the government.

Ramos Zavala, of the Monterrey-based Procesos, became the leading force behind a national organization to unite the independent movements under a single umbrella. Between 1972 and 1973, he used his connections within the PCM to begin recruiting members of the FER, Enfermos, Lacandones, and other major urban guerrilla organizations. Once the alliance had been sealed between the Enfermos and the Procesos in the early 1970s, he focused on groups operating in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Chihuahua. In Guadalajara he organized a meeting with Fernando Salinas Mora “El Richard,” a major figure of the FER, in 1972.³⁸⁵ Leaders of the FER contemplated the proposal, but the Campaña brothers opposed the deal, arguing that the chain of command within a single organization had the potential of compromising the FER’s goals. From Guadalajara, Ramos Zavala traveled to Mexico City for discussions with David Jiménez Sarmiento, now leader of the Lacandones, and to Chihuahua, to meet with Diego Lucero, leader of the Guajiros, an organization that included among its members Marcos Razcón, the future Super Barrio, a modern-day working-class cult hero.³⁸⁶ Perhaps because of their small size, the Lacandones and Guajiros were among the first to informally accept the merger, even before the guerrilla summit in Guadalajara in 1973.

³⁸⁵ Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, 173.

³⁸⁶ Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism After the Revolution*, 134-135.

Among the individuals that Ramos Zavala cultivated in his quest for national unity was Ignacio Salas Obregón, a Jesuit-trained member the Professional Student Movement (MEP), a Catholic-political organization based in Monterrey.³⁸⁷ Originally from Aguascalientes and inspired by liberation theology Salas Obregón would become the leading theoretician of the urban guerrilla experience of the 1970s and even a cult hero among some revolutionary circles. Taking the *nom de guerre* “Oseas” after the biblical prophet Hosea, he was revered as one of the most ideologically advanced revolutionaries, but also someone who suffered from paranoia, a condition that would eventually lead to his capture in 1974. Although Ramos Zavala did not live to see it, his dream of a united guerrilla front would soon be achieved. In 1972, he was killed in a confrontation with police and a short time later, Lucero and Genaro Vázquez were also gun down—making this the “grey winter of the guerrilla” in 1972. The loss of two such prominent leaders threatened to cripple the unification initiative because there were few people capable of replacing them. Salas Obregón acted upon the suggestion of another JC cadre, José Angel García Martínez, to meet secretly in the Pantitlán quarter of Mexico City and agreed to fulfill Zavala’s plan for “guerrilla unity.”³⁸⁸ Eventually, leaders of organizations contacted by Ramos Zavala and Lucero elected Salas Obregón as the new leader of the campaign and immediately made plans to hold a secret meeting to complete the merger.

In March 1973, autonomous guerrilla groups from a gamut of political backgrounds met in Guadalajara, a wise choice of location since Mexico City continued

³⁸⁷ Salas Obregón was not a communist but a Hegelian Christian. See Liza Gross, *Handbook of Leftist Guerrilla Groups in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 121.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 135.

to be under close watch by authorities. As a precautionary measure the site of the gathering remained a secret; militants were asked to meet in distinct places, then blindfolded and driven to a clandestine locality, a small house that had been rented by members of FER. The meeting was attended by approximately fifteen to twenty men and women from the MAR, MEP, Procesos, various student organizations from the UNAM, the Lacandones, Los Guajiros, the Enfermos, the FUZ, and Los Macías, which had its roots in the Spartacus Revolutionary Movement and the MIRE.³⁸⁹ The agenda included a comprehensive appraisal of the present revolutionary struggle in Mexico and a discussion of the likelihood of creating a successful uniformed *guerrilla*. But not all militants who were present supported the initiatives. Most agreed with the following goals: the desirability of forming a united front reaching across the nation, the need for alliances with the working-class and peasantry, the importance of recruiting students, and the demand for the release of political prisoners. Many, however, disagreed that the group should specifically target police, soldiers, and co-opted “union bureaucrats.” Waging class war on the streets and the university was one thing, but indiscriminately murdering police officers was seen as excessive, unprincipled, and counterproductive. In the end, a number of members of the FUZ and MAR left the organization.³⁹⁰

The remaining militants, who formed the core of the Liga, adopted a complex structure divided into brigades in order to work efficiently. Concurrently militants were able to gain knowledge of particular traits needed to carry out a revolutionary campaign. This was a fundamental prerequisite so that everybody implicated in the guerrilla

³⁸⁹ FEMOSPP, “La guerrilla se extiende por todo el país,” (2001):31, Dios Corona, *La historia que no pudieron borrar: La guerra sucia en Jalisco, 1970-85*, 72.

³⁹⁰ Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism After the Revolution*, 135-136.

movement recognized the simple rudiments of its organizations and understood how to mobilize themselves in case leaders were killed or detained. The categories included: brigades, cells, a central committee, public relations, and a cell that concentrated entirely on military strategies and planning operations.³⁹¹ The central committee, called “Buró Político,” was in charge of observing the advancement of the movement and also imposed rules, discipline, and indoctrination. Contrasting other guerrilla movements in Mexico, the Liga dedicated itself to aggressive crusades much more violent than previous insurrections during this period. The critical assessments put forward by the urban guerrillas’ epitomize the denunciation of institutions and persons who participated in “bourgeois politics” even if they opposed the Establishment. Unions that sided with the state received equally aggressive criticisms.³⁹² For instance, in November 1975 a small group of militants of the Liga traveled to a demonstration organized by a leftist coalition of peasants, workers, and students in Juchitan, Oaxaca. While marchers demonstrated on the streets the small group of representatives from the group began heckling them and yelling out offensive comments saying they were all “hopeless pacifists serving capitalism.”³⁹³

The Liga’s insurrection had a Marxist-Leninist orientation; trusting that socialism and the eradication of the state would liberate the proletariat from the confines of the classes that exploited them. The Liga political line rejected intermediary steps in the installation of communism, which demonstrates its anarcho-communist elements.³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ FEMOSPP, “La guerrilla se extiende por todo el país,” (2001): 35.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ “La agonía y podredumbre de la burguesía y la reunión de cacilleros,” personal copy.

³⁹⁴ Gross, *Handbook of Leftist Guerrilla Groups in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 121.

Stressing the importance of a coherent ideology to achieve its revolutionary goal their movement had to be based on theoretical, and most notably, military elements in order to combat the authoritarian forces of the state, inequalities, and imperialism.³⁹⁵ During its lifespan the Liga sponsored many operations that included assassinations of political figures both on the left and right, bombings, kidnappings, and bank robberies. Most importantly, former militant Graciela Mijares maintains that the Liga differentiated itself from other revolutionary movements in Mexico and even Latin America because of its self-determination and independence. “It by no means received funds, support, or training from foreign communist countries. On the contrary it criticized the PCM, Soviet Union Communism and its negative opinion of Third World revolutions.”³⁹⁶

A number of communiqués were directed specifically at students. According to the Liga, “the vanguard of the socialist revolution was the student, or rather the student-worker.” The ideologies of the League maintained that the “massification” of university education produced radicals and proletarianized students and that the university had succeeded in producing cultural activities that facilitated the advancement of the proletariat.³⁹⁷ Furthermore, the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter supports this claim. In its “Manifesto to the Student” the Liga delineated a teleological history of student militancy—stressing that the historical conditions had arrived for the youth to shoulder being the leaders of a new revolution. It also mentioned that as a privileged class, students were morally required to help the underprivileged classes combat their

³⁹⁵ LC23S, “Al movimiento estudiantil”.

³⁹⁶ Jesus Ramírez Cuevas, “Liga Comunista 23 de septiembre: Historia del exterminar,” www.jornada.unam.mx/2004/03/28/mas-historia.html - 18k, 2004.

³⁹⁷ Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth Century Mexico*, 170.

exploiters and see that the advancement of Mexico includes all the social classes.³⁹⁸

Furthermore, other documents suggest that students, as a result of the 1968 student movement, demonstrated their capabilities as revolutionaries and they were capable of joining the broader proletarian struggle.³⁹⁹ What this also suggests is that the Liga was highly dependent on students for support from its inception.

The creation of the Liga has been viewed as an apogee in the urban guerrilla experience. In its ten years active, the Liga amounted to nearly one thousands militants, though the number has been debated by former members. Because the Liga's structure was so complex and divided up into various brigades, it was difficult for the state and even militants to gauge the size of the group. Even today members still run into their former comrades without ever having met them underground. The rapid rate in which the organization grew prevented the state from immediately eliminating the group. Within a few months of its creation, the Liga had expanded to almost every corner of the country and established cells in universities and solidarity networks. Students from across the country witnessed as the group's presence, as it became increasingly visible at rallies and on campuses. Before the Liga emerged, Mexican youth often doubted the potential of students as revolutionary actors because organizations that identified themselves as armed struggles were small and localized units with little chance of threatening the establishment. Now with a nation-wide organization the prospects of genuinely challenging the state's official propaganda, monopoly over revolution, and hegemony in general appeared imaginable.

³⁹⁸ LC23S, "Manifiesto al estudiantado," (1973): 1-6.

³⁹⁹ LC23S, "Al movimiento estudiantil."

While not all students took seriously the group's program, it did prompt many to at least profess their solidarity with their revolutionaries from a distance. For those still entertaining going underground, the idea of a national organization hastened their revolutionary conviction. By 1973, Echeverría had already made it clear that any student who refused to take advantage of his "good gesture" would be denounced as a traitor to the nation and vilified for being idealist dreams. Struggling to prevent students from going underground, the government became increasingly obsessed with creating a false image of the Liga and challenging every word and sentence the organization wrote in their communiqués. A new phase in the intellectual war between student-revolutionaries and the PRI had begun.

Chapter Three

Paradoxical Utopias and Revolutionary Cultures

“The walls are the publishers of the poor.” – Eduardo Galeano

While some students took up arms to fulfill their revolutionary goals, many others challenged the ruling party's hegemony by joining social movements that sought to organize workers and peasants in peaceful opposition to the authoritarian regime. Works on the Mexican Dirty War tend to leave out non-violent political organizing and creating a false assumption the majority of students went underground. Therefore, to understand the unique experience of student-guerrillas, it is necessary to compare them with non-violent alternatives. This chapter examines these rival subcultures of dissent, comparing their methods of indoctrination, their language of propaganda, and the symbolism deployed in their attacks on the government. The success of both urban guerrillas and non-violent radicals depended on winning the support of and recruiting followers from among the same groups of workers and peasants, who had long been disenfranchised by the ruling party. Arguments between these youthful dissidents therefore had important, long-term consequences for the growth of an effective leftist opposition to the PRI. Each group imagined a better society for Mexico, and in their competition, they revealed paradoxes inherent within the utopian visions of their rivals.

The first section of this chapter discusses the experience of being an urban guerrilla. Although scholars have long been fascinated with revolutionary movements, few have sought to appraise them from the ethnographic perspective of the cultural

historian, particularly in the case of urban guerrillas. In the course of sowing the seeds for their utopian society, student revolutionaries fashioned radical cultures and personalized micro-communities to embody the social, political, and culture values they collectively shared. Students came to symbolize the fundamental importance of their role as urban guerrillas in the culture of rebellion. The act of becoming a guerrilla, or “going underground,” meant more than simply taking up arms. It entailed a complete transformation of their worldview and character. By looking at the symbolism and practice of guerrilla culture through three basic expressions—indoctrination, propaganda, and violence—this study offers a wider perspective on how students defied different forms of authority. Although many of the urban guerrillas studied in this dissertation were imprisoned for violent actions, they were also persecuted for their counter-hegemonic ideas and beliefs. Looking at revolutionary cultures requires a deep appraisal of their attitudes and behaviors, the compromises and negotiations involved in becoming revolutionaries, and the ways they defined their personas.

The second section compares the guerrilla subculture with the experience of non-violent social movements. In the early 1970s, radical students increasingly began to link their own protests with broader groups opposed to the PRI. Unlike 1968, they began to work more directly with urban impoverished communities organizing grassroots development projects.⁴⁰⁰ Students believed they would be more effective in igniting a “new urban social movement” and avoiding government repression through decentralized political activities rather than attempting to forge a single massive movement. The

⁴⁰⁰ For an exceptional work on underground movements and urban struggles see in particular Vivienne Bennett, “Orígenes del Movimiento Popular Mexican: Pensamiento político y organizaciones políticas clandestinas, 1960-1980,” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 55 3 (Jul.-Sep., 1993): 89-102.

protests focused on sprawling shantytowns, which had grown up since the 1950s around the outskirts of Mexico City, Guadalajara, and other major urban areas as a result of the demand for labor during postwar industrialization. Shantytown residents, unable to secure title to their modest homes or access to water, sewage, and electricity, began demanding basic human services. Students joined in their protest marches and used their education to assist impoverished families in pressuring the government.⁴⁰¹ If conditions on the urban fringes were difficult, they were often far worse in the remote countryside. As a result, students also began moving outside of their urban domain and journeying to rural communities, many inspired by the Maoist saying of “going to the people.”⁴⁰² For many students, it was the first time they had left the city and they paid dearly for taking on this challenge.

Whereas students from these communities were too young in 1968, they came of age politically in the aftermath of Tlatelolco, during a time in which armed struggles were forming. As members of a new wave of student militancy much like their peers before them, they too felt a moral obligation to be political involved in struggles, particularly those directly affecting their families and communities. Yet, radicals and revolutionaries of higher socioeconomic status entered an alien world of impoverished

⁴⁰¹ The height of land invasions in urban areas by organized communities and independent organizations seeking to improve the conditions of colonias populares occurred between 1968 and 1972. While by 1970 the government invested in infrastructure, health, and education, these actions were limited by bureaucratic politics and contradictions. Manuel Perló and Martha Schteingart, “Movimientos sociales urbanos en México: Algunas reflexiones en torno a la relación: procesos sociales urbanos, respuesta de los sectores populares,” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 46 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1984): 113. See also Poniatowska, *Fuerte es el silencio*; Luis Unikle, “El proceso de urbanización en México: Distribución y crecimiento de la población urbana,” *Demografía y economía*, 2 2 (1968): 139-182.

⁴⁰² Government officials also noted the upward presence of students in rural communities. Using the escalating political situation in Sinaloa, Sonora, Chihuahua, and Oaxaca (all states with a large rural population) as a point of reference to explain the growth of student militancy the DFS demanded almost daily reports from their provincial offices. Galería 2 at the AGN holds thousands of reports on student activism in rural areas. See boxes 1920 and 1920B.

shantytowns and rural communities. Acclimating to daily contact with indigent communities proved to be more challenging than they expected. Transforming theory into praxis was easier for the more experienced revolutionaries, but for newcomers and less ideological and mentally prepared individuals, the task of indoctrinating and working with impoverished communities was more than many could handle. Consequently, the unpreparedness of revolutionaries and non-violent radicals created a barrier between “educator and student.”⁴⁰³ Urban guerrillas were often required to lead discussions over Marxist concepts without knowing the subject matter well themselves. Careless acts frustrated efforts to amalgamate popular support.

The final section of this chapter examines the conflicts between nonviolent activists and proponents of the armed struggle as they sought to build an effective opposition. Both sides believed that they embodied the broad concerns of Mexican society. Revolutionaries lambasted the popular political mobilizations of the radicals for their soft-line tactics, which the non-violent organizers accused the revolutionaries of “tainting the image of the left.”⁴⁰⁴ Both factions competed for supporters, clout, and a foothold in factories, universities, and proletarian communities. Urban guerrillas called the reformists naive for believing political exigency would coerce the government to carry out significant reform.⁴⁰⁵ Considering peaceful demonstrations to be obsolete, the ultra-left refused to repeat the same strategies employed by the previous student movement. The paradox for radicals therefore lay in the government’s monopolization of the political process and its refusal to respect the will of the people. In contrast,

⁴⁰³ José Luis Borbolla, former member of the Liga, interview with author.

⁴⁰⁴ José Luis Esparza, former member of the Liga, interview with author.

⁴⁰⁵ *Madera* no. 3, 16-20.

nonviolent activists claimed that they were already achieving worthwhile results from helping the poor directly, and believed that the polarizing effects of armed struggle would paradoxically serve only to alienate the masses from the revolutionaries.

With the creation of the Liga, student-guerrilla leaders wanted to take student militancy even further and with members from the Enfermos and the FER already well trained in spontaneous combat, leaders hoped to build on these trails. Revolutionary violence had been moderate until the creation of the Liga. While the Liga refrained from carrying out bombings they made up for this type of revolutionary violence by executing confrontations with security forces and spectacular “expropriations.” Members of the Liga advocated for revolutionary violence, and in this they succeeded in their endeavor. Citizens from Mexico’s largest cities experienced revolutionary violence that had formerly been limited to rural areas such as Guerrero. Newspaper clippings attest to the expansion of actions by student-guerrillas and the responses by government forces. Within a two years block, guerrilla actions mushroomed.⁴⁰⁶ Symbolically, the escalation of revolutionary motivated activities was meant to demonstrate the Liga’s capacities, ability to successfully execute their operations, demonstrate the government’s weakness, and to make a mockery of security agents.

“Going Underground”: Revolutionary Culture

In becoming an urban guerrilla, young people were required to follow a “revolutionary code” and abide by the rules of the organization, or face being

⁴⁰⁶ For a newspaper perspective on the growth of revolutionary violence see caja AGN, DGIPS, caja 1892A and 1920B.

reprimanded for their counterrevolutionary actions.⁴⁰⁷ In guerrillas' opinion this form of ideological training and discipline was essential for the success of the revolutionary struggle. Indoctrination into the movement meant a break with the past, and the abandonment of family and civilian aspirations. Very few revolutionaries made a smooth transition from open political activism to "clandestine" life,⁴⁰⁸ but understood the deep ramifications of their actions. Moreover, although they considered themselves to be "underground," as urban guerrillas they were surrounded by crowds of people everyday. This situation required them to keep a constant vigilance against informers, but also provided everyday opportunities for spreading propaganda about the struggle against the government. The greatest source of propaganda was violence—what an earlier generation of radicals had called "propaganda of the deed." Urban guerrillas deployed a symbolic language of violence, calibrating their attacks simultaneously to strike fear into the capitalist classes and government officials and to win the applause of the oppressed and working classes. Yet as the war escalated in the mid-1970s, the guerrillas began to lose the ability to maintain this grammar of violence. As their strikes became more indiscriminate and fratricidal, they became more self-defeating.⁴⁰⁹

Men and women shared common and different experiences in the "clandestine." According to one author "for men the revolutionary life was challenging, for women it was liberating."⁴¹⁰ Both men and women guerrillas were allowed to have formal relationships, but also experimented with open relationships. Nevertheless, the liberation

⁴⁰⁷ José Luis Esparza, former member of the Liga, interview with author.

⁴⁰⁸ Castellanos, *México armado*, 209.

⁴⁰⁹ The Liga has often been compared to the Red Army Faction and like their German counterparts the student-left criticized revolutionaries for their excessive use of violence.

⁴¹⁰ Castellanos, *México armado*, 209.

process did not occur swiftly. While revolutionaries of both genders divided up domestic chores and women later formed part of the leadership of their respective organizations many issues arose that embodied the ongoing establishment of gender roles. While male revolutionaries spoke of national liberation for all, but their ability to conceptualize the particular needs of women's liberation was less clearly defined. Guerrilla culture did not always work in favor of female guerrillas especially when pregnancy became an issue. Women faced a tremendous choice of whether to endanger their unborn child by remaining underground, leaving the new born with a family member, or disconnecting from the organization. "These were tough choices for women and the support was not always there from our man comrades," says Tita.⁴¹¹ A clear indication machismo, female guerrillas were constantly put in difficult situations that compromised their revolutionary commitments.

The decision to go underground was only the final step in a long process of evolving political consciousness, inspired by contacts within the movement, and differed for every revolutionary. Therefore, to broadly generalize that one event or reason was behind a student's decision to go underground would be misleading. Maricela Balderas Silva, a former member of the Enfermos and Liga, never thought her destiny lay in an armed revolutionary organization; she simply found the social and political situation in Mexico intolerable. "You didn't have to be a Marxist to understand that the proletariat was getting screwed or to believe in class struggle." Speaking more about her political formation and her eventual embrace of the armed struggle, Balderas Silva added, "There was no political opening, that was all a blanket farce that the government used to keep the

⁴¹¹ Tita Gutiérrez, former member of the Liga, interview with author.

youth at bay. I wasn't going to take that rhetoric anymore.”⁴¹² While Balderas Silva did not have a long record of activism, her decision to go underground was not done instinctively. She thought about the decision for some time before finally being convinced by her recruiter. Over time, as the struggle with the government escalated, some guerrilla recruits were motivated by having been personally affected by state-sponsored violence or personal knowledge of someone who had suffered violence.

Joining the militants entailed a significant break with the past, leaving behind family and friends, possessions and civilian careers. Parents often sought to prevent their children from joining the revolutionaries, and were deeply perturbed when they voiced radical political opinions or brought “subversive images” in to their house. Even progressive families were afraid of the fate that awaited their children, while more conservative parents were deeply hostile to the perceived immorality and lack of religiosity among the communist movement. When going underground, student guerrillas also had to give up the dreams of civilian life. Mario Alvaro “El Guaymas” Cartagena had aspired to be a doctor and live comfortably from his salary. His only connection to the revolution had been playing guitar at a political rally, where an old friend, already deeply embedded in the underground finally approached him. “I remember him saying he was helping organize people into a group called Liga Comunista. Just by hearing the word ‘communist’ I immediately got scared. Can you imagine that?”⁴¹³

Hundreds like El Guaymas had no prior political history and came under tremendous pressures to expedite their radicalization. Jose Luis Esparza remembers

⁴¹² Maricela Balderas Silva, former member of the Enfermos and the Liga, interview with author.

⁴¹³ Alvarez Cartagena, former member of the FER and Liga interview with author.

living in a predominately rural region in northern Mexico where the lack of resources prevented him from acquiring a political consciousness at a young age. Unlike his urban comrades he, like many rural youth in the early 60s, had to work to contribute to the family income. When Esparza finally reached a point in which he was radicalized enough to go underground he found that his political ideas were quite rudimentary. Like many others, Esparza was reprimanded by his comrades for lacking a strong ideological background. Esparza's situation made more turns for the worst when he was accused of mishandling revolutionary funds and buying a sweatshirt. This action was deemed bourgeois and used to measure his lack of revolutionary committee. The act eventually led to his momentary expulsion from the Liga. Acts like these were common and not only Esparza was accused of violating guerrilla code.⁴¹⁴ "Counterrevolutionary" acts were often punishable by death given that by dismissing someone, the entire group was at risk of betrayal to security forces.

The process of going underground meant forging a new personal identity as a guerrilla fighter. Their baptism came when they first took a *nom de guerre*. Whether given by others or self-chosen, the pseudonym represented a rite of passage that signified a person's transformation from civilian to guerrilla. Revolutionaries often went by several names at any given time. Even today former revolutionaries prefer their guerrilla names. In the underground milieu, the *nom de guerre* meant acceptance and gave militants a sense of recognition by the clandestine world. Juventino Campaña, the leader of the FRAP, for example, had the alias Ho Chi Minh, as a tribute to the Vietcong leader.⁴¹⁵ A

⁴¹⁴ Jose Luis Esparza, former member of the Liga, interview with author.

⁴¹⁵ See Hodges and Gandy, *Mexico Under Siege*, 150, and Angulo's, *La hora de los martires* pg. 62. Both

female guerrilla from the MAR asserted her revolutionary affinity by vowing to name her unborn child Emiliano in honour of her hero, Zapata, but if the baby were a girl she would be named Vietnamh.⁴¹⁶ One militant even took the name “El Chicano”; he was not Mexican-American, but simply fair skinned.⁴¹⁷ Perhaps it is Ignacio Salas Obregón’s *nom de guerre* that deserves the most attention. Salas Obregón’s appropriately self-assigned name, *Oseas* or Hosea, the Biblical prophet, was representative of his persona as well as his previous religious background. His intention was never to create a cult of personality around his status as the leading theoretician and most revered leader of the Liga. Yet, Salas Obregón developed a subtle prophet-like image of himself through his intellectual capacities and because he preached the “truth” through his eloquent writings. Women also gave themselves fake names and descriptive *nom de guerres* like “La Güera” (The Light Skinned One).⁴¹⁸ The *nom de guerre* could be another expression of camaraderie among revolutionaries. Many guerrillas took the original name of fallen comrades to remember them and assure that they would live on in the struggle against the government.⁴¹⁹

Guerrilla schools and brigades were established in different parts of the country by major urban guerrilla movements. In addition to political indoctrination, these schools provided the military training needed for the transition to the life of a revolutionary. Che

provide other uses of *nom de guerres* by urban guerrillas in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Chihuahua.

⁴¹⁶ Carlos Borbolla and Emilio Viale, “Las guerrillas planeaban el secuestro de altos funcionarios,” *Excelsior*, Feb. 2, 1972, 403.

⁴¹⁷ This came up during a conversation with Bertha “Tita” Gutierrez who added that “it was because he was güero.”

⁴¹⁸ This was one of Olivia Ledesma’s names.

⁴¹⁹ After a number of FLN guerrillas were killed during an assault on a safe house in the town Nepantla in the state of Mexico, Gloria Benavides, one of the founders of the EZLN, took the name “Elisa” in homage to her comrade Elisa Irina Sáenz Garza.

Guevara, in his influential work, *Guerrilla Warfare*, spent considerable time discussing the mechanics of military training under difficult conditions. But initially student-guerrillas found his works difficult to apply given his strategies catered to a rural insurrection. The conditions of urban warfare posed still further difficulties in training. While militants were still able to learn from Che's ideas of revolution and adopt his foco theory by creating brigades and collectives across the country, they still required a politico-military strategy applicable for city combat. Inspired by the Uruguayan urban guerrilla group, the Tupamaros, the leaders of the Liga were also drawn by the theories and ideas on urban guerrilla warfare outlined by Brazilian revolutionary Carlos Marighella, whose *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* was the work of choice among many South American and Mexican revolutionaries in the 1970s.⁴²⁰ In this work urban guerrillas found a detailed description that not only provided readers how to build a revolutionary movement by exploiting resources, but also a section on "The Personal Qualities of the Urban Guerrilla" and "How the Urban Guerrilla Lives and Operates," From these parts, revolutionaries were given an explicit look into what characterized the urban guerrilla. Marighella demonstrated how guerrillas could use the city "to cling to legitimate work or profession"⁴²¹ and still be underground. Despite the risks guerrillas could live at home if they chose too as a way to avoid any suspicion from neighbors or friends. Additionally, having "normal lives" meant revolutionaries could train themselves to acclimate to living two separate lives. Lastly, being able to return home also

⁴²⁰ Esteve Díaz, *Las armas de la utopia*, 76-78.

⁴²¹ Carlos Marighella, *Manual of the Urban Guerrilla* (Chapel Hill: Documentary Publications, 1985), 49.

functioned as a morale booster for student-revolutionaries especially when circumstances became difficult.

Safe houses and urban refuges were therefore vital to the physical and mental well being of guerrillas. Student-guerrillas capitalized on potential new recruits marginalization and interest in radicalism by creating comfortable spaces or “liberated zones.”⁴²² These zones came in different forms and were located throughout the country representing the foundation of what would eventually be *focos*. Of course, the overarching purpose of offering these “liberated zones” was to indoctrinate potential revolutionaries. By building a strong camaraderie from the onset of a new recruit arrival to a “liberated zone” a special bond and sense of acceptance was used to persuade new revolutionaries to take up the armed struggle.⁴²³ More advanced militants would use language to describe the family-style spirit of being in a revolutionary movement to new comers as well as to those who had been longer underground and felt disillusioned or homesick. Each revolutionary dealt more than once with the issue of whether they had made the right decision and allowed their ideas to be informed by revolutionaries killed performing the same actions they were orchestrating.

Propaganda and Imagery

The character of the heroic guerrilla was best embodied by Che Guevara’s image and his dedication for national liberation movements. Then as now, Che’s posthumous legacy, as one author put it, “teeters between viewing him as a misguided rebel, a

⁴²² Castañeda, *La negación del número*, 88.

⁴²³ Salvador Castañeda, former member of the MAR, interview with author.

coruscatingly brilliant guerrilla philosopher, a poet-warrior jousting at windmills, a brazen warrior who threw down the gauntlet to the bourgeoisie.”⁴²⁴ Even among urban youth who did not embrace armed struggle, his image was ubiquitous, for example, on homemade banners carried during the 1968 student movement. Local vendors sold his image and propaganda all over the cities. Students duplicated his image on leaflets, posters, placards, and into any other sort of propaganda. Associating oneself with Che also meant that one was in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution. Marches and demonstrations sponsored by students occurred regularly along Mexico City’s busiest avenue, Avenida de la Reforma, from Chapultepec Park to the Zócalo, where febrile students expressed their solidarity with the Cubans.⁴²⁵ Nevertheless, his image aroused controversy and polarized radical groups, who selected particular passages from among his revolutionary writings. Moreover, his irrefutable machismo privileged men in revolutionary struggles and overtly placed women on the sidelines.⁴²⁶

Role models from among the national revolutionary pantheon were more controversial among student guerrillas because of their association with PRI propaganda. Therefore, guerrillas were more likely to associate themselves with contemporary revolutionaries such as Mao Zedong or Ho Chi Minh. *Guevaristas*, in particular, claimed to see “no connection with Morelos, Zapata, Villa, Vicente Guerrero or Hidalgo.”⁴²⁷ Some argued the prestige of Mexican revolutionary figures had become a part of the

⁴²⁴ Peter McLaren, *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 7.

⁴²⁵ Hodges, *Mexican Anarchism After the Revolution*, 111.

⁴²⁶ Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices*, 16.

⁴²⁷ Taibo II, '68, 22.

bourgeois ideology.⁴²⁸ Yet a member of the FUZ stated: “we are admirers of Emiliano Zapata and he is our inspiration. Since Zapata didn’t finish the Revolution because he was killed, we will continue the struggle.”⁴²⁹ By contrast, Claudia Cortés Gonzales, a student of Political Science at the UNAM said she “never thought of Zapata as a symbol of the student movement or an emblem. Zapata had been integrated into the ideology of the bourgeoisie and now a part of the PRI. That way during our manifestations we choose Che. Che united all the student movements of the world!”⁴³⁰ Urban guerrillas also looked to the works of the Spanish anarchist and Trotskyite Abraham Guillén, who was credited as being a fundamental theoretical and strategic guide for the Tupamaros and for publishing another Bible for urban guerrilla warfare titled *Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla*. Even Guevara had respected Guillén for his contributions to the armed revolutionary process. Guillén’s theories seemed more compatible with the situation in Mexico City and Guadalajara, offering a political orientation to guerrilla warfare that could be appropriated by any revolutionary movement.⁴³¹ Since both men were theorists as well as revolutionaries their books offered complementary insights on politics and doctrine. Interestingly, Guillén wrote an introduction to Che’s book, but in a secret interview Guillén tried to convince Guevara of the limitations of rural insurrections and advantages of urban guerrilla warfare.⁴³²

⁴²⁸ Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 127.

⁴²⁹ *Excelsior*, Feb. 2, 1972, pg. 397 cited in de Mora’s, *Las guerrillas de México*.

⁴³⁰ Poniatowska, *La noche del Tlatelolco*, 48.

⁴³¹ Hodges, *Mexico Under Siege*, 147.

⁴³² Abraham Guillén, *Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla: The Revolutionary Writings of Abraham Guillén* Translated and edited with an introduction by Donald C. Hodges (New York: William and Morrow Company, Inc., 1973), 7.

Indoctrination into guerrilla units involved a continual process of reinforcing political consciousness. Although the works of revolutionary theorists such as Mikhail Bakunin, Ricardo Flores Magón, and other revolutionary authors were crucial to their training, the culture of urban guerrillas also embraced Russian novelists who wrote in the genre of socialist realism. Still government propaganda often depicted urban guerrillas as thoughtless terrorists, ignoring the literary and theoretical sophistication of many revolutionary activists. One author noted, “the September 23 Communist League, the most powerful guerrilla organization in Mexico, was also the most educated.”⁴³³ Russian literature was particularly influential on the culture of rebellion in Mexico since it combined theoretical training with stories of successful uprisings. Two works in particular, *How the Steel was Tempered* (1936) by novelist Nikolai Ostrovsky and *Mother* (1907) by Maximo Gorki, were widely read and disseminated by revolutionaries. Each uplifting book added meaningfulness to the heroic guerrilla, glorified them and the masses, and buttressed the possibility of building a society akin to those encapsulated in the novels. In their own way, each novel colorfully depicted the working classes’ struggle on the eve and during the Russian Revolution, and followed the character transformation of each protagonist into a revolutionary. In *Mother*, Gorki narrated women’s role in the proletarian struggle before the 1905 revolution, an element that certainly influenced gender relations in armed revolutionary struggles. Reading revolutionary literature also gave militants a different lens into how politics and culture were interrelated categories and function as a mechanism to build class consciousness amongst the people they

⁴³³ Palacios Hernández, *Héroes y fantasmas*

recruited.⁴³⁴ Socialist realism explicitly narrated the trials revolutionaries came up against, but identified them as heroes and liberators—a rare breed of individuals who willingly confronted deadly engagements with the enemy and died before reaching their objective.⁴³⁵

The process of individual indoctrination as a guerrilla was also intimately connected to the dissemination of propaganda among the wider populace. In developing a language to speak to the Mexican people, urban guerillas looked to history, proletarian culture, symbolism, and revolutionary romanticism to build a counter-hegemonic culture and retrieve what had been taken over by bourgeois society.⁴³⁶ Student-revolutionaries recognized the importance of having a dominant voice in communities, particularly in universities and proletarian neighborhoods. They used symbols of Mexican history and class struggle as the basis of their pedagogical instruction within these milieux, yet it remains unclear how effective these tools were. The construction of a separate revolutionary culture sought to undermine the teachings of the PRI by defying their model of collective memory and *mexicanidad*. For instance, when students began to demystify images and figures exploited by the ruling party to amalgamate support, not only was this behavior interpreted as anti-establishment, but also as counter-

⁴³⁴ When counterinsurgency units located guerrilla safe houses they often took pictures of revolutionary propaganda and other materials. Books by Soviet authors and other radical theorists helped to bolster the government's assertion guerrillas formed part of a largely global communist conspiracy.

⁴³⁵ For an in-depth study on socialist realism see Katerina Clark, *The Socialist Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Thomas Lahusen; E A Dobrenko, ed., *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), and E A Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁴³⁶ AGN, DFS, 11-221-73 H-146 L-1; AGN, DFS, 80-5-71 H-157 L-1; Luis Chong, *La guerrilla en México: Testimonios orales y artísticos*, 183-195.

Revolutionary, that is, counter to the official interpretation of the Mexican Revolution.⁴³⁷

Making and distributing propaganda entailed a creative and brave mindset. Creativity and originality were two critical components needed in order to efficiently promote and propagate radical ideologies into “popular” areas. The Liga produced massive quantities of revolutionary propaganda. The emphasis on propaganda was so intense that within the structure of the organization, a group was designated entirely to this task.⁴³⁸ Those who participated in the production of propaganda were considered important individuals, who carried a heavy weight on their shoulders. In addition to mass-producing printed information, militants had to protect the documents. El Guaymas recalled a day when he was driving a Volkswagen van loaded with propaganda down the busy streets of Mexico City when suddenly he noticed a police check. Immediately he prepared himself for a possible violent confrontation in order to ensure the propaganda would not fall into the hands of his adversary.⁴³⁹ Fortunately for him, he was able to pass undetected. Given the risks of distributing propaganda, especially in places where secret police and other counterinsurgency forces were believed to be concentrated, made the job increasingly strenuous and required major creativity.

Another tactic employed by guerrillas was clandestine radio shows to channel news to leftist students and other potential sympathizers. The airwaves were an essential asset to armed revolutionary groups because they offered an avenue to broadcast demands and proclamations attacking the State and advocate radical ideologies. This means of calling attention to their revolutionary struggle proved to be beneficial because

⁴³⁷ Heberto Castillo, “Asaltabancos Contrarrevolucionarios,” *Excelsior*, 12 diciembre 1974.

⁴³⁸ Velázquez, *Biográfica armada*, 96.

⁴³⁹ Mario Cartagena, former member of the FER and Liga, interview with author.

it captivated a new audience that was previously less accessible to the student and guerrilla movements. People who drove to work were often exposed to harsh criticism of the state on the radio as well as at work. The broadcasting of radical doctrine was beneficial, but not without controversy. Citizens typically would tune in to the radio and anticipate hearing two or more stations dedicated to communicating a message of solidarity with student and guerrilla movements. Radio transmitting for guerrillas was harder to come by because they lacked the facilities and technology to do so. While these radio stations were under the control of state university or the UNAM, allowing revolutionary ideas to be professed on the radio testifies to the complicated relationship between the student left and student-guerrillas. By allowing revolutionaries on the radio, leftists contradicted their own non-violent stance, yet “student power” and loyalty lead to exceptions.⁴⁴⁰

The process of politicizing peasants and workers was a difficult yet essential challenge for student guerrillas. The ultimate goal was to train workers in guerrilla warfare, both to ensure the longevity of the revolutionary process and also to build a strong solidarity network between the vanguard (students) and the masses. Therefore, small guerrilla brigades were in charge of training peasants and workers equally to fight the battle “above ground” given that it was impossible for all workers and peasants to go underground. Theoretically, workers and peasants would pass on their knowledge of guerrilla warfare others and facilitate the politico-military learning process of new

⁴⁴⁰ Guerrillas demanding airtime often disrupted radio stations in Guadalajara. At the UNAM, radio programs experience similar interrupts. By using the radio station as a tool to spread revolutionary propaganda, student-guerrillas expected to use the airwaves to become a dominant voice.

recruits.⁴⁴¹ The Liga's largest brigade, the Brigada Roja (Red Brigade) amalgamated the most advanced revolutionaries, yet even the most developed militant encountered problems organizing communities.⁴⁴² Moving into a particular community required a significant amount of preparation and understanding of the conditions these people were coming from. Organizations that associated themselves with Maoism used a strategy they drew directly from Mao's writings concerning how to draw the masses to join a particular cause, by following his "go to the people-learn from the people" strategy.⁴⁴³ There were a number of steps that could be taken to gain the trust and support of the masses. One method was the Robin Hood approach of buying support with money stolen from the bourgeoisie. Before joining the Liga, the FUZ summarily distributed money from bank heists to indigent communities in envelopes with their propaganda,⁴⁴⁴ although this form of revolutionary propaganda was no longer used by the mid-1970s.

Urban guerrillas had a difficult time reaching out to factory workers. Because of their young age, they were ignored at best. In the worst case, workers informed the police about urban guerrillas' activities of distributing propaganda or establishing a presence at labor rallies, oftentimes carrying concealed weapons. Unafraid to denounce the infiltration of urban guerrillas at rallies intended to be peaceful, a few selected workers were given the job of watching over demonstrations in order to locate potential outside

⁴⁴¹ Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre, "Técnicas de tiro para el combatiente revolucionario." 6.

⁴⁴² The following brigades were aligned to the Liga: Brigadas Rojas (Mexico City), Brigadas Emiliano Zapata (Oaxaca), Brigada Genaro Vazquez Rojas, Comité Coordinador (Monterrey), Brigada 22 de abril del Comité de Lucha Genaro Vazquez Rojas, Brigada "Richard," Brigada Revolucionaria Lacandona, Brigada Arturo Gamiz (Mexicali), Brigada Oscar Gonzalez (Tijuana), Comando Guerrillero Urbano Salvador Allende.

⁴⁴³ Fabio Barbosa, "Las utopías cambiantes," *Nexo*, agosto 1983, 35-37

⁴⁴⁴ *Excelsior*, Feb. 2, 1972 cited in de Mora, *Las guerrillas en México*, 393.

agitators.⁴⁴⁵ Workers typically kept close surveillance on young people intermixed with their gatherings. Unfortunately, non-violent students who showed up at these rallies to express their solidarity with the workers were randomly identified as subversives and apprehended. Organized labor in Mexico also remained firmly under control of the CTM and the PRI; even independent workers' organizations would have feared contact with armed insurgents because it would make their own struggle more vulnerable. Even as worker militancy was on the rise in the 1970s, it remained far from being revolutionary, much less seeking the overthrow of the government. Electric, university, and other worker's unions appeared to think working independently produced better result.⁴⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the iron fist policies of union boss Velázquez seriously hindered the labor movement. As a result, guerrilla organizations in Guadalajara moved out of the city to the surrounding countryside, where they established links in communities such as Lagos Moreno, Cocula, Casimiro, and Autlán.⁴⁴⁷ Guerrillas faced new challenges distributing propaganda and mobilizing followers in the rural areas with high rates of illiteracy. Balderas Silva recalled trying to teach historical materialism to people with little education, although she herself often had trouble understanding Marxist theory.

Guerrilla Action

Creating spectacles of violence was a crucial goal of urban guerrillas to demonstrate the power of their attacks against Mexican society. Revolutionaries did not

⁴⁴⁵ *Sol de Mexico*, 29 de abril.

⁴⁴⁶ See Raul Trejo Delarbe and Anibal Yanez, "The Mexican Labor Movement, 1971-1975," *Latin American Perspectives* 3 1, Imperialism and the Working Class in Latin America (Winter, 1976): pp. 133-153.

⁴⁴⁷ Rogelio Hernandez y Roberto Rock, *Zocalo Rojo* (D.F.: Ediciones Oceano, S.A., 1982), 177.

turn to violence instinctively, rather urban guerrillas discussed at great lengths how revolutionary violence was going to be used and against whom.⁴⁴⁸ In the early 1970s guerrilla violence manifested itself through acts of vandalism, bank robberies, and other actions that inflicted damage on material wealth and property. But once the Liga was in full force and the State was in the midst of implementing a comprehensive counterinsurgency crusade on subversion, guerrilla violence became less limited to property and more against individuals. Personal vendettas against state officials, policemen, the military, and other perpetrators of violence also fueled animosities and violent behavior against people and property. Guerrillas also complemented their symbolic actions by systematically targeting public figures, industrialists, police, politicians, and persons considered accomplices in preserving the ruling party's hegemony or were guilty of other social injustices. One particular incident involved members of the Liga kidnapping an individual by covering his nose and mouth with an adhesive fabric causing him to slowly asphyxiate. Whether or not the death was accidental, his captors exhibited no sympathy for their deed by placing a sign on the body that read: "one bourgeois less."⁴⁴⁹

Using violence to carry out indiscriminate damage on persons and property initially went against the morals of the various urban guerrillas. The Liga institutionalized military operations and kidnappings within a dedicated branch called the *Comité Militar* or Military Committee, which was fundamentally the *Buró Político* or Political Bureau. For security reasons, each faction comprised only three or four militants, and information

⁴⁴⁸ Miguel Topete, former member of the Liga, interview with author.

⁴⁴⁹ Poniatowska, *Fuerte es el silencio*, 151.

about military actions was only disclosed to revolutionaries of a front where the operation was going to be executed.⁴⁵⁰ Guerrillas carefully planned operations to avoid any unnecessary collateral damage. More experienced militants were given complicated tasks while the less skilled revolutionaries performed minor missions. Despite these careful measures, planning was often insufficient and urban guerrillas suffered easily preventable deaths.⁴⁵¹

Becoming a full-fledged revolutionary required embracing all the elements, even ones some militants found hard to accept. Many guerrillas found this part of guerrilla culture extremely challenging given they had no previous experience with violence. While many revolutionaries internalized their revolutionary duties, others found it difficult to assimilate the military aspect of their guerrilla identity. As kidnappings and bank expropriations increased, urban guerrillas like Gustavo Hiraes vented his frustration against the militaristic character of the *Liga* by saying: “We opposed the military spirit and militaristic tendencies that were expressed within the *Liga* mainly because we thought that the kidnappings, and the alleged major military actions weren’t what we needed to take forward what at the time we still considered a correct and valid line in the *Liga*.”⁴⁵² Student-revolutionaries like Esparza openly expressed their object at some of the revolutionary actions against “agents of the PRI and bourgeoisie.”⁴⁵³ Coming from a religious upbringing and modest family, Esparza was less prepared than members of the FER who through their years in the “barrio bravo” of San Andrés and had

⁴⁵⁰ Palacios Hernández, *Heroes y fantasmas*, 205.

⁴⁵¹ Ulloa Bornemann, former member of the LCE, interview with author.

⁴⁵² Palacios Hernández, *Heroes y fantasmas*, 204.

⁴⁵³ José Luis Esparza, former member of the *Liga*, interview with author.

developed a “thicker skin” for confrontations.⁴⁵⁴ This is not to say that some militants were inherently violent than others, it just goes to demonstrate how the disparity in upbringings truly shaped a revolutionaries persona.

The kidnapping of prominent politicians and industrialists served as a crucial tactic in urban guerrilla warfare and as a way to demonstrate the vulnerability of the elites. Actions likes these were meant to demonstrate to the ruling class that despite have a plethora of luxuries and security their lives were still susceptible to revolutionary actions. A few of the urban guerrillas’ most recognized expressions of revolutionary violence were the death of the famous industrialist Eugenio Garza Sada in September 1973, the double kidnappings of young industrialist Fernando Aranguren and the kidnapping of British Consul Anthony Duncan Williams that same year, the attempted kidnapping of the President’s sister, Margarita López Portillo in 1976, and the kidnappings of the first lady’s father José Guadalupe Zuno in 1974.⁴⁵⁵ Each action was specifically orchestrated against the political and industrial elites to symbolize just how powerful the Liga was, and the government’s inability to protect their allies.⁴⁵⁶

The Liga also targeted symbols of state authority by randomly killing police officers, a policy exclusively attributed to them.⁴⁵⁷ Thus, officials experienced a sharp

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Medina Ruiz, *Terror en Mexico*, 121-124, 135; Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, 187; Fernández Menéndez, *Nadie supo nada*, 79-98; Castellanos, *Mexico Armado*, 214-217; *El Sol del Medio Día*, 17 de octubre 1973, 4;

⁴⁵⁶ For a detailed account of the kidnappings and investigations afterwards see DFS, DGIPS, caja 1892 and 1892A.

⁴⁵⁷ Ex-militants and “dirty war” scholars conclude that David Jimenez Sarmiento’s during his time as leader of the *Liga* ordered launched a campaign against police officers. Militants were ordered to take out police check points and instillations more often than usual. The Mexican public without hesitation condemned the targeted assaults on policemen. However, there is no written document to my knowledge that explicitly supports Jimenez Sarmiento was the architect of this campaign.

increase in injuries and fatalities in Guadalajara, Sinaloa, and Mexico City—three key urban hubs considered bastions of the Liga in the mid-1970s.⁴⁵⁸ But the killing of police officers was not well received by all militants. Once again Esparza voiced his opinion on the matter and was scolded for his defiance. While his moral stance was subject to question by his comrades, Esparza remained firm on his position especially after a brief confrontation with police officers put him face to face with an old schoolmate. Esparza froze as he contemplated killing a close friend for being an agent of the state, or ignore his revolutionary ideals and leave. He eventually decided on not shot the friend.⁴⁵⁹

The actions of urban guerrillas, sensationalized by an unsympathetic media seeking to discredit them, had created a widespread fear of violent upheaval in Mexico by the mid-1970s. Although few citizens might actually witness or be affected by these actions, millions of people perceived the danger.⁴⁶⁰ Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey had been seemingly transformed almost overnight into a battlefield between revolutionaries and the counterinsurgency forces. Before urban guerrilla movements surfaced in the early 1970s, Mexican cities were largely immune to urban-centered violent uprisings, although ordinary crime was common. Urban residents experienced the revolutionary movement of Rubín Jaramillo and the short-lived armed struggle of Gámiz from a distance, and saw social discontent as a nuisance limited to rural areas. Guerrillas sought to convey the legitimacy of their violence and thereby counter the claims made by

⁴⁵⁸ DFS, AGN, 11-221-73 H- 139 L-1.

⁴⁵⁹ José Luis Esparza, former member of the Liga, interview with author.

⁴⁶⁰ Newspapers and the press regularly embellished guerrilla actions. See Jorge Aviles Randolph, “Esquema Organizativo de los Extremistas,” *El Universal*, 3 diciembre 1971, 7B; “Asaltabancos y Secuestradores los 30 Reclamados,” *Excelsior*, 6 mayo 1973, and José Luis de la Colina, “Escuela Guerrillera en Nuestra Sociedad,” *El Heraldo de México*, 15 enero 1977.

journalists and government officials that they were aimless youth. As one reporter bluntly remarked, guerrillas knew only one way of talking because “their language, as it’s already been know, is violence.”⁴⁶¹

Yet the violence of urban revolutionaries was not indiscriminate. In the case of the airline highjacking, when the plane returned to Monterrey, the guerrillas released children, women, and elders while keeping seventy-five passengers on board including the governor’s son and a number of elite businessmen. After some time the guerrillas ordered the pilots to fly to Cuba, though during the flight passenger’s sense of dread and panic appeared to have vanished. Travelers and guerrillas talked amicably throughout the flight and when the plane finally touched down on Cuban soil before saying their goodbyes passengers asked their captures for their autographs.⁴⁶²

Guerrillas emphasized the legitimacy of their actions based on the violence perpetrated by the Mexican regime. Of course these were embellishments when one considers the militaristic power of guerrillas versus that of the government. Student-revolutionaries responded against these allegations by emphasizing the nuance of their struggle against the PRI’s mediocre and farcical intentions to alleviate class struggle. Guerrillas counteracted the violence argument against them by issuing a number of communiqués describing how state-sponsored violence was a policy deeply embedded inside the structure of the Party since its formation. Moreover, rather than using violence to protect its citizens, brute force was exclusively used as an instrument to uphold the dominance of political elites, and not for the benefit of the nation. The appropriation of

⁴⁶¹ Ruben Salazar Mallen, “El diálogo guerrillero,” *Excélsior*, 12 de mayo 1973.

⁴⁶² Castellanos, *Mexico Armado*, 190-191.

direct action and revolutionary violence clearly exemplified the student-revolutionary left's divorce from nonviolent tactics and that any possibility for reconciliation with the government had come and gone. Furthermore, the common notion that percolated in revolutionary circles was that regardless of whether a movement was non-violent or not the government was readily prepared to use brute force against any group or person that challenged its power.⁴⁶³ These beliefs enticed student-revolutionaries to continue exposing the state's authoritarian character by directly challenging its hegemony through the same means they were being repressed. As one *Liga* militant explained: "It was a time of war. There is no alternative; going underground is all we have left. It was time to violently overthrow this government and we knew we were the only ones who could start the process."⁴⁶⁴

Factionalism soon emerged from the escalation of revolutionary violence. Infighting among the urban guerrilla movements led to more than a few internal executions.⁴⁶⁵ Guerrillas were also executed for giving up information no matter what the circumstances, dishonoring their respective organization, abandoning the group, even killed for something as little as performing actions that appeared to insinuate bourgeois traits.

Urban guerrillas also began targeting workers, who should have been their allies in the struggle against the regime. By 1975, government documents and newspapers

⁴⁶³ Bertha Lilia Gutierrez, interview by author, Guadalajara, 2008.

⁴⁶⁴ José Luis Esparza, interview with author, Mexico City, February 2010.

⁴⁶⁵ On the record former guerrillas never spoke of internal executions. However, there is speculation that Ignacio Salas Obregón ordered the execution of various militants during this tenure as maximum leader of the *Liga*. See also Wilbert Torre G., *La Prensa*, 31 octubre 1973, 12. In this newspaper article two women were reportedly sentenced to death by the *Liga* for providing the authorities with information regarding members of the organization. According to the reporter "both women signed their death sentence because the underworld does not forgive talkers."

recorded a steep increase in aggression by guerrillas towards workers. Although workers and labor leaders were only a small percentage of the victims of revolutionary violence, it was a sign of increasing desperation that they had begun targeting the very groups they claimed to be fighting to liberate.⁴⁶⁶

Embracing guerrilla culture was a major component of becoming complete revolutionary. Though, as mentioned throughout the sections, militants contested what entailed being an urban guerrilla by demonstrating that one could still have a revolutionary consciousness without taking actions to excessive levels. Yet, others firmly stood by the guerrilla code and never thought twice about their actions. Accepting the guerrilla code also meant a break from radical politics to revolutionary action. Being a revolutionary required taking militancy to a new level and to purportedly be taken seriously by non-revolutionaries and the government. By developing a separate revolutionary culture guerrillas competed with the state on what the term actually implied. Yet, while guerrillas never abandoned the need for direct action and violence the non-violent left had to deal with being ridiculed by their revolutionary counterparts as well as repression from the state even though they refrained from employing violence. Regularly non-violent activist were harassed and falsely linked to revolutionary organizations, an issue that also produced vitriol from the moderate left towards guerrillas.

⁴⁶⁶ Alfredo Marrón, "Líder Sindical Muerto por Elementos de la Liga '23 de Septiembre,'" *El Heraldo de México*, 29 de enero 1975, 14 and "Miembros de la 'Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre' Asesinaron a dos Obreros," *El Día*, 3 de mayo 1975.

Non-Violent Radical Movements

By the 1970s, a new and independent civic society had begun to emerge across Mexico, defying the efforts of the PRI to contain it, and students took a leading role in its creation. In Mexico City, proletarian communities in dire living conditions organized their *colonas* to demand that the government offer basic services like roads and sewage. Worker mobilizations also burgeoned with the founding of numerous independent labor unions that were in the words of one activist, “not addicted to official syndicalism” of the CTM.⁴⁶⁷ In 1975, the First National Congress of Indigenous People took place, and that same year Mexico City was the site of the United Nations International Women’s Year Conference.⁴⁶⁸ In southern Mexico independent indigenous and campesino organizations made their appearance to challenge the ruling party’s local rule.⁴⁶⁹ All of these struggles created a political space for people who refused the armed struggle, yet were eager to pursue a life of radical activism. Thousands of leftist students, unwilling to align themselves to a political party or a guerrilla group, found their calling in these flourishing grassroots movements. The rise of independent civic, peasant, and worker organizations attested to the political crisis brewing and Echeverría’s failure to institute any “fundamental transformation of the economic political or social system.”⁴⁷⁰ In

⁴⁶⁷ Basurto, *En el regimen de Echeverría*, 11, 23.

⁴⁶⁸ María L.O. Muñoz, “Forging Destiny: Populism, Indigenismo, and Indigenous Mobilization in Echeverría’s Mexico,” in Kiddle and Muñoz, *Populism in 20th Century Mexico*, 122-134; Jocelyn Olcott, “Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret: Sexual Politics at the 1975 United Nations International Women’s Year Conference,” *Gender & History* 22 3 (November 2010), pp. 733–754.

⁴⁶⁹ Lynn Stephens, *Zapata Lives!: Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); See Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez, *Movimiento popular y política en Oaxaca, 1968-1986* (México D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes), 1990; and Jeffrey W. Rubin, *Decentralizing the Regime: Ethnicity, Radicalism, and Democracy in Jucitlán, Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁴⁷⁰ Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis*, 196.

challenging the authoritarian political culture of the PRI, these radical movements developed their own cultures of resistance, quite different from the urban guerrillas.

Perhaps the most obvious area of renewed youth protest was the revival of the student movement. In January 1972, the Foro Nacional, which had marked a decisive split between a core of student guerrillas and the majority of moderates, reached an agreement on one point: that Echeverría's policies intended to mask the ruling party's authoritarianism with a democratic veneer and "cover up proletariat and bourgeoisie antagonism and thwart the independent organization of the proletariat and popular forces."⁴⁷¹ Based on this consensus, universities again became a politically volatile space, even apart from the guerrilla movement. Later that year, at the UNAM, Rector Pablo González Casanova faced a mushrooming of student militancy that ultimately brought about his downfall. Ironically, González Casanova had achieved scholarly distinction as a political scientist who challenged the complacency of the PRI as a democratic government. Students and university workers together organized to demand the university and the government provide better working conditions and to improve the universities infrastructure. Student groups also posited reforms to education, but the majority of its demands dealt with broader social and political issues.

Many student activists felt that they would be more effective in igniting a "new urban social movement" by leaving the campus in order to develop alliances with social groups that were taking shape throughout the country, particularly around the issue of urban housing. Mexico City had developed enormous shantytowns with no access to municipal services or to land titles, and students realized that their fight for social justice

⁴⁷¹ Rivas Ontineros, *La izquierda estudiantil en la UNAM*, 710.

had to begin by improving the living conditions and political opportunities of people in these marginalized *colonias*. For example, an activist organization called the Popular Independent Front, or FPI, began to work directly with the impoverished communities of Lomas de Padierna and Campamento 2 de Octubre, organizing grassroots development projects so that people could acquire services for themselves. The groups also organized numerous marches to demand that the urban bureaucracy give greater attention to their needs. Meanwhile, in the city center, the government began pursuing a vast project of urban renewal to bulldoze historical slums in barrios such as Guerrero and Tepito in order to replace dilapidated tenements with middle-class housing projects such as the one at Tlatelolco. Inspired by students and faculty from UNAM, residents began a campaign of grassroots organizing to resist their eviction, often using firecrackers to disrupt the redevelopment programs. These groups became affiliated with the National Coordination of Urban Popular Movements (CONAMUP) and later provided the core for mobilizing after the disastrous 1985 Mexico City earthquake.⁴⁷²

These social movements were just as active or even more so in the provinces as they were in the capital. Jeffrey Rubin has described the triumph of an indigenous political mobilization in the Tehuantepec Isthmus of Oaxaca. Student militants from Juchitán helped to organize the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus (Coalición Obrera Campesina Estudiantil del Istmo, COCEI) in early 1973 to challenge boss-rule by the PRI. Drawing on long traditions of Zapotec popular rebellion,

⁴⁷² Díaz-Barriga, "Beyond the Domestic and Public: Colonias Participation in Urban Movements in Mexico City", 255; Susan Eckstein, "Poor People versus the State and Capital: Anatomy of a Successful Community Mobilization for Housing in Mexico City," in *Power and Popular Protests: Latin American Social Movements*, ed. Susan Eckstein, updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 336 (329-50).

the movement grew out of conflicts over land and regional development, particularly after the construction of the Benito Juárez Dam and irrigation district in 1962, which increased land prices and exacerbated social inequality. A fraudulent municipal election in 1971 led to massive demonstrations by Juchitecos against the PRI candidate. The governor of Oaxaca restored peace only by appointing the popular challenger to a “civil administration.” The PRI quickly installed a new and more charismatic boss in the town, fearing the spread of a political insurgency, particularly in an indigenous region. Nevertheless, when COCEI continued its electoral challenge, the government responded with violent repression, particularly in the period from 1974 to 1977. Students and activists were beaten and arrested by soldiers and hired thugs, and dozens died in multiple assaults. Many within the movement argued at the time that they should respond to the violence by becoming armed guerrillas, but anti-guerrillas ultimately prevailed. Through persistent political campaigning, they eventually won the support of Juchitecos, and COCEI has governed the town as an independent party since 1989, forcing the PRI to negotiate with them on local matters.⁴⁷³

One of the most unusual trajectories among student militants was taken by the non-violent, Maoist, Catholic grassroots organization *Colonia Tierra y Libertad* (Colony Land and Liberty), named after the Zapatista slogan. Founded in Nuevo León by Maoists who had “gone out to the countryside” from Mexico City, the group later extended to Chiapas, where it became closely tied to the liberation theology of Archbishop Samuel Ruiz. The Maoist People’s Party (PP) was founded by Adolfo Orive Berlinguer, an economic professor at the UNAM, who had studied in Paris with Maoist theoretician

⁴⁷³ Rubin, *Decentering the Regime*, 64-88, 95-109, 139-44.

Charles Bettelheim.⁴⁷⁴ When he returned to Mexico in 1968 Orive organized a brigade at the UNAM to resist military occupation and put his newly developed political ideologies to practice.⁴⁷⁵ Believing the masses would propagate a revolution from the countryside Orive's proponents eagerly moved north to the states of Chihuahua and Coahuila as well as Nuevo León, where *Colonia Tierra y Libertad* was formed to address demands for better basic services like schools, water, and shelter by barrios in Monterrey and surrounding municipalities.⁴⁷⁶

With his unorthodox interpretation of Maoism, Orive eventually carried out his most important organizing work in Chiapas. He and his followers sought to move beyond the northern states by expanding their successful grass-roots organizations into a national popular front, the *Frente Popular Tierra y Libertad* (FPTyL).⁴⁷⁷ The model for the organization called for the creation of community assemblies, a strategy used to encourage local people to participate directly with the Maoists, while allowing the revolutionaries to consult with a "mass base."⁴⁷⁸ These assemblies were also intended to educate and radicalize the populace. By the mid 1970s, Maoists, who had once been targeted by other leftist factions for their under-developed political agendas, were now the largest organizers of the Mexican peasantry. The Maoists' success stemmed from their ability to connect with the peasantry and understand their social and political needs.

Archbishop Samuel Ruiz of San Cristobal de las Casas observed this success while

⁴⁷⁴ La Botz, *Democracy in Mexico*, 33.

⁴⁷⁵ John Ross, *Rebellion from the Roots: Indian Uprising in Chiapas* (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1994), 274.

⁴⁷⁶ Vinienne Bennett, "The Evolution of Urban Popular Movements in Mexico between 1968 and 1988", in Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez, ed. *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy and Democracy* (West Westview Press, 1992), 242.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 245.

⁴⁷⁸ La Botz, *Democracy in Mexico*, 33.

organizing an Indigenous Congress to be held in the central highlands of Chiapas. On a trip to northern Mexico to recruit community organizers, he ran into leaders of the PP doing similar work in Torreón, Coahuila. Ruiz was impressed by their organizational skills and invited them to Chiapas to serve as advisors in the highland region bordering Guatemala. The Bishop also invited leaders of another Maoist organization, the Union of People (UP), founded by agronomist René Gómez, from the national school of agronomy at Chapingo, outside Mexico City. The two Maoist factions worked well together and shared similar political agendas and interpretations, forming a coalition called the “Proletarian Line.” Orive and Gómez published extensively, suggesting the application of a Maoist “mass line” in a non-violent fight toward socialism, in which the peasantry would be the major support base.⁴⁷⁹ Maoists also helped to construct alliances with ejidos in the Lacandon jungle region of Chiapas and organized a new coalition of *ejidos* (communal lands) called *Ejido Union* (UE).⁴⁸⁰

There was tremendous diversity within just these four social movements: the revitalized student movement, the Mexico City civic group FPI, the Juchiteco indigenous political party COCEI, and the Chiapaneco Maoists. Without seeking to impose any theoretical dogma, it is possible to identify certain commonalities between these non-violent protests as well as basic differences between non-violent social movements and the culture of the student guerrillas.

Perhaps the most obvious commonality is their integration within local cultures and the efforts of activists to articulate a sense of local citizenship that would help to

⁴⁷⁹ Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion*, 81.

⁴⁸⁰ La Botz, *Democracy in Mexico*, 38.

draw the wider population into civic life. For example, popular barrios in the center of Mexico City created a renaissance of mural art in the 1970s, while the aging folk poet and barrio singer Salvador “Chava” Flores enjoyed a new popularity among local youth. As political scientist Susan Eckstein notes: “Whereas outsiders viewed El Centro as a hard-core, crime-ridden slum, long-term residents, especially in the oldest section, took pride in their neighborhood. They viewed it as authentic, representing the 'soul' of Mexico City.”⁴⁸¹ A similar sense of local pride and indigenous ethnicity was vital to the early efforts of COCEI in its effort to gain support of Zapotec residents, “drawing on and reshaping ethnic language, customs, art, and historical knowledge.”⁴⁸² Activists spoke to residents in their native Zapoteco, not in Spanish, and they composed ballads and poems in honor of COCEI members. Oral histories, memoirs, and local histories also contributed to a sense of political consciousness within the community. These cultural efforts were in some ways a continuation of an earlier Juchiteco cultural renaissance, dating from the 1930s and expressed in a literary journal called *Neza*, edited by local intellectuals including Andrés Henestrosa.⁴⁸³ Even the Maoists adapted to Mexican local cultures, although they thereby earned the opprobrium of urban guerrillas, who saw such localism as a deviation from the internationalist ideal of proletarian revolution.

Social movements in Mexico were also eager to forge alliances with a range of different actors, including many whom the urban guerrillas would denounce as the petite bourgeoisie. Students who continued to believe in democratic procedures became a powerful political force through alliances with other social groups. In turning toward a

⁴⁸¹ Eckstein, “Poor People Versus the State and Capital,” 335.

⁴⁸² Rubin, “Decentralizing the Regime: Culture, and Regional politics in Mexico,” 105.

⁴⁸³ Rubin, *Decentering the Regime*, 75, 233-35.

“mass-based” movement, activists were forced to leave their comfortable lives and travel outside of urban areas, coming face to face with the social and political strife of indigent communities. These experiences were valuable and served as consciousness-raising “sessions” that introduced students to new ways of organizing. While many still believed in socialism, their language became less stilted by Marxist theory and more familiar to common citizens. By so, student activists were not underestimating peasant and worker’s intelligence, rather they were trying to establish a foundation where everyone understood each other. In Mexico City, for example, poor tenants formed alliances with local businesspeople, whom they also depended on for credit. These were the same people who were often robbed by urban guerrillas in acts of revolutionary expropriation.⁴⁸⁴

Juchitecos were also willing to work within the local livestock association, mounting a slate of opposition candidates in 1975 to oust powerful merchants, although the PRI used fraud to overturn the election. According to Vivienne Bennett, urban popular movements were a powerful force the government would not longer ignore. Pedagogically, this embodied a radical shift in student militant strategies. Whereas before students imposed their ideas on popular groups, in the mid and late 1970s, the intent was to focus on grassroots organizing rather than ideological formation.

Social movements also allied with leftist elements within the Catholic Church that drew inspiration from liberation theology. Catechist groups in Mexico City worked with slum dwellers to help organize their protest movements against eviction. The Church did not actively support the rise of COCEI in Juchitán, but the influence of liberation

⁴⁸⁴ Eckstein, “Poor People Versus the State and Capital,” 341.

theology did help to create a radical environment in the region.⁴⁸⁵ Maoists of the Proletarian Line likewise operated under the guidance of the Church, which seemed to contradict the doctrines not only of Maoism but also of Marx, who famously dubbed religion “the opium of the people” and believed that dreams of an afterlife prevented the masses from seeking revolutionary change. Yet liberation theology was far more revolutionary than Marx could ever have imagined. Although the Vatican condemned radical or “red” priests, Samuel Ruiz was able to establish connections with radical groups such as the Proletarian Line to assist in organizing peaceful peasant groups.

The pragmatism of non-violent social movements also encouraged accommodations with the PRI when strategic advantages could be gained as a result. Maoists in Chiapas, for example, never posed a direct threat to the stability of the state. In fact, the Proletarian Line differed from traditional Maoism and other armed insurrections by its close relationship with the state. Advocating a non-violent revolution, Maoists in southern Mexico avoided any sort of confrontation with the Mexican military. Other factions of the militant left denounced the notion of a peaceful move toward socialism and accused the Proletarian Line of selling out to the ruling party. In some instances the Proletarian Line accepted the PRI’s willingness to negotiate land disputes favoring peasants. Also, supporters of the Proletarian Line who faced brutal repression from local authorities occasionally sought alliances with the Federal government for protection. This willingness on the part of the PRI to seek alliances and comply with most demands made it seem the Proletarian Line was relying on state assistance and contradicting their views of the elitist state as the ultimate enemy of the masses. Some would argue that the

⁴⁸⁵ Eckstein, “Poor People Versus the State and Capital,” 336; Rubin, *Decentering the Regime*, 195.

Proletarian Line was only using the PRI's presence in the highlands of Chiapas to gain the acceptance of the people. Their relationship with the regime and their inability to channel an armed insurrection through southern Mexico like their counterparts hoped they would caused them a great deal of criticism from urban guerrillas. In a similar fashion, COCEI proved willing to negotiate with the PRI, and even gained support in local conflicts from Echeverria and Lopez Portillo. Likewise, after the 1985 earthquake, Mexico City residents ultimately turned to the government for help rebuilding their homes, even though it meant signing an accord with the federal government.⁴⁸⁶

Although ideologically quite different from the guerrillas, participants in non-violent social movements shared many of the same difficulties in making contact with the masses. Mexican Maoists preached going out to the countryside, but most had never been outside of cities, much less to heavily populated peasant and indigenous regions. Their inability to function well in those conditions followed by their inexperience and rudimentary Maoist education could have targeted Maoists as "adventurists" and suicidal. For those who came as outsiders, it was often difficult to win the trust of rural folk, who had a long history of exploitation by "city boys." Yet many students learned these rural ways of living in order to build trust and put into motion a revolutionary struggle. Without accurately understanding the social and political conditions of indigent communities in rural areas middle-class youth would be unable to organize peasants because they lacked a comprehensive first-hand understanding of their predicaments.

Perhaps the greatest convergence between guerrillas and other social movements came through the mechanism of land occupations. Amid an array of social backgrounds,

⁴⁸⁶ Eckstein, "Poor People Versus the State and Capital," 343.

particularly in Chihuahua, where there existed a high percentage of farmers and peasants working in agriculture, it did not take long for the PP to pervade Maoist based peasant and farmer organizations throughout the state. Coahuila brigades associated with the PP seemed to have enjoyed the most support from the masses. In Coahuila the PP participated in several land seizures to gain back land lost by peasants to large landowners and companies. Other forms of mobilization occurred through public demonstrations, which seemed to have prompted other independent organizations to form alliances with the PP.

Growing Factionalism

The intense factionalism between the student and revolutionary left complicated any possibility of working together. Student-revolutionaries remained convinced the growing political crisis precipitated by Echeverría was the overture for a potential new revolution. Never persuaded by his populist stance, student-revolutionaries continued to cultivate antagonism in the universities and schools, as well as in the countryside and factories. On the other hand, the moderate student-left preserved its stern anti-armed struggle position despite criticisms from their revolutionary peers. Moderates, despite identifying themselves as radicals, did not interpret working with the PRI as co-option or selling out. On the contrary, they viewed Echeverría's willingness to listen to student leftists and communists as an indication that he was paving the way for students to genuinely become influential actors in state building. As the example of Niebla shows, these clashes within the left between moderates and guerrillas could be quite intense.

They were, in some ways, the most perceptive critics of their own rivals' weaknesses. By examining these intellectual divisions, it is possible to gain a greater understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of student political mobilizing during the 1970s.

Within the PP, factions of the Guevaristas began to divide themselves from the organization due to conflicting political ideologies. The Guevaristas wanted the PP to move towards a violent armed insurrection by putting into play both Che's and Mao's teachings of armed insurrection from the countryside that would encircle the cities and subsequently result in the triumph of the peasant class. There had been little discussion regarding the possibility for an armed insurrection and a swift, immediate revolution. In neither of Orive's writings did he advocate a move toward a violent or prolonged armed insurrection. Members of the PP. Mao himself proclaimed the importance of an armed revolution in order to eliminate the existing political and social environment did not share this element of Maoism, which advocated the importance of an armed insurrection from the countryside. Mao makes it clear when he said that authority comes from the barrel of the revolver and that the mobilization of the peasantry would undertake a people's war.

Even as rival wings of the student opposition debated their differences, PRI officials were very aware of the damaging effects that radical cultures could have on the family structure, and thus took on a proactive role in "educating" parents and society in general about the implications. Political leaders launched into exhaustive tirades in order to marginalize and undervalue radical students, as well as stigmatize student guerrillas as dishonorable, unprincipled, and interestingly enough, uncultured. State officials also made it seem that Mexican youth who participated in moderate political activities were

capable of being “saved” while those deep inside underground organizations were lost causes.⁴⁸⁷ But in reality it was all a part of a program intended to preserve the PRI’s hegemony over all aspects of Mexican life and avoid conceding important institutions for the benefit of marginalized groups.

Neither urban guerrillas nor student radicals won the competition to bring together the largest number of bodies. For revolutionaries the failure to recruit members went beyond societies’ disgust towards violence. Also, people refused to join armed struggles not because they necessarily feared the state’s repressive response. Rather, urban guerrillas failure to draw students and society in general to taking up arms had more to do with historical forces out of their hands. Put differently, Mexican society continued to believe that reform could be carried out through popular protest, that Mexico did not require a revolution, nor did society want to experience such bloodshed once again. But student radicals also experienced similar obstacles. Despite disassociating themselves from revolutionary violence student activists found it increasingly hard to create a new student movement as was discussed at the Foro Nacional in 1972. Instead, student activists saw a better opportunity to be politically active in broader social movements. This strategy in turn made it seem that student activists were more successful in recruiting people into their cause, when in fact they were not the original founders of these struggles.

⁴⁸⁷ In a brave political act president Echeverría visited the UNAM at the beginning of his incumbency. Hundreds of pro and anti-government students were in attendance. Some welcomed the President while a large multitude greeted Echeverría with insults, creating an unpleasant atmosphere. During his speech in a packed auditorium Echeverría punitively responded back to a group of protestors arousing the crowd and making it increasingly difficult for the President to continue uninterrupted. He accused those individuals of intentionally creating a hostile environment and made calling to students to resist being drawn by agitators.

Yet, both sides, nonviolent students and revolutionaries, made major contributions to political culture in their own way. Urban guerrillas altered the fabric of underground culture and insurgent politics by re-appropriating historical symbols associated with the ruling party's official propaganda. By creating a new revolutionary cultural underground, student urban guerrillas defied PRI nationalism as well as the party's definition of revolution. Much has been written about how the 1960s was a decade in which students contravened all types of authority, and it is easy to assume urban guerrillas make up a part of his generation. Nevertheless, their concept of defiance went beyond the reformist, compromising, and even radical ideas of the 60s generation and the new social movements of the 70s. On the other hand, the countless urban and rural organizations that surged in the 1970s fundamentally changed political culture. Peasant and indigenous struggles in rural Mexico and urban popular movements revitalized street protests, mass mobilizations, and the effectiveness of grassroots organizing. Much like urban guerrillas non-violent organizations used direct action as a protest tactic, but refrained from physically confronting the police. Therefore, a single event or social movement did not change the fabric of political culture; rather both popular and revolutionary actions participated in "upgrading" mobilization strategies.

Chapter Four

The Uncivil State

“A state that cannot respect and safeguard human rights does not even deserve to be labeled as such.” -Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, Head of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (1964-1970)

To this day Mexican officials have denied accusations that the government carried-out dirty war tactics during the 1970s counterinsurgency against student urban guerrilla movements. In 2001, the daily *La Jornada* interviewed General Alberto Quintanar Álvarez, who explicitly said: “There was no Dirty War, rather it was a war to cleanup the country from delinquents.”⁴⁸⁸ Former National Defense Secretary Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz (1970-1976) went even further, claiming that the guerrilla war in Mexico was an absolute myth.⁴⁸⁹ But the generals are not alone in denying the presence of extraordinary state-sponsored violence. No less an authority than the esteemed historian Friedrich Katz has argued that the democratic opening of the Echeverría years, the tolerance of leftist thought and exiles from other countries, and civilian control of the military all helped to prevent Mexico from descending into a dirty war.⁴⁹⁰ Renowned political scientist Jorge Castañeda has specifically targeted guerrillas in general, accusing them of disrupting democracy. These claims, among others, have preserved state versions and failed to take into account the thousands of documents,

⁴⁸⁸ Gustavo Castillo García, “En los setenta no hubo *guerra sucia*; se limpió al país de delincuentes,” *La Jornada*, 7 de diciembre 2001.

⁴⁸⁹ Jorge Torres, *Nazar: La historia secreta; el hombre detrás de la guerra sucia* (México: Debate, 2008), 46-47 and José Francisco Gallardo, *Always Near, Always Far: The Armed Forces in Mexico* (San Francisco: Global Exchange, 2001), 7.

⁴⁹⁰ Friedrich Katz, “*La guerra fría en América Latina*,” in *Espejos de la guerra fría: México, América Central y el Caribe*, ed. Daniela Spenser (México D.F.: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2004), 13.

testimonies, and other relevant materials detailing the counterinsurgency campaign.

Testimonies by a few members of the military who participated in the counterinsurgency also reveal the similarities between anti-guerrilla tactics in Mexico and the more popularly studied dirty wars of the Southern Cone.⁴⁹¹ But their peers have continuously debunked these claims.

Indeed, there has been a growing recognition both by academics and by human rights campaigners that Mexicans suffered from pervasive state-sponsored violence during the 1970s. Numerous memoirs and testimonies have been published recounting personal histories of violence at the hand of government officials.⁴⁹² Scholarly works have also begun to support that conclusion.⁴⁹³ The most comprehensive although still unofficial statistics, in the Informe Histórico a la Sociedad Mexicana (The Historical Report to Mexican Society, 2006), suggest that state-sponsored violence resulted in more than 1,300 “disappearances,” 1,000 murders, 5,000 cases of torture, and 2,000 political prisoners.⁴⁹⁴ These figures are considerably lower than the totals for military regimes, nevertheless, this evidence raises serious questions claims made by government officials and academics alike that there was no dirty war in Mexico.

⁴⁹¹ General José Francisco Gallardo has been the most outspoken critic of the state’s counterinsurgency campaign of the 1970s. As a result of his denouncements Gallardo was imprisoned for seven years.

⁴⁹² See Orozco Michel, *La fuga de Oblatos*; Borbolla, *La guerra sucia*; Cilia Olmos and González Ruíz, *Testimonios de la guerra sucia*; Topete, *Los ojos de la noche*; Ibarra Chávez, *La guerrilla de los 70*; Bornemann, *El sendero en tinieblas*; Hiraes Morán, *Orígenes de naufrago*; Robles Garnica, *Guadalajara “La guerrilla olivada*; Chong, *La guerrilla en México*.

⁴⁹³ See Castellanos, *México armado*; Montemayor, *La violencia de estado en México*; Solano Oikión, “El Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria;” Cedillo, “El fuego y el silencio;” Aviña, “Guerrero Insurgent;” Condés Lara, *Represión y rebellion en México*, vol. 3.

⁴⁹⁴ These unofficial statistics come from an array of sources such as the Informe Histórico a la Sociedad Mexicana (The Historical Report to Mexican Society) or IHSM, a report akin to those produced by Truth Commissions in other countries and human rights organizations. When President Vicente Fox ran for the presidency of Mexico one of his platforms was a firm stance on human rights and in 2001 he ordered the Attorney General’s office to investigate human rights abuses in 1968 and during the 1970s. The end result was the IHSM.

This dissertation can contribute to the dirty war debate by examining the national security apparatus created by the Echeverría and López Portillo administrations in response to urban guerrilla movements. High officials, both civilian and military, unremittingly used the term “counterinsurgency” to identify the ploys used to eradicate the “guerrilla threat.” Even without considering government repression of innocent students, the aggressive measures undertaken by the Mexican regime arguably were disproportionate to the violence perpetrated by guerrillas. Urban guerrillas were militarily incapable of overthrowing the government, yet the state responded in a way that depicted revolutionaries as a genuine threat. Although student-revolutionaries were responsible for the deaths of policemen and secret agents, including some high profile figures, the regime sought to exacerbate the sense of danger for political reasons.⁴⁹⁵ The government pledged to defend the populace from extremists by using the politics of fear and arguing a theory that student-guerrillas were threatening the fabric of the family by recruiting students into believing they were genuine revolutionaries. This belief was also used during the 1968 student movement to warn parents against allowing their children to be manipulated into being agents of an international communist conspiracy.

The heightened Cold War mentality around the urban guerrillas paved the way for the Mexican regime to use brutal and unlawful tactics in the name of democracy.

According to Max Weber, violence was not only a right exercised by the government but

⁴⁹⁵ For further reference on the Southern Cone “dirty war” see Thomas C. Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina, and International Human Rights* (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), Anthony W. Pereira, *Political (In)justice: Authoritarianism and the Rule of Law in Brazil, Chile, and Argentina* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), and Martin Edwin Andersen *Dossier Secreto: Argentina's 'Desaparecidos' and the Myth of the "Dirty War"* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

a duty for its self-defense. In the words of President Echeverría, “we will defend democracy from any internal or external aggression, you can be sure of that.”⁴⁹⁶

Following the model of military regimes as well as the paragons of French’s counterinsurgency campaign in Algeria, Mexico developed an anti-subversive syndrome and the armed forces upgraded their security forces and national security doctrine to resemble dirty war tactics.⁴⁹⁷ As with the military regimes of Southern America, the threat of communist insurgency provided a justification for the Mexican government to upgrade its security forces, and as Shawn Smallman observed of Brazil, “permitted the expansion of institutions dedicated to political violence.”⁴⁹⁸ Neglected since World War II, Mexico’s antiquated security system used the rise of armed struggles as an opportunity to modernize its institutions and adopt anti-subversive tactics that would also be used by the ruling party to eliminate potential opposition.⁴⁹⁹

Both Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo worked closely with the security apparatus, including police commanders, the armed forces, and the DFS, to develop counterinsurgency methods to eradicate the guerrillas and their allies. During Echeverría’s term, thousands of activists, peasants, students, and workers were consigned to Mexico City’s dreaded Lecumberri Prison and other penitentiaries around the country. López Portillo’s administration followed in these footsteps by creating a

⁴⁹⁶ “Advertencia del Presidente Echeverría: Defenderemos la democracia frente a cualquier agresión interior o exterior,” *El Día*, 18 de marzo de 1971, 1; Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 33.

⁴⁹⁷ Alan Knight speaks to this in his article, “Cárdenas and Echeverría: Two ‘Populist’ Presidents Compared,” in *Populism in 20th Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 22.

⁴⁹⁸ Shawn C. Smallman, “The Professionalization of Military Terror in Brazil, 1945-1964,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 37 (Summer, 2000), 118.

⁴⁹⁹ Aguayo Quezada, *La charola*, 61-72.

counterinsurgency unit, the Brigada Blanca, to eliminate Mexico's largest urban guerrilla movement, the Liga. With a new, sophisticated anti-guerrilla unit in place, urban guerilla and state-sponsored violence mushroomed during López Portillo's incumbency, but the number of political prisoners actually declined. This shift signified a disturbing reality: the government was no longer incarcerating prisoners; it was "disappearing" them. Nor were all of these prisoners armed guerrillas. In discussing potential targets, civilian and military leaders saw the university as a seedbed for discontent and a guerrilla breeding ground, and as a result student groups loyal to the ruling party infiltrated educational centers, arbitrarily singled-out guerrilla sympathizers, and performed violent attacks against student leftists.⁵⁰⁰ Dozens of student rallies in state schools across the country denounced the imprisonment of their peers, as well as guerrillas. Even though students disagreed with guerrillas, student camaraderie and a moral obligation to defend social justice prompted them to also demand the government release their comrades and see that the judicial process fairly treat them.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the counterinsurgency campaign in the cities, while briefly referring to actions carried out by the military in the countryside. Despite the chapter being urban centered, the counterinsurgency campaign in the city well embodies how far the government was going to see urban guerrillas were completely eradicated. It begins by examining the literature on dirty wars in South America and elsewhere in order to understand the global context in which the Mexican campaigns took place.⁵⁰¹ The chapter then describes how the government worked to construct images of

⁵⁰⁰ See Sánchez Gudiño, *Génesis, desarrollo y consolidación*; AGN, DFS, 15-3-75 H 183 L 16

⁵⁰¹ For more information see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the*

subversion and to degrade opponents as crazed firebrands, whether armed revolutionaries or student sympathizers.⁵⁰² This section is followed by an analysis of security service archives to understand the government's instruments of counterinsurgency, both the military doctrines and the institutional practices. The chapter concludes with the testimonies of imprisoned guerrillas to show how they experienced and survived Mexican state violence in the age of the dirty wars.

Dirty War Debates

The term “dirty war” has inspired a vast historiography, generally focused on Argentina and Chile, although many other countries in Latin America and around the world have now been usefully examined from this perspective. Scholars from an array of disciplines have generated interpretations that range from investigations of memory, gender, human rights, and the cultural consequences of the dirty war on society. These are all important questions, but the focus here is on the origins and implementation of a particular repertoire of discourses and practices associated with counterinsurgency rather than on their long-term effects, which will be considered briefly in the conclusion. The present discussion begins by setting the entwined histories of dirty wars and the Cold War into hemispheric and global perspective. The brutality of the dirty wars arguably began with the racial dynamics of French counterinsurgency against Algerian freedom fighters. These tactics later spread through Latin America with the encouragement of U.S. anti-communism policies. In addition, this section considers the internal dimensions

Making of Our Times (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁵⁰² See Jorge Mendoza García, “Los medios de información y el trato de la guerrilla: Una mirada psicopolítica,” in *Movimientos armados en México*.

of the dirty wars, and how Latin American nations came to apply these brutal tactics against their own populations. Scholars have shown that the implementation of dirty war tactics depended on complex mixtures of ideology and social and political conditions.

The dirty wars of the 1970s and 1980s must be understood in the context of the Cold War. Political scientist Paul Lewis has been a major contributor to the view that the dirty war cannot be examined through isolated cases, but instead arose from a global security doctrine intended to eradicate communism.⁵⁰³ Greg Grandin reinforces this claim by adding “the extension of counterinsurgent violence also entailed a sequential jumping scale, from the regional to the national, and then the transnational.”⁵⁰⁴ It has become more obvious that the United States’ involvement in the dirty wars was larger than previously understood. In the introduction to *In From the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War*, Gilbert Joseph emphasizes that the Cold War in Latin America has yet to be incorporated into Cold War Studies. Without speaking specifically of the dirty wars, he largely attributes two decades of repressive governments in Latin America to U.S. Cold War policies.⁵⁰⁵ What can also be added further is that Mexico’s has been excluded from this historiography. Recently, however, the image of “pax-priista” has slowly eroded and new scholarship, including this dissertation has re-written Mexico’s “untroubled” 70s as a period of tremendous political strife and violence.

⁵⁰³ Paul Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals: The “Dirty War” in Argentina* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 107. While I agree with Lewis’ claim, his one-sided assessment of armed struggles in Argentina is questionable.

⁵⁰⁴ Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph, *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America’s Long Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3. This idea speaks to the Mexican case. As noted in chapter two I argued that regional dirty wars were first used by local governments to clampdown on student movements before transforming into a national project.

⁵⁰⁵ See Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, *In from the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). 3,19.

The term “dirty war,” as well as many of the tactics used in its pursuit, originated with the French military during Algeria’s brutal war of independence (1954-1962) to justify the usage of unconventional war tactics. French officials argued that their “war against subversion” required the violation of the Geneva Convention’s rules of war. Thus, they explicitly called their counterinsurgency effort against the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (National Liberation Front) a dirty war because of the illicit methods of torture, random incarcerations, and the suspension of civil and human rights. Marie-Monique Robin’s *Los Escuadrones de la Muerte: La escuela francesa* (Squadrons of Death: The French School, 2005) traces the usage of dirty war tactics from these colonial origins to their eventual application in the Southern Cone of Latin America. She argues that “dirty war” does not have an empirical definition, and that using it to simply measure state-sponsored violence is not accurate because its application differs from case to case. Robin stresses that the dirty war experiences in countries like Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay should not be interpreted individually, but rather represents a broader context and the implications of Cold War policies in the region and U.S. hegemony in the hemisphere.⁵⁰⁶ The broadening of the term has prompted scholars, human rights groups, and the mainstream media to embrace dirty war as a valid label for the civil war in Guatemala, the Peruvian government’s violent counterinsurgency campaign against the Shining Path guerrillas, and the War on Drugs in Colombia.⁵⁰⁷ Even

⁵⁰⁶ Marie-Monique Robin’s *Los Escuadrones de la Muerte: La escuela francesa* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2005).

⁵⁰⁷ Gerardo Rénique, “‘People’s War, ‘Dirty War’: Cold War Legacy and the End of History in Postwar Peru,” in Grandin and Joseph, *A Century of Revolution*, 309-337; See also Kate Doyle, “The Atrocity Files: Deciphering the Archives of Guatemala’s Dirty War,” *Harper’s Magazine*, December 2007.

today, Mexican politicians are constantly being quoted accusing party officials of carrying out political dirty wars against opponents.

Although the United States had supported military regimes and launched interventions before 1959, most notably in the CIA-sponsored overthrow of a democratically elected government in Guatemala in 1954, after the success of the Cuban Revolution the threat of communism in the Western Hemisphere inspired widespread paranoia. Officials in Washington mulled over ways to prevent another country from “going communist” even if it meant supporting non-democratic regimes and turning a blind-eye to human rights abuses. Latin American countries were expected to institutionalize a rigid national security doctrine formulated by the United States. In the years following 1961, Latin Americans experienced massive atrocities, human rights abuses, and censorship—all “symptoms of the Cold War.”⁵⁰⁸ Countries like Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala received financial, political, and military support from the United States, and in return they were given free-range to employ any strategies to eliminate subversion. Military dictatorships and anti-communist regimes in Latin America would have never been able to function or prolong their hegemony without support from the United States.

The transnational phenomena of Latin America’s dirty wars are also exemplified by studies of Operation Condor, an international alliance intended to eliminate guerrilla movements and other underground networks, and eradicate anyone who advocated Marxist ideas. Originally sponsored by the Chilean government, the coalition also

⁵⁰⁸ Jorge Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War* (New York: Vintage Press, 1993), 5.

included Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and later Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru. After its creation, it was approved by the United States. John Dinges' journalistic account, *The Condor Years* (2005), based on declassified documents and interviews in the United States and Latin America, revealed how regimes brought violence and terror to other parts of the world, largely with the United States' stamp of approval. The dirty war was also exported to Central America during its decades of civil war in the 1970s and 1980s. Ariel C. Armony has shown that the Argentine military government shared counterrevolutionary tactics with death squads and military governments in the region as a part of their crusade to eradicate Communism in the hemisphere.⁵⁰⁹

Mexico has a unique place in the Cold War because of its revolutionary heritage. Despite the tense history between Mexico and the United States, both countries seemed to agree on the need to contain international communism. In fact, the alliance on both sides fostered during the Cold War helped to heal previous wounds.⁵¹⁰ Moreover, Mexico received training and assistance from the United States in the 1940s and 50s. Enrique Condés Lara has recently revealed that the CIA and FBI were increasingly involved in training Mexico's own secret service. Important figures like J. Edgar Hoover and Winston Scott, Chief of the Mexico City station from 1956 to 1969, were among the most prominent figures to see that Cold War policies were implemented and Mexican security forces were prepared to deal with communist subversion.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁹ Ariel Armony, "Transnacionalizando la 'guerra sucia': Argentina en Centroamérica," in *Espesos de la guerra fría: México, América Central y el Caribe*, ed. Daniela Spenser (México D.F.: Miguel Angel Porrúa, 2004), 319.

⁵¹⁰ Enrique Condés Lara, *Rebelión y represión en México* (México D.F.: Miguel Angel Porrúa, 2007), 59.

⁵¹¹ See Jefferson Morley, *Our Man in Mexico: Winston Scott and the Hidden History of the CIA* (Lawrence:

Unlike Argentina, which suffered from decades of political turmoil prior to the military junta's seizure of power, Chile had a long and proud tradition of civilian government. Therefore, one question for scholars of the military dictatorship is how the coup against Salvador Allende was successful. Although scholars emphasize the importance of the CIA in destabilizing the regime, internal factors are also important in explaining the rise of the regime. Likewise, in Chile the military dictatorship "worked within the law" to suppress subversives. It is typical during military dictatorships that all institutions of power were subordinate to the military junta, which defined the boundaries of legality.⁵¹² According to Thomas C. Wright, the suppression of human rights under the military was greatly facilitated by the judicial system. Nevertheless, "under the state of siege, the military justice system enjoyed sweeping authority that infringed on the judiciary's normal jurisdiction. Civilian courts out of fear simply accepted the military's word that an individual was detained or not."⁵¹³

In Argentina, the Church also supported these tactics, adding a religious and spiritual dimension to rhetoric of the "war against subversion." Frank Graziano's book, *Divine Violence: Spectacle, Psychosexuality, and Radical Christianity in the Argentine 'Dirty War'* (1992) spells out how the Church was actively involved in legitimatizing the tactics used by the state. Graziano argues that the military junta revamped its rhetoric to suggest that they were not only fighting a war against communism but also for the

University of Kansas Press, 2008).

⁵¹² For more information on issues of legality see Branca Eloysa, *Tortura Nunca Mais* (Rio de Janeiro: Petrópolis, 1987), 74-77, and Julio Scherer García and Carlos Monsiváis, *Los patriotas: De Tlatelolco a la guerra sucia* (México D.F.: Nuevo Siglo, 2004), and Mark J. Osiel, "Constructing Subversion in Argentina's Dirty War," *Representations* 75 (2001): 144 and Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela, *A Nation of Enemies: Chile Under Pinochet* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 140-143.

⁵¹³ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina, and International Human*, 70.

salvation of western society.⁵¹⁴ Likewise, in a speech, Augusto Pinochet, demonstrated the military government's religious undertone by stating that the coup had been "God's work," and that he was committed to carry out the "moral cleansing" of Chile.⁵¹⁵ The messianic rhetoric employed by the military juntas had a two-fold affect: first, it helped to legitimize the usage of extreme measures to eliminate the threat. Second, adding a messianic dimension to the fight served to instill more fear into the minds of citizens. But not all clerics supported the dirty war. The less conservative sector of the Church openly condemned the state's brutal tactics. The Church in Chile created support networks for people affected by the dictatorship, creating commissions like the National Committee for Aid of Refugees and the Committee for Cooperation for Peace in Chile. Similarly, in Argentina the Church created similar groups.⁵¹⁶

Studies of the Holocaust, particularly question of the complicity of the entire German nation in genocide, have also influenced the dirty war literature. In their book *Violence Workers* (2002), Martha K. Huggins, Mika Haritos-Fatouros, and Philip G. Zimbardo asked how "ordinary people" were transformed into perpetrators of violence. With considerable effort, due to the sensitivity of the subject, the authors were able to interview twenty-five former police officers involved in the dirty war in Brazil. According to the authors these individuals demonstrated no prior history of violent acts. Perpetrators were transformed into violent individuals only after being "brainwashed" by state rhetoric. The authors nickname these men as "cool-headed" people who never

⁵¹⁴ Frank Graziano, *Divine Violence. Spectacle, Psychosexuality, and Radical Christianity in the Argentine 'Dirty War'* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 144.

⁵¹⁵ Ernesto Ekaizer, *Yo Augusto* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 2003), 142-143.

⁵¹⁶ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 55.

would have involved themselves in such atrocities of this sort if they had not been badly informed of the threats “subversives” had on their country. While further study of high-ranking officials is needed, this work demonstrates the effectiveness of the military government in constructing a perception of subversion.⁵¹⁷

Only for the past ten years has the term dirty war been associated with the counterinsurgency campaign against armed struggles and human rights in Mexico. The scholarship on state-sponsored violence, the dirty war, and human rights all in the seventies has bypassed Mexico in large part because of the country’s complicated position of non-alignment within the Cold War, maintaining cordial relations with both Cuba and the United States. When military dictatorships were coming to power in South America and Central America, Mexico remained democratic in the eyes of the world. Even after 1968, the general view was that Mexico was still a bastion of democracy in the developing world. The PRI’s authoritarian bureaucracy allowed some leniency for political opposition and Marxist-inspired ideas to be taught and discussed in educational spaces. Echeverría even pronounced in his first state of the union address: “we respect all ideologies.”⁵¹⁸ Realistically, this reflected a double discourse. The Mexican government depicted itself as tolerant, but it also infiltrated student organizations and monitored the political ambiance on campuses. Academic freedom also appeared to be well established, but a number of unwritten caveats compromised the essence of free speech. This was all done in order to “assured that class struggle remained within the confines of state

⁵¹⁷ Martha K. Huggins, Mika Haritos-Fatouros, and Philip G. Zimbardo, *Violence Workers: Police Torturers and Murderers Reconstruct Brazilian Atrocities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁵¹⁸ Echeverría, Luis A. Primer Informe de Gobierno, *Mexico a través de los informes presidenciales*, 336.

regulations.”⁵¹⁹ One would think the specter of Tlatelolco would have caused the government to think twice about engaging in unlawful counterinsurgency tactics, espionage, and dabble with academic freedom, but this was not the case.

The 1970s also mark a critical point in the ruling party’s history as politicians brought re-legitimization to the forefront of its political discourse. The use of counterinsurgency tactics suggests the state had lost the consent of rule, yet attempted to reclaim by defending its people. In a time when the PRI was seeking to legitimize itself in the public sphere following a cycle of violent episodes that discredited its democratic veneer, armed revolutionary struggles intended to undermine the PRI’s political and economic ambitions. From a political standpoint these were precarious times for the ruling party, which suggests that there is an important relationship between its campaign to reestablish political legitimacy and relations with potential opposition. The actions carried out by the government during the dirty war also demonstrate a shift in party politics. While the ruling party’s legitimacy was not completely restored during the dirty war, inter-party discussions and concerns suggest the PRI was less concerned about serving the people and more interested in preserving its power.

⁵¹⁹ Eugene Gogol, *The Concept of the Other in Latin American Liberation: Fusing Emancipatory Philosophic Thought and Social Revolt* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 184. Government officials created avenues for peasants and workers to channel their demands, but left students out of its corporatist project until Echeverría instituted reforms to incorporate students and intellectuals into national development projects. State officials believed students had no right to engage in class struggle antagonism given they were not “oppressed” people or belonged to a particularly social class. Nevertheless, this all changed during the urban guerrilla experience.

Constructing Subversion⁵²⁰

The Mexican ruling party sought to use the threat of urban guerrillas to restore its political legitimacy by defining as subversive those who challenged its leadership. This campaign against dissidents was carried out on two fronts, within the courts and by way of propaganda. Among the many roles of the state is establishing the norms of citizenship and showing who belongs and who sits outside the boundaries. This process of categorization and codification of what constituted a “genuine citizen,” was, in the words of Carole Nagengast, part of a larger project of “creating punishable categories of people, forging and maintaining boundaries among them, and building the consensus around those categories that specifies and enforces behavioral norms and legitimates and de-legitimates specific groups.”⁵²¹ Mexican officials also worked with sympathetic media outlets to embellish the threat of urban guerrillas, thereby creating a vague and diffuse image of the enemy that extended beyond armed combatants to include student dissidents. To heighten the sense of danger within the population, the government invoked anti-imperialist sentiments by speaking ominously of domestic enemies as agents of foreign conspiracy.

The use of legal mechanisms to define subversion was common to military dictatorships of South America. Law professor Mark J. Osiel, explains how the Argentine dictatorship “constructed subversion” in order to legitimize their practice of illicit

⁵²⁰ I borrowed this term from Mark J. Osiel. See Mark J. Osiel, “Constructing Subversion in Argentina’s Dirty War,” *Representation* no. 75 (Summer 2001).

⁵²¹ Carole Nagengast, “Violence, Terror, and the Crisis of the State,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 122. See also Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977); E. Martin, *The Women in the Body* (Boston: Beacon, 1987); and Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

measures against dissidents. According to Osiel, “subversion is very much a social construction, specifically, an interpretation of human nature, history and national identity not entirely amenable to empirical confirmation—or rebuttal.”⁵²² Anthony W. Pereira concurs that understanding authoritarian legality enables us to frame a more “detailed picture of exactly how the law was manipulated distorted, and abused under authoritarianism.”⁵²³ Even military governments sought to work within the letter of the law when implementing their national security policies. To achieve that goal, the line between illegal and legal was ambiguous. In a similar fashion, the Mexican government exaggerated the guerrilla threat and arbitrarily defined “subversion” to allow military and police officials, along with paramilitaries, the ability to carry out repressive tactics under the protection of the law.

When the Mexican government first began using terms like subversive, terrorist, and criminal, it did not provide a precise definition of what constituted these categorizations. Labels were broad enough terms that the State could manipulate them to cater to their anti-subversive policies. In cities, students were targeted for being responsible for class antagonism and more likely to assimilate to subversive ideas and mannerisms. Labels were broad enough so that the State could manipulate them to cater to their anti-subversive policies. As a result of this ambiguity, during the 1970s, hundreds of non-guerrilla youth were targeted for simply having a political life and participating in activities the State defined as subversive activities. Universities and preparatory schools became the epicenter of conspiracy in the view of government officials. Students and

⁵²² Osiel, “Constructing Subversion in Argentina’s Dirty War, 119.

⁵²³ Anthony W. Pereira, *Political (In) justice: Authoritarianism and the Rule of Law in Brazil, Chile, and Argentina* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 7.

teachers who professed radical ideas were monitored and accused of being agitators as well as guerrilla sympathizers.⁵²⁴ Monitoring and harassment of this sort by police and pro-government students groups transformed universities, leftist rallies, and student hangouts into sites of potential confrontation. In this way, even moderate student dissidents could never speak safely without worrying about government repression.⁵²⁵

In his fourth annual address to Congress, President Echeverría condemned the violent behavior of student-revolutionaries, and exploited the politics of fear to cultivate anxieties in society and the family:

It is thus imperative ladies and gentlemen, that we now focus on the composition of these small groups of terrorist cowards unfortunately integrated by young men and women whose actions are akin to other armed organizations around the world, and in which these acts have become fashionable. These individuals originate from broken homes; from irresponsible families; they are victims of the lack of communication between parents and teachers; they are to a large extent youth with learning disabilities; adolescents that suffer with maladjustment behavior; with precocious inclinations for drug use and who are sexual promiscuous; have homosexual tendencies, and are victims of violence...⁵²⁶

The address was also a call to families to focus on their relationships with their sons and daughters, and to suggest that the family structure in Mexico was the

⁵²⁴ AGN, DGIPS, caja 1920, "Problema estudiantil," 23-I-73, 660.

⁵²⁵ AGN, DFS, 100-23-1-73 H-237 L-23; AGN, DFS, 11-219-73 H-92 L-4; DGIPS, caja 1920, "Estado de Nuevo León," DFS 14-II-74, 95. The Ministry of Interior also monitored foreigners. See DGIPS, caja 1920, "Actividades de los asilados políticos Chilenos," DFS 21-I-74.

⁵²⁶ Centro de Documentación y Análisis, Cámara de Diputados, "Cuarto Informe de Gobierno de Luis Echeverría Álvarez," Informes Presidenciales, www.diputados.gob.mx/cedia/sia/re/RE-ISS-09-06-14.pdf, 180.

responsibility of civil society, not necessarily the government. In this way, Echeverría sought to blame the actions of student-revolutionaries not on the lack of social justice and democracy in Mexico, but rather on the supposed failures of parents in raising well-adjusted children. Moreover, Echeverría's degrading depiction of revolutionaries fit within the government's program to delegitimize social movements that advocated justice by labeling their acts as counterrevolutionary and as traitors to what the government considered to be the true Mexican Revolution of 1910. Echeverría further personalized his tirade on young revolutionaries by tarnishing their political awareness. In his own words he argued that Mexican students were "not conscious of the crisis, but going through a crisis of consciousness."⁵²⁷ By continuing to undervalue student's role in politics Echeverría contradicted his program of cooperating with Mexican youth and rectifying the relationship between the government and them.

As in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, Mexican military officials dreamt up an ambiguous conspiracy around an obscure enemy that could not be easily detected but was living among society. Mexicans also largely based their opinions on what the media reported and the President's discourse. Without a clear identification of what the enemy looked like categorization would change to encompass a diversity of vague descriptions such as: enemies of the state, uncultured, and dissident.⁵²⁸ Anyone who fit these unclear classifications was subject to arrest, tortured, imprisoned, disappeared, or murdered. This facilitated the targeting of students in the city given they composed the greater part of

⁵²⁷ Carlos García, *Fulgor rebelde*, 11.

⁵²⁸ Bertha Lilia Gutiérrez, interview with author.

armed struggles. Hundreds were picked up during rallies or as they walk the streets of Guadalajara, Mexico City, Monterrey, and Culiacán.

Combined with the PRI's paternalistic character and protective discourse the ruling party depicting itself as a defender of democracy, in which a violent response was necessary. The PRI's hyperbolic rhetoric about the threat of student revolutionaries had no limits. Officials and military personnel worked overtime to twist student-revolutionary and rural guerrilla's political program. Other forms of minimizing students' actions were to reduce their activities as infantile. As the father figure, the PRI was therefore obliged to reprimand its children. Octavio Paz explained this mentality conflating authoritarian politics with patriarchy: "Behind the respect for Señor Presidente there is the traditional image of the Father...The image of Mexican authority is inspired by two extremes: Señor Presidente and Caudillo."⁵²⁹ Nevertheless, the corporatist structure so famously used by the PRI to control and work with particular social groups and other interest groups began to falter in the wake of the 1968 student movement and even more after 1971.⁵³⁰ The guerrilla movements, both rural and urban, from the State's point of view rekindled a class and cultural struggle and challenged the patriarchal state. While student revolutionaries did not necessarily make up one of those special interest groups largely because of misconstrued and prejudiced ideas about them, their political rhetoric contradicted the PRI's cultural, political, and social program. But as the 1968 student

⁵²⁹ Octavio Paz, "Return to the Labyrinth of Solitude," trans. Yara Milos in Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*, trans. Lysander Kemp, Yara Milos, Rachel Phillips Balash (New York: Grover Press, 1985), 336 cited in Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1.

⁵³⁰ Roderic Ai Camp, *Politics in Mexico: The Decline of Authoritarianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). 151-152.

movement confirmed, students had become a powerful and volatile political group with the capacity to make cross-class alliances and organize the underclass. Thus, the intentions of the counterinsurgency campaign were not exclusively fought on a political terrain, but also in opposition to the cultural and social impact of the guerrillas.

Principles and Practices of Repression

The Mexican dirty war was an anti-subversive campaign that targeted organizations and revolutionary groups of different capacities regardless of whether they were a genuine threat to the government. High-ranking officials in the military as well as in the PRI never clearly defined what subversion denoted and who fit such a description, which was intentionally meant to be broad enough to incriminate anyone or any action directly challenging the government. In his book, *Movimiento subversivo en México*, then coronel Mario Acosta Chaparro explicitly uses the term subversive as broadly as possible to describe enemies of the state, as well as support the international conspiracy theory.⁵³¹ Politically this strategy allowed for the government to indiscriminately pick up people without concrete evidence and harass students unaligned to any political organizations or revolutionary movement.

The anti-subversive campaign against student urban guerrillas was instrumental in modernizing Mexico's antiquated security system. Previous methods used to contain dissent based largely on cooptation were fruitless after groups resurfaced with their political line radically transformed. Anti-subversive tactics during the 1970s were profoundly altered from containing opposition to completely eliminating its agents. No

⁵³¹ Acosta Chaparro, *Movimientos subversivo en México*, 11-13.

longer were state officials dealing with moderate radicals they could easily monitor, and as a result the government established an extensive security network, complete with legal mechanism, counterinsurgency doctrine, an elite brigade of troops, and extrajudicial prisons for carrying out brutal interrogations and incarcerations. The tactics and strategies that shaped the national security doctrine in Mexico were based on an ideology of repression that grew out of a mixture of anti-communist sentiments, political desperation, and patriotism. This ideology, in turn, provided the foundation for a national security doctrine that intended not merely to justify or rationalize excessive force, but to actively embrace a credo of state-sponsored violence. Anyone found contesting the manner in which the government carried out its “war against subversion” was immediately reprimanded, while military men faced the death penalty for insubordination.⁵³²

The first usage of modern Mexican counterinsurgency dates back to 1965 and preformed in a rural setting. The failed assault on the Madera Barracks in Chihuahua, by the Grupo Popular Guerrillero prompted the government to work with national security forces to develop new tactics to resist armed struggles. When survivors of Madera reorganized into the September 23rd Movement almost immediately after the assault and began to organize revolutionary actions, the armed forces practiced its first anti-subversive tactics. Under the code name Operación Yunque y Martillo (Operation Anvil and Hammer), the Mexican military for the first time employed “low intensity conflict” counterinsurgency tactics learned at the School of the Americas in Panama.⁵³³

⁵³² Cedillo, “El fuego y el silencio”, 360-361.

⁵³³ Juan Fernando Reyes Peláez, “El largo brazo del estado: La estrategias contrainsurgente del gobierno mexicano,” in *Movimientos armados en México, siglo XX* vol. II, ed. Verónica Oikión Solano and Marta Eugenia García Ugarte (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, CIESAS, 2008), 405-406.

These counterinsurgency strategies were subsequently applied to fight Lucio Cabañas and Vázquez's rural armed struggles in Guerrero in the 1960s. In the countryside a "scorched earth" policy was used for exterminating these guerrillas, and typically these atrocities went undetected and were never reported by the media. On a national scale urban dwellers were less informed about the violence occurring outside of major cities. The media, loyal to the PRI, only published reports trumpeting the military's progress in eliminating the guerrillas, but left out the atrocities carried about by contingents. Civilian deaths, if they ever made the news, were reported as collateral damage, but of course the State never took responsibility for those deaths. Rather they publicized them as being the fault of guerrillas.⁵³⁴ From a comparative standpoint, Guerrero easily resembled rural Guatemala during its civil war and the unwavering terror directed towards indigenous communities encountered by the military and death squads. Villages in Guerrero affected by the "dirty war" still stand, unlike Guatemala where entire villages and their residents were forced to leave or face possible death at the hands of the armed forces. Military contingents in Guerrero ravaged villages and performed illicit acts all seemingly justified to protect civilians from guerrillas. One village, La Quemada, literally "the burnt one," on the road between Acapulco and the city of Atoyac continues to stand as a symbolic memory of the State's counterinsurgency campaign. During the 1970s the military made massive sweeps throughout communities assumed to be sympathizers of the Partido de los Pobres or PDLP, a rural guerrilla organizations made up of peasants. In the village of La Quemada the majority of the male population was "disappeared"—some men returned but showed signs of torture while others were

⁵³⁴ "Guerrero: Terror y crimen," *Excelsior*, 23 abril 1973.

never heard from again. Normally these human rights abuses went unreported since victims feared further abuse or even death. A decade later when questioned about the government's counterinsurgency campaign in the countryside one official confessed that outside of Mexico City there was no control over counterinsurgency operations.⁵³⁵

Together the army and the marines collaborated with one another in the countryside. When necessary the air force was called to reinforce both branches by bombing zones where guerrilla encampments were believed to be positioned, or to assist in transporting prisoners. Large bombardments also took a major toll on farming communities, which were sometimes restricted from working their lands—putting at risk their harvest. Farmer's milpas were often destroyed by military contingents or were collateral damage during major bombings by the air force. On a daily basis locals were harassed and abused at military checkpoints scattered throughout the Sierra. Soldiers also abused their powers by stealing crops from poor farming family's land, and much of these abuses went undetected by the general public. Abuses by soldiers were often considered more heinous than in urban areas. Mass rape, executions, and other aberrant actions against the community were just some of the methods used by the military to spread fear in rural communities.⁵³⁶ Massive atrocities were carried out against the campesino communities of Guerrero. The remoteness of these communities facilitated the military's usage of illicit measures, which allowed their actions to sometimes go undetected. While villages in Mexico were not entirely eliminated, racialized acts against

⁵³⁵ Raúl Monge, "La lucha antisubversión, 'no se sabía dónde quedaba la bolita,'" *Proceso*, 23 of diciembre 2001, 10.

⁵³⁶ The state with the most reported *desaparecidos* is Guerrero. For more information on the state repression see Simón Hipólito, *Guerrero, Amnistía y represión* (México D.F.: Editorial Grijalbo, 1982) and José Arturo Gallegos Nájera, *La guerrilla en Guerrero* (Chilpancingo: Editorial Lama, 2004).

indigenous and peasant communities represented themselves on many occasions.⁵³⁷

Cabañas was well loved in the Sierra of Atoyac, one of the poorest regions of the state of Guerrero. Most of his campesino support came from this region. Knowing that this part of the state was sympathetic to the guerrillas the Mexican military set up camps and terrorized local communities on a regular basis.⁵³⁸

The Echeverría and López Portillo administrations took major steps to distribute an ideology of repression across all the counterinsurgency agencies, and it did so with the idea that a common ideology would inject a sense of determinism into the minds of counterinsurgency agents—turning them into heartless killing machines. The arrest of a group of MAR revolutionaries in 1971 reawakened the fear of an international communist conspiracy when militants confessed that they received training in North Korea.⁵³⁹ Soon after discovering MAR hideouts, Cold War politics returned to the fore of State discourse.⁵⁴⁰ Military leaders gave impassioned speeches using a mixture of Cold War rhetoric and preaching about the prestige and historical significance of the military in preserving order against homegrown enemies of the state. All anti-subversive units were thus expected to conceive a war-like mindset in which the enemy, despite being internal, was no different from any other adversary. The same patriotic rhetoric used to incite the military was carried over to other units working in conjunction with the armed forces. State officials also proclaimed that it was the “patriotic duty” of the armed forces

⁵³⁷ Fernando Medina Ruiz, *El terror en México* (México D.F.: Editores Asociados, 1974), 115 and Carlos Montemayor, *La guerrilla recurrente* (México D.F.: Debate, 2007).

⁵³⁸ Luis Suárez, *Lucio Cabañas: El guerrillero sin esperanza* (México D.F.: ROCA, 1976), 22.

⁵³⁹ DFS, AGN, Exp. 11-207-71 H-101 L-1 and Exp. 11-207-71 H-29 L-1.

⁵⁴⁰ Gustavo M. García, “Localizan un campo de entrenamiento y un depósito de armas del M.A.R.,” *El Universal*, 21 enero 1972.

to defend the sovereignty of the country whether the threat was domestic or foreign, something not new to the lexicon of the military. Soldiers and agents who were expected to confront the guerrilla threat head on were pumped up with violent rhetoric all justified in the name of ensuring the security of the patria. The mentality of the state and how they viewed violence as a tool is a classic example of the Weberian thesis on the monopoly of violence.⁵⁴¹

The major newspapers of Mexico City, including *El Universal*, *Excélsior*, and *El Heraldillo de México*, also contributed to an ideology of repression with favorable reporting on counterinsurgency campaigns. One article titled “¿Hay terroristas en México?” perfectly exhibits how the press collaborated with the State’s anti-subversive campaign and rhetoric.⁵⁴² Besides assisting the PRI in legitimizing its war, the press was a major player in disproving the power and clout revolutionaries had on the population, entirely basing their claims on biased information provided by the government and never making an effort to communicate with insurgents to learn about their justifications for resorting to the methods they were using. In an interview with *Novedades*, Secretary of Gobernación Mario Moya Palencia (1970-1976), argued that guerrilla movements were without any mass base and that society would never join an organization or movement that resorted to violence to stimulate reform.⁵⁴³ Of course the media never spoke of the violence carried out by the armed forces and paramilitary groups. When confrontations were published the press always placed the responsibility on guerrillas.

⁵⁴¹ Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*.

⁵⁴² Jorge Aviles Randolph, “¿Hay terroristas en México?: Esquema organizativo de los extremistas,” *El Universal*, 3 de diciembre 1971, 7B.

⁵⁴³ “Pleno repudio del pueblo a todo movimientos subversivos,” *Novedades*, 2 septiembre 1972.

However, such tactics as dividing up rural territory into military zones of occupation and employing scorched earth were not practical when urban guerrilla movements surged in the early 1970s. Again, the military and secret police were required to revamp their counterinsurgency doctrine. Since the first uprisings in Guerrero in the late 1960s, the State denied the presence of guerrilla movements in Mexico, and it was very effective at first to keeping society unaware of the real situation. Nevertheless, it became increasingly difficult when revolutionary groups established fronts throughout the country and began to carry out actions on a larger scale. Guerrillas made their presence felt by strategically forming small *focos* in different parts of the country, taking responsibility for bank robberies (expropriations), assaulting police, kidnappings, and performing other forms of revolutionary propaganda. By 1971, the State had no other choice than to acknowledge that Mexico was in fact experiencing the rise of an undisclosed level of “terrorist organization.”

President Echeverría responded to the challenge by upgrading military and police training.⁵⁴⁴ The counterinsurgency doctrine in the 1970s was based on the following principles:

1. The complete annihilation of armed revolutionary groups.
2. The counterinsurgency campaign is to not be ideological given that guerrilla movements had no clout in the masses or influence on the media.
3. Classify members of guerrilla movements as “dangerous delinquents” to justify the counterinsurgency campaign.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid, 406.

4. In order to eliminate rural guerrilla movements it was necessary to modernize the military's arsenal and character in order to assure they were adequately prepared to take on such a task fighting an unconventional war in an unknown terrain.
5. The battle against urban guerrilla movements required a different yet similar approach. This entailed the full support of the police, torture, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial executions, and "disappearances."
6. The Mexican State transformed counterinsurgency groups into urban paramilitary organizations and granted them with impunity.⁵⁴⁵

All branches of the military were involved in the counterinsurgency; however, this did not mean that all branches coordinated smoothly to implement policies. In fact, different branches of the security apparatus battled constantly for administrative turf. Power struggles were particularly intense between the Secretaries National Defense, Cuenca Díaz and Félix Gálvan López and the directors of the DFS, Gobernación, military commanders, and paramilitary groups. Many others formed under-the-table alliances and deals in exchange for certain privileges and autonomy, at times with presidential authorization. Certainly there is little evidence to suggest that high-ranking officials questioned the ideology of repression. All were hardliners fully dedicated to their jobs.

⁵⁴⁵ Jorge Luis Sierra, "Fuerzas armadas y contrainsurgencia," in *Movimientos armados en México, siglo XX* vol. II, ed. Verónica Oikión Solano and Marta Eugenia García Ugarte (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, CIESAS, 2008), 361-362.

President López Portillo escalated the struggle against urban guerrillas even further by creating elite paramilitary units. By the mid-1970s, the guerrilla movements in the countryside had been largely repressed, allowing the military to focus its efforts on urban campaigns. López Portillo's frustration with the radical left, together with the failed kidnapping of his sister, Margarita López Portillo, in 1976, influenced his "política de aniquilamiento" or annihilation policy.⁵⁴⁶ Once again the counterinsurgency doctrine was modernized in accordance with the current situation. This gave way to the creation of urban paramilitary groups composed of elite officers and soldiers.⁵⁴⁷ The counterinsurgency campaign gave rise to a core of "elite repressors" who were given the responsibility to specifically hunt down urban guerrillas in the cities at any cost.

Because of this sense of personal involvement, the president and his top officers stayed abreast of all actions taken in the war against the guerrillas. This engagement was in contrast to Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and perhaps Chile, where the high command of the armed forces and military junta wanted to know as little as possible about the counterinsurgency campaign.⁵⁴⁸ Mexican police, military, and DFS officials reported directly back to the Secretary of Gobernación Moya Palencia and Secretary of National Defense Cuenca Díaz.⁵⁴⁹ In turn, President López Portillo, met with both director of the

⁵⁴⁶ Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, 187-190.

⁵⁴⁷ Reyes Peláez, "El largo brazo del estado: La estrategias contrainsurgente del gobierno mexicano," 407.

⁵⁴⁸ See chapter "Chile under State Terrorism" in Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*.

⁵⁴⁹ Moya Palencia was Secretary of Interior during the entire Echeverría administration and campaigned to be nominated as the PRI's presidential candidate for the 1967 elections but failed to be elected, and ambassador to the United Nations. During his tenure Moya was denounced for being the mastermind behind the Jueves de Corpus massacre in 1971. Public condemned the repression and even accused him of genocide just as Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría were held responsible in the wake of the 1968 massacre. Cuenca Díaz also held the Secretary of National Defense during the same administration. He was the first Defense Secretary who did not participate in the armed phase of the Mexico Revolution.

DFS Miguel Nazar Haro⁵⁵⁰ and General Francisco Quirós Hermosillo to devise a plan to create a semi-secret counterinsurgency force capable of annihilating the guerrillas.⁵⁵¹ The Brigada Blanca, created in 1976, had as its sole objective the annihilation of the Liga, Mexico's largest and most powerful urban guerrilla movement. The government believed that once the Liga had been defeated, other smaller armed struggles would also surrender. In the memory of the dirty war the Brigada Blanca was seen as one of the most notorious organizations—resembling other paramilitary groups in Chile and Argentina. They employed tactics similar to those used by the Chilean Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (National Intelligence Directorate) to clampdown on urban guerrillas and violated an unprecedented number of human rights abuses. From this counterinsurgency unit emerged the most infamous torturers and perpetrators of violence. Immediately following its created in 1976, citizens and revolutionary organizations experienced an increase in extrajudicial executions, violence in the cities, and disappearances became more frequent and the level of confrontations between agents and urban guerrillas amply grew.⁵⁵² According to one author, “the war between the Brigada and the Liga was very intense. They killed each other on the streets with greater violence and ‘selective

⁵⁵⁰ Nazar Haro was the director of the DFS during when the Brigada Blanca was created but his actual participating in the creating of the group is dubious. According to the ranking system in Mexico, the DFS was under the military and thus any elite militaristic group formed during the “dirty war” had to be supervised by high-ranking official of the military. Therefore Nazar Haro would be unqualified. Though the official narrative is that he *was* the supreme leader and I was unable to locate any tangible evidence that contradicts that belief.

⁵⁵¹ Coronel Quirós Hermosillo was also active in Guerrero and identified to be the mastermind behind *los vuelos de la muerte*. See Laura Castellanos, *Mexico Armado, 1943-1981* (México D.F: Ediciones Era, 2007), 268.

⁵⁵² See “Ejercito contra la 23,” *La Prensa*, 23 de abril 1977, cited in Sierra Guzmán, *El enemigo interno*, 92.

assassinations.”⁵⁵³ This proves how the government’s anti-subversive campaign policy went from trying to capture guerrillas to killing them when the situation justified the action. Therefore, as agents engaged with urban guerrillas on the streets or on the campuses they found specifically killing leaders or prominent revolutionaries to be increasingly effective.

There are still disputes about how large the Brigada Blanca actually, and neither government nor researchers have been able to arrive at a consensus on its size. Though investigations dedicated to unraveling the secret history of the Brigada Blanca have established that at least 184 officers made up the group.⁵⁵⁴ While it might come as a surprise that such a small organization was going to be in a position to eradicate revolutionary groups in the cities, it was able to accomplish this by periodically circumventing the law and employing inhumane tactics. Of course the military, police, and DFS worked alongside the Brigada Blanca. Moreover, police and dedicated counterinsurgency units constantly prowled the streets, universities, and other locations where they believed “subversives” were active and hiding out. But the actual investigations, interrogations, torture, extrajudicial executions, disappearances, were generally attributed to the Brigada.⁵⁵⁵ Nazar Haro and Francisco Quirós Hermosillo brought all these agents together by orders of Gobernación and López Portillo who entrusted both of these individuals to create a semi-secret force capable of taking care of

⁵⁵³ Torres, *Nazar, la historia secreta*, 102.

⁵⁵⁴ Javier Ramírez published the identification cards of the 184 members of the Brigada Blanca in an article. See Javier Ramírez, “Brigada Blanca expedientes inédito,” *Bajo Palabra*, 16 de junio 2001, 5.

⁵⁵⁵ See Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, Castenllanos, *México Armado*, Sierra, *El enemigo interno*.

subversives.⁵⁵⁶ Throughout López Portillo administration, the Brigada Blanca and its leaders developed a peculiar obsession for capturing members of the LC23S.⁵⁵⁷ Nazar Haro and his henchmen together spearheaded comprehensive schemes to combat the urban guerrillas on a national scale. Violence increased tremendously and the policy to entirely eradicate guerrillas took shape.

Only officers of the highest quality were allowed admittance into the Brigada. Furthermore, it took a certain disposition and character to be a part of this subsection since it seemed highly plausible agents were going to be faced with serious decisions or conspire in illicit performances. Following a screening process each officer incorporated into the group was presented with the Plan de Operaciones No. Uno. Rastreo. Carta del Valle de México, a handbook detailing the structure of the organization and other relevant information. Much like specialized counterinsurgency groups in the Southern Cone and Central America, the Brigada Blanca was highly structured. It was divided up into divisions each with a specific task and under the supervision of the Department of National Security. The Security Commission was the largest of all the divisions and encompassed the chief of police and their best agents from the DFS, the Federal Judicial Police, Mexico City Judicial and Transit Police, and Military Police. Then there were the "organos ejecutores" that worked with a specific branch of the police, military, military police, and even transit officers. This subdivision worked alongside these sections to hinder guerrilla actions when they were being carried out. There was also the Grupo

⁵⁵⁶ Coronel Quirós Hermosillo was also active in Guerrero and is presumed to be the mastermind behind *los vuelos de la muerte*. See Laura Castellanos, *Mexico Armado, 1943-1981* (México D.F: Ediciones Era, 2007), 268.

⁵⁵⁷ Torres, *Nazar, la historia secreta*, 104.

Especial, deemed the most callous and specialized in explosives, espionage, communication, and assaults.⁵⁵⁸ Understandably as both head of the DFS and the intellectual leader of the Brigada Blanca, Nazar Haro alone was unable to sustain both positions effectively. He made a constant effort to assign top posts to people close to him and who could easily be swayed to carry out his policies.⁵⁵⁹

Prison Violence, Torture, and the Disappeared

Miguel Topete epitomized the attitude that hardcore revolutionaries had about being taken prisoner when he admitted that, “I was trained to fight until the end and if there was no chance of surviving, the last bullet was for me.”⁵⁶⁰ One’s willingness to take his or her own life in an effort to escape apprehension was considered brave and loyal. Revolutionary suicide was a broadly accepted practice in the urban guerrilla imagination. Militants believed that their subsequent imprisonment would be more damaging to the vitality of their revolution because of the understanding that torture could force them to confess valuable information that could cause damage to their comrades and the movement. Such a fatalistic view reflected the reality and well-known brutality of Mexican counterinsurgency tactics during the urban guerrilla wars of the 1970s. Ending one’s life simply accelerated the inevitable. Other revolutionaries were more daring, like the guerrilla who tried to grab an agent’s pistol in the hopes of dying in a quicker and decorous manner.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁸ Jorge Torres, “Restos de la Brigada Blanca,” *Proceso*, 15 de junio 2003, 75.

⁵⁵⁹ Ramírez, “Brigada Blanca expedientes inédito,” 6.

⁵⁶⁰ Miguel Topete, interview with author, Guadalajara, Jalisco, July 2008.

⁵⁶¹ José Domóñez, “Cuatro hermanos en la guerrilla,” *Nexos*, Julio 2004, 41.

The principles of repression allowed for unusual behavior on the part of those involved in the counterinsurgency campaign. Defending the patria excused outlandish behavior, manifested through sadistic torture sessions. But there was a difference between those involved in the apprehension of a subversive and those who continued to perpetrate violence in the wake of the arrest. Military, police, and other units did their job of apprehending “subversives,” but a different mindset was required to aggressively extract information from prisoners. Perpetrators of state -sponsored violence would come home after working long shifts, perhaps after performing extended interrogation sessions and expected to radically transform their personality. Thus, it was important for top officials in the counterrevolutionary movement to locate people that could handle such demanding commitments.⁵⁶² Given that there is little information about the Brigada Blanca available to the public and investigators, it is difficult to determine the social background of agents. If such information was accessible, it could prompt investigations to understand whether there was a relationship between Mexican torturers’s social and economic background and their jobs as perpetrators of state -sponsored violence.⁵⁶³

In every society there are always people readily available to follow violent orders.

While torturers in Mexico have not come forward and confessed about their specific

⁵⁶² Information on the social and economic level of torturers is not available given that it is impossible to know who was an “official torturer.” There has been some speculation that torturers shared a common social-economic background, and that the State recruited men from lower-class neighborhoods, because they were deemed to have a closer relationship to daily violence and were most likely to accept a job due to their economic situations. Much of this is pure speculation given that the few people that have been accused of torture and other illicit acts in relation to the “dirty war” were people of the high command who had a long history of being involved in the military or law enforcement.

⁵⁶³ There are a number of literature that have used a psychoanalytical approach to understanding how normal citizens are transformed into perpetrators of violence. See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), and Martha Knisely Huggins, Mika Haritos-Fatouros, Philip G. Zimbardo, *Violence Workers: Police Tortures and Murderers Reconstruct Brazilian Atrocities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

participation during the “dirty war” it is still possible to evaluate the torturer’s persona. There have been numerous psychological studies that have concluded that torturers are not naturally born but rather are forced to appropriate a killer persona. For someone to voluntarily inflict pain on someone else entails certain psychological changes that allow the perpetrator to “distance himself from the victim and the deed.”⁵⁶⁴ At first torturers might have found it problematic to inflict involuntary pain on individuals, especially young adults since many of them had sons or daughters in the same age range as those they were torturing. However, eventually perpetrators grew out of that mentality and became more and more sadistic as time went on, losing any sort of compassion for detainees.

When they finally internalized and normalized violence the end result made for a combustible mix. By accepting the principles of repression, perpetrators normalized actions that were deemed barbarous by modern society. When perpetrators accepted these principles sanctioned by the State, it became less difficult to feel sympathy for the victim. The power relationship between torturer and victim became increasingly clear as well. In a single torture session militants faced flagrant situations that stretched the limits of their physical and mental capacities. Normally torturers conducted sessions without concealing their identity as a possible manifestation that they were unafraid of the consequences of their actions since they had the backing of the State and enjoyed immunity. The insolent undertone of interrogations also attests to the feeling of superiority torturers had over their victims. Torturers prided themselves on their ability to obtain the most information

⁵⁶⁴ Paul H. Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals: The “Dirty War” in Argentina* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 154.

from detainees. Victims were constantly given false hopes in order to force them to give up valuable information. The victim was generally told that he or she would be released if they provided the right information. Revolutionaries who could no longer endure being severely tortured gave in only to realize that their incarceration was going to be prolonged regardless of their confessions.

Torture sessions were carried out in undisclosed houses and at military camps like the famous Campo Militar No. 1, located on the southwestern edge of Mexico City. Unlike Chile or Argentina, concentration camps were not established to exhibit the State's power over subversives. No soccer stadiums were used as detention centers, but military bases and secret houses throughout the country were transformed into personal infernos for captives. Sometimes secret houses were located in ordinary neighborhoods where residents went about their daily business without knowing about the malicious acts being carried out. Because captives were generally taken to secret torture centers and houses during the night, residents had no evidence to suggest a particular home was holding militants.⁵⁶⁵

Detainees were purposely disoriented to heighten their sense of helplessness and detachment from society. DFS agents would arrive in the middle of the night or in broad daylight to arrest militants off the streets or in their homes. Unmarked cars like the Dodge van, unlike the fashionable Ford Falcons used by agents in Chile and Argentina, were used to pick up prisoners and transport them to secret detention centers. After the detainee was blindfolded, the driver generally drove in circles to distort the detainee's orientation even though detention centers might be located close to where the individual

⁵⁶⁵ Sierra, *El enemigo interno*, 83.

was apprehended. According to former guerrilla Alberto Ulloa Bornemann, after being captured by federal agents he was taken to an undisclosed detention center. During which the course of his ride the car he was being transported in kept breaking down, prolonging his agony.⁵⁶⁶ Conditions in detention centers were also purposefully built to be intolerant and to psychologically affect the victim's mindset. Once in a designated location prisoners were put into makeshift cells, alone, sometimes still blindfolded and handcuffed. Bertha Alicia López García remembers being taken to the Campo Militar in Torreon, Coahuila alongside her husband and brother-in-law and then at a later date to the Campo Militar No. 1. She was put in a wet and cold cell without shoes and unaware of what lay ahead for her.⁵⁶⁷

Waiting for an uncertain future was the hardest period for any revolutionary. Inside their cells prisoners were forced to overhear their comrades being tortured. Even though a part of their revolutionary training was designed to prepare militants for situations where their strength and mentality was going to be severely tested, nothing could prepare them for the situation they were about to confront. The majority of militants in underground revolutionary movements had no previous experience with violence. Most came from healthy working-class families and lived in relatively peaceful neighborhoods where they only heard about day-to-day petty crimes in the media. Thus, their disassociation with violence played a major role in how they faced tortuous situations. While revolutionaries had been often underground for quite some time and may well have committed violence themselves, they had little preparation for the physical

⁵⁶⁶ Ulloa Bornemann, interview with author, Mexico City, March 2008. See also his testimony, *Sendero en Tinieblas* (México D.F: Cal y Arena, 2004).

⁵⁶⁷ Cilia Olmos and Gonzalez Ruíz, *Testimonios de la guerra sucia*, 29, 31.

and mental hardships of torture. Among the counterinsurgency agents, Liga members were generally regarded as being the hardest to break. Military man Rafael Rocha Cordero, chief of the División de Investigaciones para Prevención de la Delincuencia (DIPD), observed that the members of the Liga were trained to “put their lives on the line or die before being caught.”⁵⁶⁸

Victims of torture recall their morbid experiences under the “dim light” in grave detail. Sessions could last for hours on end, depending on the goals of the interrogators, and the techniques were brutal in the extreme. José Luis Borbolla, another member of the Liga, stated:

When they torture you so badly that your whole arm has to be amputated because you were hung by your thumb, that’s not showing any compassion, that’s outright sick.⁵⁶⁹

Common torture techniques included the famous *pósito* (well), in which victims were placed on a seesaw contraption and lowered underwater for extended periods of time, a form of torture we now call “water boarding.” Ulloa Bornemann explained that it was important to begin struggling immediately after being submersed or the torturers would continue holding the victim underwater.⁵⁷⁰ Other forms of physical torture used against militants included severe and extended beatings, electrocution, rape, and simulated crucifixion, being hung by feet and hands. Psychological tortures derived from the solitary confinement, the uncertainty of the future, and threats that comrades, family

⁵⁶⁸ “Detienen a cinco presuntos guerrilleros,” *La Prensa*, 26 de enero 1976, archivo hemerográfico del Centro de Investigaciones Históricas de los Movimientos Armados, cited in Sierra Guzmán, *El enemigo interno*, 84.

⁵⁶⁹ José Luis Borbolla, interview with author, Mexico City, July 2008.

⁵⁷⁰ Alberto Ulloa Bornemann, interview with author, Mexico City, March 2008

members, and even young children would suffer torture on their behalf. Former militants remember seeing DFS director Nazar Haro, torturing militants, raping women, and promising militants if they confessed their freedom would be granted. Liga guerrilla Mario Alvarez Cartagena López, known as El Guaymas after the Sonoran port city although he was actually from Guadalajara, recalled one session of torture at the hands of Salomón Tanús, a well-known interrogator within the counterinsurgency community. Tanús accused El Guaymas of lying or choreando, a slang word exclusive to chilango (Mexico City) dialect. As a provincial, unfamiliar with the meaning of chorear, and under tremendous pressure and agony, El Guaymas responded by saying that he was in fact choreando the interrogator. In reaction to this forced confession, Tanús grew increasingly infuriated and responded by saying “Y todavía dices que sí hijo de la chingada, no sabes lo que te espera” (and yet you admit it you son of a bitch, you have no idea what’s going to happen to you now.)⁵⁷¹ But even though former guerrillas can now laugh about these episodes, many of them still suffer from issues related to their experience with torture.

While both males and females were mentally and physically tortured, women’s tortured sessions took on a sexually perverse character. Men were violated on occasion, but the torture of women was standard procedure.⁵⁷² As Octavio Paz has explained, a raped woman (called la chingada, in Mexican slang), was basic to the notion of Mexican identity, and so interrogators seeking to assert their power as agents of the patriarchal

⁵⁷¹ Interview with Alvaro Mario Cartagena López “El Guaymas,” Mexico City, July, 2008. For a published short version of his testimony see Cilia Olmos and Gonzalez Ruíz ed., *Testimonies de la guerra sucia*, 21-27.

⁵⁷² Macrina Cárdenas Montaña, “La participación de la mujer en los movimientos armados,” in *Movimientos armados en México, siglo XX* vol. II, ed. Verónica Oikión Solano and Marta Eugenia García Ugarte (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, CIESAS, 2008), 617.

state, found it natural to adopt this cultural image. A second layer of meaning in the sexual abuse of women during torture sessions further reinforced gender divisions by punishing militant women for stepping outside of the home and engaging in political behavior, which many regarded as an exclusively male arena. While this viewpoint is historically incorrect, Mexican women were still marginalized and discouraged from participating in politics, especially in the 1970s.⁵⁷³ Besides being tortured, female urban guerrillas also faced the difficult situation of having their infants tortured. López García recalls the horror of watching her baby being tortured in front of her eyes:

My daughter who was a year and two months was tortured in my presence, and they also applied electric shocks all over her little body.⁵⁷⁴

Torturing women also had psychological effects on the male character of the torturers. Oftentimes they would indiscriminately beat women for the sole purpose of indulging their machismo. Former member of the Comandos Armados del Pueblo, (The People's Armed Commando), Macrina Cárdenas Montañas experienced such a session. She remembers being severely beaten simply because a female guerrilla affiliated to the MAR guerrilla group carried out a bank robbery that led to a shootout with police. According to Montañas, perpetrators of violence resented violent encounters with women—preferring men instead, which they considered a fairer challenge and an opportunity to enrich their machismo. But when females fought back during confrontations with secret agents, women proved themselves to be equally threatening as

⁵⁷³ See Elizabeth Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), and Joceyln Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano, ed., *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁵⁷⁴ Cilia Olmos and Gonzalez Ruíz ed., *Testimonies de la guerra sucia*, 32.

men. Secret agents found it too hard to fathom women were capable of carrying out such revolutionary acts and that gender had nothing to do with their combat skills, therefore threatening men's machismo because they now felt their combat skills were equal to women's.⁵⁷⁵

But what happened to people following their detention and subsequent torture? After sufficient intelligence was extracted from prisoners, militants were either imprisoned or "disappeared." The act of "disappearing" individuals was a popular method of eliminating guerrillas. Aside from the revolutionaries who died under torture, many prisoners were executed and dumped into unmarked graves or else loaded onto planes, called *vuelos de la muerte* (death flights), and thrown into the ocean.⁵⁷⁶ Prisoners were typically blindfolded and drugged at a military base before being loaded onto the plane. Once in the air their feet were tied to large bags of rocks to prevent them from floating ashore. Decades later some military officials have come forward and confessed to participating in *vuelos de la muerte*, thereby proving that these tactics were in fact used by the State. According to Gustavo Tarín Chávez, a former soldier in the armed forces, the entire process of "disappearing" subversives was filmed. Tarín Chávez also revealed that soldiers on the plane were ordered to relax prisoners and relay to them "everything was going to be okay." Lastly, a photograph was taken of the prisoner as a souvenir before he or she was taken to an open hatch, shot in the head, and thrown out.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁵ Cárdenas Montaña, "La participación de la mujer en los movimientos armados," 617.

⁵⁷⁶ Residents from coastal villages in Oaxaca and Guerrero where military bases were located recall seeing a number of planes flying in broad day light and at night dropping "things" into the water. Also, there have been some reports by residents from nearby villages south of the resort city of Acapulco that claim that subsequent to Hurricane Pauline in 1997 human bones washed up onto the beach. No investigations followed.

⁵⁷⁷ Gloria Leticia Díaz, "la 'foto del recuerdo' y el mar...", *Proceso*, 27 de octubre 2002, 13-14.

Former prisoners at the Campo Militar No. 1 also tell disturbing tales that testify to others methods used to “disappear” individuals. General José Francisco Gallardo Rodríguez, perhaps the most celebrated military commander who has since come forward to denounce human rights violations during the counterinsurgency, recalls that when he was later imprisoned in Campo Militar No. 1 in 1993, presumably for speaking out against the government, the mechanisms used to torture guerrillas were still in place more than a decade later. General Gallardo remembers passing by a room reminiscent of a butcher freezer, where he saw hooks dangling from pipes along the ceiling. Overcome by curiosity he inquired about the hooks to prison guards, who revealed that they were used to “hang people four to five days.” Victims included members of the Liga. Gallardo was also haunted by an observation he made while visiting the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. In one interview, he compared the crematory doors in Nazi concentration camps to similar doors he saw in a section of Campo Militar No. 1.⁵⁷⁸

Even when insurgents were transferred from the interrogation chambers of military facilities to ordinary prisons, they continued to suffer from state-sponsored violence. Inside correctional facilities revolutionaries fought a daily battle for survival that resembled their struggle for survival on the outside. Having to face the change of environment, political prisoners were forced to immediately adapt to their new surroundings.⁵⁷⁹ Generally, revolutionaries were either transferred to the Lecumberri or Santa Marta prisons in Mexico City or to new prisons constructed in the mid-1970s.

⁵⁷⁸ Juan Velez, “El hobo sin fondo de la Prisión Militar,” *Proceso*, 26 de septiembre, 74.

⁵⁷⁹ My purpose in using the term political prisoner instead of revolutionary in this section is not a technicality because it was typical for incarcerated revolutionaries to appropriate the term as a form of protest against their right to free speech and right to assemble. Of course the State refused to label prisoners as such.

Depending on the current political situation, the gravity of the crime, or the militant's rank, they were customarily showcased to the public, but only after being tortured and for a time "disappeared." After being presented to the press and public, if that was the case, revolutionaries were then processed and taken to regular prisons to await trial. Former urban guerillas recall having to wait days or even weeks before they were interrogated, and well over a month before being sent to a detention center. Fernando Pineda Ochoa, one of the top five leaders of the MAR recalls his capture in 1971 and subsequent "disappearance":

It was a horrible experience because none of my training in North Korea prepared me for anything like this. When the first members of the MAR were apprehended in 1971 "disappearing" people was not a policy of the state yet so that was sort of a relief. Though I was disappeared for about a month before the DFS presented me to the public. Of course, I had been severely tortured by then.⁵⁸⁰

The time between the apprehension and eventual interrogation/torture was far from a restful period, but at least revolutionaries had some time to organize their thoughts, fabricate a story, and allow their comrades to take the necessary precautions to guarantee their own safety in case the prisoner confessed to knowing where safe houses were located. Also, it was common for revolutionaries to contact the family of a recently incarcerated militant. Family members were immediately encouraged to demand the police allow them to see the detainee in order confirm he or she was alive. Some were given access but a much larger number were denied the chance to see their family member.

⁵⁸⁰ Pineda Ochoa, interview with author, Mexico City, May 2010.

Prison life varied for each political prisoner. The precarious everyday circumstances of prison life were overwhelming, yet survivable. Prisoners encountered incessant harassment from prison guards and had to withstand unsanitary conditions. Perhaps the latter was not so new to some revolutionaries given the harsh living conditions that came with clandestine activities. Nevertheless, a combination of low morale and uncertainty made mundane conditions less easy to weather. In the testimony of José de Jesús “La Momia” Morales Hernández, he reminisced about a night when the tugging of his blanket suddenly woke him up. Thinking that it was possibly his cellmate attempting to kill him he awoke to “a rat the size of a rabbit” pulling on his sheet.⁵⁸¹ Others complained how prison uniforms at the Lecumberri were never thoroughly clean and infested with lice.⁵⁸² Solidarity confinement also tested the sanity of revolutionaries since prisoners were only allowed an hour outside their cells.

At the Lecumberri and Santa Marta prisons, detainees were placed in specially designated sections of the facility according to their infraction. For example, at the Lecumberri, the Crujía “M” housed the majority of political prisoners, including activists still imprisoned for their connection to the 1968 student movement and even some prisoners from the rail worker’s strike of the late 1950s. The architecture at the Oblatos Prison in Guadalajara, like that of Lecumberri, resembled a medieval castle with enormously high walls and towers for guards to monitor prisoners. The prison housed a

⁵⁸¹ Morales Hernández, *Memorias de un guerrillero: La guerra sucia del México de los 70's*, 76.

⁵⁸² For further reference see Arturo Ripstein’s documentary (2005) about political prisoners in the Lecumberri Prison. This film includes the testimonies of four political prisoners who were former members of the MAR, UP, and LCE guerrilla movements. Ripstein first interviewed these individuals as a part of his earlier documentary titled *El palacio negro* (1976) about the history of the Lecumberri Prison. For “Los héroes del tiempo,” he found four of five original interviewees to tell their testimony now decades after their release.

number of acclaimed leaders and militants of the Liga including El Guaymas, Antonio Orozco Michel, and Guillermo Enrique Pérez Mora El Tenebras. Other political prisoners arrived from the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias del Pueblo (FRAP) and the Unión del Pueblo or UP. Political prisoners, despite enjoying some restricted incentives, were still closely monitored by guards and wardens. Daily cell checks, limited free time, and even the slightest violation could lead to a punishment as harsh as solitary confinement. Salvador Castañeda, a “resident” at Lecumberri from 1971 to 1977 for his participation in the MAR, experienced first-hand the continuation of government repression in prison. According to Castañeda, there were prisoner guards called "rodines" whose only job was to beat prisoners.⁵⁸³ The rodines’ violent behavior was likely not politically motivated; they were merely carrying out their jobs. At the Oblatos prison members of the right-wing student group Federación Estudiantil de Guadalajara (Student Federation of Guadalajara) imprisoned for various crimes were also mixed in with political prisoners, which brought the campus street fights into the prison.⁵⁸⁴ Naturally if a guerrilla died in prison it was easier for the government to exonerate itself for the death when another prisoner could be implicated, even one who had been placed undercover by counterinsurgency agents to carry out the murder.

But despite the reputation of the prison for being filthy, antiquated, and dangerous, prisoners still exploited the small bit of autonomy given to them. Revolutionaries were only allotted one hour a day outside their cell, but El Guaymas remembers always running as much as he could around the small grassy area in the

⁵⁸³ Castañeda, interview with author, Mexico City, May 2010.

⁵⁸⁴ Morales Hernández, *Memorias de un guerrillero: La guerra sucia del México de los 70's*, 73.

middle of the prison, while others played soccer and chess.⁵⁸⁵ Castañeda used his charisma to befriend a high-ranking prison guard and exploited his empathy for political prisoners. According to Castañeda, his congenial relationship with the guard not only benefited him, but all political prisoners. When necessary, the guard notified Castañeda the day and time that members of the DFS and Nazar Haro were planning to visit the prison. The notice was generally given to Castañeda twenty-four hours before the visit, giving enough time for prisoners to prepare themselves for the ordeal.⁵⁸⁶ Prisoner-guard relationships also developed in other prisons. In Guadalajara, the prisoner-guard relationship was instrumental in allowing for the symbolic fuga de Oblatos (escape from Oblatos).⁵⁸⁷ The architects of the scheme, imprisoned from 1974-1976 in Oblatos, patiently drew up plans with help from their comrades outside the prison. The leniency of prison rules allowed detainees to move in and out of other cells, hold meetings and discussions, and plan their escape. The escape was eventually carried out and six revolutionaries regained their freedom.

Political prisoners also made the best of their time to discuss politics, transforming the prisons transformed into revolutionary schools. The enforced idleness allowed long hours of study so that militants could fine tune and expand their intellectual consciousness.⁵⁸⁸ In this way, militants sought to maintain their revolutionary mentality and help insure that comrades did not “become soft.” No minute was wasted—from

⁵⁸⁵ Alvaro Mario Cartagena López “El Guaymas,” Mexico City, July, 2008.

⁵⁸⁶ Salvador Castañeda, interview with author, Mexico City, May 2010.

⁵⁸⁷ See Antonio Orozco Michel, *La fuga de Oblatos: Una historia de la LC23 de Septiembre* (Guadalajara: La Casa del Mago, 2009).

⁵⁸⁸ Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen, “Defining the Space of Mexico ’68: Heroic Masculinity in the Prison and ‘Women’ in the Streets,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83 (2003): 628.

planning possible escapes, communicating with comrades outside the prison, to maintaining one's physical condition—all were critical details. Morales Hernández La Momia got himself appointed sports organizer at Oblatos, although he had no prior athletic background. Nevertheless, he exploited the position by organizing soccer games entirely composed of guerrillas as a way to keep them in shape and raise morale.⁵⁸⁹ Others combined theoretical discussions with nonpolitical work. Small workspaces were allocated to prisoners where they could pass time, but also to develop other skills. For instance, El Guaymas spent his time painting, building small items from wood, and composing protest songs. Because the Mexican prison system had no comprehensive program to prepare prisoners for the transition to life outside, militants suffered from shock after being confined for years.⁵⁹⁰

Ruling party officials capitalized on the violence perpetrated by revolutionaries to garner support and developed an aggressive discourse that spread fear and ambiguity across the population about the domestic threat posed by guerrillas. While insurgents were convinced that their revolutionary propaganda and violence would garner popular support, it turned out to be a major stumbling block in their struggle. Contradictory to the militants' intentions, revolutionary violence instead helped to strengthen the PRI's image and restore part of its power. Repression of the radical Left represented a double-edged sword—although justified to a degree, it nevertheless reflected the State's inability to resolve longstanding social injustices. Indeed, many of the revolutionaries the

⁵⁸⁹ Morales Hernández, *Memorias de un guerrillero: La guerra sucia del México de los 70's*, 73.

⁵⁹⁰ Alvaro Mario Cartagena López "El Guaymas," interview with author, Mexico City, June, 2008, and Morales Hernández, *Memorias de un guerrillero: La guerra sucia del México de los 70's*, 76.

government was incarcerating, torturing, murdering, and “disappearing” came from working-class families, a social group that formed the base of its popular support.

The beginning of the end of the urban guerrilla war came in 1978 when Jose López Portillo offered an amnesty to student revolutionaries.⁵⁹¹ The conditions of the pardons required imprisoned militants to guarantee they would no longer engage in any subversive activities or face harsh consequences. Because the potential for revolution had lost its impetus, many political prisoners chose to accept the amnesty and return to public life. Re-immersing themselves back into society proved to be a major challenge. Many had interrupted their studies to go underground and found themselves without a degree, while dozens returned to politics years later and participated in the formation of the PRD in 1990 or participated in the growing human rights movement. While the counterinsurgency campaign succeeded in eliminating the Liga and the rural guerrilla movements in Guerrero, it failed entirely eradicate armed struggles since some went into a short hiatus and emerged decades later under different names.⁵⁹²

The violence carried out by the State for roughly twelve years was heinous, unwavering, and deeply embedded in influencing policy. The dirty war and other unrelated factors allowed the PRI to reign until 2000 when it lost the presidency to the center-right PAN. Ruling party officials intelligently capitalized on the violence perpetrated by revolutionaries to garner support and developed an aggressive discourse that spread fear and ambiguity across the population about the domestic threat the guerrillas posed. While insurgents were convinced that their revolutionary propaganda

⁵⁹¹ Julio Scherer García, *Los pariatos: De Tlatelolco a la guerra sucia* (México D.F.: Nuevo Siglo, 2004), 139.

⁵⁹² Revolutionaries active during the 1970s formed both the Zapatistas and the EPR.

and violence would afford them popular support, it turned out to be a major stumbling block in their struggle. Contradictory to militant's intentions, the downside of revolutionary violence instead helped to strengthen the PRI's hegemony. Repression of the radical Left represented a double-edged sword—it was justified, but was also a testament to the State's ineptitude to solve issues. What also worked against the PRI was the fact that many of the revolutionaries the government was incarcerating, torturing, murdering, and “disappearing” came from middle-class families, a social group the PRI became increasingly dependable, formed the base of its popular support, and could mean a major setback in their program if that relationship was further tampered.

The evidence presented in this chapter not only supports the theory Mexico experienced a dirty war but also changes how we see the 1970s and the ruling party's crisis of legitimacy. Those who are resistant to accepting Mexico as a valid dirty war case tend to overuse the quantitative approach by stating that because fewer people were victimized, disappeared, or tortured in Mexico than the Southern Cone, means the term is inapplicable. But as this chapter reveals, even without using quantitative information; a case can be made for Mexico by simply using the tactics and language used by the government, armed forces, and other counterinsurgency units. More broadly, this chapter demonstrates the ongoing fragile relationship between leftists and revolutionary students and the state, and the failure of co-optation in containing student dissent. Whereas in Southern Cone and Brazil, the counterinsurgency campaign targeted all leftists, in Mexican cities and wherever students were performing political work, they were discriminately targeted for being academics and class antagonists. Much like student-

revolutionaries, state officials sought to regain control over the campuses but not only by implanting pro-government student organizations to preserve the ruling party's official propaganda, but also by eliminating the iconoclasts injecting ideas into students' minds that ran against the government's policies. While innocent people and non-violent social actors were thought to be implicated in subversive acts and were repressed by counterinsurgency forces, the true targets were students. This is not to suggest that the PRI sought to eliminate an entire sector of the student population, rather my point is that after Cabañas' death in 1974 students replaced peasants and workers as the leading threat for the government.

Conclusion

The Legacy of Student Militancy and the Dirty War

Today in the suburbs of Guadalajara, San Andrés's plaza remains a favorite spot for adolescents to congregate and gossip. Vestiges of its earlier "barrio bravo" atmosphere are less noticeable among the trendy shops that have crowded out much of the barrio's "popular" character. Yet, the plaza continues to be a nostalgic and powerful space for longtime residents, including former revolutionaries. Perhaps no one returns to the barrio more frequently than "Tita", who can be seen walking around the plaza reminiscing about her time talking with her future comrades. Unintentionally she overhears the youth's conversations and how far removed they are from what she discussed with her friends in the seventies. "It's interesting to listen to what the youth talks about these days," she says.⁵⁹³ While "Tita" shares the same experiences with dozens of other *feroces*, San Andrés also brings to mind difficult memories she has been unable to conquer. She realizes hundreds of students-revolutionaries will never be able to enjoy the barrio's plaza. Yet, "Tita" is also aware of the responsibility she has in preserving their memory by not only speaking about her experience underground, but also continuing to fight for social justice. At least once a month Tita invites as many former *feroces* as possible at her home to talk, laugh, eat, look back on their experience in the FER and Liga, and discuss how society remembers, or not, their actions. Functioning less as a support group and more as a forum to discuss the state of the reconciliation process, a number of FER ex-militants are deeply engaged in the human rights movement

⁵⁹³ "Tita" Gutierrez, interview by author.

in Mexico. They continue to feel discouraged that most people have no interest in this period and basically accept the state's version of history.

While the PRI came out victorious from the Dirty War it was forced to make a number of compromises with both the moderate and revolutionary left. Scholarship has acknowledged the weight of new urban social movements and regional independent struggles in slowly dismantling the ruling party's power. Few, however, have taken into account the political, social, and cultural weight urban guerrilla movements had on the democratization of Mexico's political system, regardless of how indirect that leverage might have been. In 1977 the López Portillo administration instituted the Political Reform that officially reintegrate the left into the electoral process.⁵⁹⁴ Chief among the logic behind this major political move was to make it appear the PRI was democratic, and therefore delegitimize urban guerrillas' decrying of Mexico's lack of democracy. For hundreds of Mexican urban guerrillas this Reform further isolated their struggle and made it increasingly irrelevant, especially amongst the radical student population. From the perspective of urban guerrillas, this maneuver by the government embodied ongoing power of co-option and the selling out of the radical left, yet it was no less successful in attracting people disillusioned by the fragmenting and increasingly violent guerrillas.

Student-guerrillas from the 1970s drew their motivations to create a new revolutionary movement to overthrow the Mexican state and establish a socialist society based on their local experiences and broadening political horizons. Those who had taken

⁵⁹⁴ For more information on the Electoral Reform see Ricardo Rodríguez Araujo, *La reforma política en México* (México: Siglo XXI, 1997); Adela Cedillo, "El suspiro y el silencio: De la reconstrucción de las Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional a la fundación del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (1974-1983), chapter 2.

part in student movements prior to going underground had exhausted non-violent channels. In their minds, students were historically prepared to lead the vanguard of the masses into battle against an oppressive state and its capitalist allies. Camaraderie, student-proletarian identity, and faith in the student population were to play a focal role in bringing cohesion to their respective organizations and realizing their revolutionary dream. Even though their aspirations were deemed suicidal, adventurist, and unrealistic by their own peers -- other members of the radical left -- and despite the ruling party's accusing student-urban guerrillas of being "enemies of the working-class,"⁵⁹⁵ they sought to fulfill their vision.

Both the Enfermos and the FER existed as groups until the early 1980s. Even though they worked under the auspices of the Liga, militants preserved their original affiliation. The initially regional counterinsurgency in Guadalajara and Culiacán against student movements had shaped each group's politics. The radical language they employed showed their determined to make the leap from students to revolutionaries. Enfermos and feroces knew they were outsiders within the left once they realized few people were actually raising their hand to be recruited. Being alone meant student-guerrillas had to recast their relationship with students in the university and formulate a terminology that students could relate to easily. While this did not entirely work the way revolutionaries would have hoped, student-urban guerrillas established a precedent for future resistance movements and gave students a taste of being in a leadership position historically and ideologically meant for peasant and workers.

⁵⁹⁵ Héctor A. Ibarra Chávez, *Pensar la guerrilla en México* (México: Ediciones Expediente Abierto, 2006), 93.

This dissertation has demonstrated, first, that a regional history of student movements-turned armed revolutionaries can change how we see political culture in the 1970s and expose the ruling party's authoritarianism, which increasingly grew to resemble that of military regimes in the Southern Cone. Second, by decentering 1968 as the precursor to resistance to political and culture authority in the 1970s, we see how far the PRI had lost its hegemonic sway in the provinces and that student movements were becoming increasingly unmanageable to the point that the state had to resort to violence in order to eliminate youth antagonism. Resistance to negotiation remained a policy of the state especially towards students, who nevertheless refused to back down. Third, I posit that student militancy, both violent and non-violent, functions as a barometer to gauge the hollowness of Echeverria's democratic opening and to debunk the notion that student activism had reached a point of crisis in the wake of the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968. While the revolutionary left was isolated and lacked widespread popular support, their actions were taken seriously by the government and considered to be a genuine threat to "democracy."

Despite all of the efforts made by guerrillas, their mission to create a new revolution in Mexico ultimately failed. Because student-guerrillas' vision of a socialist Mexico was deemed historical inappropriate and unrealistic, critiques have tended to dwell on the failures and dismissed the contributions made by student revolutionaries. From the regional and local to the national, the ethos of the urban guerrilla experience and the new wave of student militancy that grew from it left a valuable imprint in Mexican leftist political culture. While it might not equate that of 1968, the way students

saw the state, their relationship to popular groups, and how they identify themselves today are informed by the theoretical models forged by student-guerrillas in the seventies. One goal of this dissertation was to describe what student-revolutionaries during the urban guerrilla experience contributed to Mexico's culture of rebellion. Much has been written about the contribution of 1968 to student radicalism and political culture. This dissertation has demonstrated that outside of the "typical" contributions armed resistance movements have made to insurgent politics, the ideas and revolutionary culture forged by student-led urban guerrillas in the 1970s continues to be widespread in popular political movements and regional politics. Student activists have come to embrace their working-class backgrounds, appropriated the student-proletariat moniker, and constructed cross-class alliances. During rallies at the UNAM and state universities the sickle and book has been a recurring symbol to represent students' embracement of their modest backgrounds. From what they know about their predecessors' theoretical contributions to radical politics, the new wave of student militants have revamped different aspects, namely their pedagogical approaches to raising consciousness.

The Liga managed to survive until 1983, but group was considered inactive by 1982. Organizations like the MAR remained active until 1990 though by then it had abandoned the armed struggle but remained a semi-clandestine political organization. Other organization went into hiding. When the EZLN surfaced on New Year's Day in 1994, was initially shocked by the insurrection but also wondered about the group's deeper history. Government security agents immediate carried out their own investigation. From their finds and interviews with EZLN deserters in 1994 agents

revealed the group had been founded by members of the FLN in 1983. Soon after this revelation, in February the police arrested Gloria Benavides, one of the original founders of the Zapatistas, among others.

One year later, writer Carlos Tello Díaz published the first history of the EZLN in which he described the origins of the group and its connection to the FLN.⁵⁹⁶ Heavily based on police documents Tello Díaz acquired perhaps from his family ties with the political elite, the book was immediately controversial and thought to have put in danger former members of the FLN living semi-clandestinely around the country. While Tello Díaz's book was severely criticized, the book revealed how the legacy of the urban guerrilla experience remained alive by post-Cold War armed resistance movements. This legacy was further reinforced in 1996 when a "new" armed revolutionary movement, the Popular Revolutionary Army (*Ejército Popular Revolucionario*) surfaced in Guerrero during the commemoration of the Aguas Blanca massacre.⁵⁹⁷ In their communiqués the leaders of the EPR, Tiburcio Cruz Sánchez and Florencia Canseco Ruíz (who are also married) revealed while the group surfaced in 1996, it was founded by former members of two revolutionary organizations from the 1970s: the Unión del Pueblo and the Party of the Poor. Following the end of the dirty war these organization remained semi-active and out of the government view until they resurfaced like the EZLN.

Student-guerrillas also transformed how the PRI executed its business of eliminating the opposition. The democratic opening so popularly used to describe the

⁵⁹⁶ Carlos Tellez Díaz, *La rebellion en las Cañadas: Origen y ascenso del EZLN*, 2nd edition (México: Planeta, 2005).

⁵⁹⁷ On June 28, 1995 several campesinos were in route to a protest in Atoyac, Guerrero when they were ambushed by a police contingent. Seventeen people were killed and many more injured.

Echeverría administration is recognized for the facade that it was. The urban guerrilla experience brought out the worst of the ruling party's authoritarianism and reinforced the party's intolerance for political movements that contradicted their social and economic programs. Even though the PRI remained in power until 2000, the party felt growing pressure to reform. The same people earlier trying to topple the government were instrumental in forming new organizations in their native states. Urban guerrilla retired from the armed struggle but returned to political work after years on the sidelines. They participated in the formation of new social movements and the formation of the leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution in 1990.

Finally, while the PRI was prepared to defeat the Enfermos and the FER militarily, it was unready to deal with the guerrillas' intellectual war. More than in 1968, urban guerrillas challenged the state's official version of history by fighting to regain control of the university and established a curriculum that made education available for economically disadvantage students while simultaneously raising consciousness. This model closely resembles that of socialist education, nevertheless, students sought to preserve popular education not in the corporatist sense, but to instill in popular groups and students a feel of purpose and moral obligation to fight for a genuine revolutionary state. Therefore, class struggle only composed half of what student-guerrilla advocated in their discourses. Intellectually they new they could defeat the state because they were better equipped and they knew all students, regardless whether if they agreed with the

armed struggle, would at least protect the sanctity of the university and academic freedom. As one revolutionary said, “in this struggle we use our minds and the rifle.”⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁸ José Luis Esparza, interview with author.

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José Luis Esparza, member of the Liga

Ricardo Gamboa, 1968 student activists

Raúl Álvarez Garín, leader of the 1968 student movement

Bertha Lilia Gutiérrez “Tita”, member of the FER and Liga

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