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## Another Massacre in Mexico

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Bard

Another Massacre in Mexico

Senior Project submitted to

The Division of Social Studies  
*of Bard College*

by

Sidney Smith

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2019

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## A Note on Translations

Due to the widespread inclusion of testimonial statements, all translations have been treated as footnotes in order to preserve the original statement in the body of the text. All quotes in Spanish have been italicized and are accompanied by a footnote that corresponds to its translation on the bottom of the page.

All translations are my own.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to Morgan, Marcus, and Mindy whose support this year has made all of the difference. Hearty meals with you all have truly nourished this project. Thank you to my parents Jane and Peter, as well as my siblings Lou and Henry whose patience, time, and love, have saved this project more times than I can count. A special thanks to Olga Voronina for her introduction to memory studies and historical memory. These themes have kept me curious and will continue to guide future endeavors. And lastly, this project truly would have been impossible if not for the generous support, time, and guidance from my advisor Miles Rodriguez. Thank you for guiding me to and through such a rich moment in Mexico's history and for helping me to find the scope and focus of this research.

# Introduction

Holidays are the most efficient way to mark time and memory. Celebrated across the Catholic world, the day of Corpus Christi remembers the last supper and the body of Christ as manifest through the Eucharist. In observation of this holiday, paritioners proceed through the streets of their village or city en route to evening mass. That which is abstract is made visible. And that which has been crucified is resurrected. It is on Corpus Christi Day in 1971 that student grievances were resurrected from past supressions. And it is also on that day, June 10, 1971, that the Mexican government crucified its student population en masse. Commemoration for this collective crucifixion is lacking. A single plaque is buried within the metro's corridors and the Tlatelolco Museum at Plaza de las Tres Culturas exhibits the massacre to willing visitors. But, besides a few markers of space and time scattered across Mexico City, the Corpus Christi Massacre has all but disappeared.

Memory has a way of self-selecting. Such is history's most faulty and vulnerable characteristic; popular history is reduced to that which can be easily recalled and that which can be easily recalled is too often reduced to the few historical instances deemed worth repeating. But it is also history's most redeeming and complex characteristic. It is ultimately the subjectivity of historical fact that asserts history's capacity for great storytelling.<sup>1</sup> History is the story of how we remember the past as much as it is the study of the past itself. Historical interpretation and narratives of the Corpus Christi Massacre are overwhelmingly at odds, filtered through government-authorized and personal, eye-witness accounts.

Mexico City in the late 1960s and early 1970s has come to life through governmental archives and written testimony. And yet, to suggest any semblance of objectivity feels fraudulent.

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<sup>1</sup> The Spanish *historia* can be translated as both 'history' and 'story'.

Is that which one believes to be true also true for somebody else? And did it even occur? This investigation has relied on trust and skepticism for the written archive and the testimony and increased attention to questions of intention and motive. How the Corpus Christi Massacre was used, molded, and reframed in its aftermath is as much a part of this research as ascertaining to some level of certainty what occurred. The view of this investigation is a pluralistic one: a bird's-eye view of the event that attempts to include its prelude, its conclusions, and its continuation. The treatment of the Corpus Christi Massacre in popular Mexican culture has been deadening. This project attempts to position the Massacre into the context it deserves.

To many, the Corpus Christi Massacre has been rendered an historical footnote. This being true in Mexico, it is no surprise that few have heard of the Corpus Christi Massacre in the United States—where involvement in a number of Cold War tragedies has diluted the memories of individual events and replaced them with a general and vague malaise. It has become clear that memorialization relies less on precise memory than on officialized memory. Few events have acquired such a status. There is little that is not worth remembering and Mexico's 1968 (as well as the world's) is indeed worth the trouble. This research attempts to frame the Corpus Christi Massacre utilizing the '68 Tlatelolco Massacre as its anchor.

Considering the global phenomenon of student and youth unrest, it is no surprise that the year 1968 has been cemented in collective memory the world over. Considering the Olympics in Mexico that year, the first to be hosted by a so-called Third World country, it is no surprise that Mexicans reference 1968 as a turning point in their own country. The 1968 Student Movement and subsequent Tlatelolco Massacre are often heralded as Mexico's pivot towards a more credible democracy. But from what point did Mexico pivot—the protests or the suppression?



Surely, it was the massacre, that obvious display of authoritarianism and democratic disregard, that collapsed the Mexican political apparatus' foundational validity.

So then, how does one account for the repeated act of political suppression and violence that occurred just three years later? And what factors led to its disappearance from national importance? Mexico's 1968 served less as a trial for Mexican democracy as a continuation of single-party dominance. Yes, the Corpus Christi Massacre displayed a government willing to embrace the use of violence as an ideological weapon. But, it also exhibited other themes, namely: how to *effectively* utilize violence to quell student protest specifically, how to mediate public opinion in order to exonerate high public officials and the Party, and how to obfuscate details and involvement to prevent the event's resurrection in popular memory and continue the Party's reign.

This project began as a way of understanding causes of historical dilution and forgetfulness. What forces are at play in the memorization, nonetheless internalization, of historical memory? This project places the Corpus Christi Massacre into the context of political and counter-political precedent as a means of explaining violent motive through structural influence. It is organized chronologically and divided accordingly: the first chapter provides background information on the years leading up to 1968, including Mexico's post-war transition, its economic boom and shifting demographics, as well as its burgeoning state-sponsored program of *porrismo*. The second chapter is devoted entirely to the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre and the preceding student movement, including its aftermath in terms of political and counter-political transitions. Finally, the third chapter of this project seeks to pluralistically trace the details of an otherwise unelaborated act of Mexican political violence. By utilizing documents

made available through the State Department and the Mexican Attorney General's Office, this chapter follows the mobilizations of students, paramilitary forces, and the government leading up to, on, and after June 10, 1971.

Historical precision is a challenge. But it is made all the more difficult when documents are rendered unavailable. For a number of years, the Mexican government under Enrique Peña Nieto discreetly re-classified and censored large swaths of its Dirty War Archives.<sup>2</sup> Documents that had previously been made public have since been locked away. One must hope that these archives reacquire declassified status, permitting a more exact portrayal of the Mexican Government's abuses on Corpus Christi Day 1971 and otherwise.

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<sup>2</sup> "Fifty Years After Tlatelolco, Censoring the Mexican Archives." Edited by Kate Doyle, *National Security Archive*, 2 Oct. 2018, [nsarchive.gwu.edu/news/mexico/2018-10-02/fifty-years-after-tlatelolco-censoring-mexican-archives-mexicos-dirty-war-files-withdrawn-public](https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/news/mexico/2018-10-02/fifty-years-after-tlatelolco-censoring-mexican-archives-mexicos-dirty-war-files-withdrawn-public).

# Chapter One

Though the Partido de la Revolución Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) was officially founded in 1946, Mexico had been governed under an authoritarian single-party state since 1929. The revolution of the early 20th century was institutionalized, rendering exterior political opinions moot and consolidating political debate under the umbrella of the PRI. Opposition was housed either under the roof the PRI or isolated from it and opposed to a monolithic Mexican political system. Opposition was, by all measures, stifled. After 1946, and until 2000, all Mexican presidents came from the country's centralized single party; each President served a six year term, called a *sexenio*, before often bequeathing the 'throne' to a political aspirant from the previous President's cabinet. Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) selected Miguel Alemán, who served as Secretary of the Interior under Camacho as Mexico's President from 1946 to 1952. Alemán then nominated Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, then governor of Veracruz, as President of the Republic between 1952 and 1958. Adolfo López Mateos, his successor, was Secretary of Labor for Cortinez's administration and served as President between 1958 and 1964.

The years between Alemán and Mateos saw what has become known as Mexico's mid-century 'economic miracle'—one that triggered nationwide industrialization and mass urban swelling in the post-war years. Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, the Secretary of the Interior under Mateos, was selected to the Presidency and won handily—serving between 1964 and 1970 and widely expected to continue what some saw as a misleading economic bubble. The country, and the PRI, changed a great deal from the Second World War onward. Mexico's leader resembled the sort of Cold War executive that the U.S. desired; a Nixon-like hardliner, Díaz Ordaz had little time for

the laments of students, agricultural workers or others on the periphery of industrialization. Díaz Ordaz transitioned the PRI into a right-leaning, anti-socialist party, despite the Party's roots in revolutionary, socialist rhetoric. Legal tools and international alliances had been put in place to prevent the spread of fascism and these very tools became reinterpreted for the Díaz Ordaz administration and its burgeoning war on left-leaning ideology.

The consolidation of power during Mexico's immediate post-war period set the stage for legislation designed to inhibit freedom of speech and opposition; as will be looked at in a subsequent chapter, Mexico's Cold War allegiance with the United States proved to be most taxing on the students and intellectuals whose views veered 'too far' to the left. Protests and strikes had been squashed in administrations prior to the 1960s. But under Díaz Ordaz, battles to contain student and worker protests were more violent. Díaz Ordaz served as President until 1970, when his own Secretary of the Interior, a discreetly left-leaning politician by the name of Luis Echeverría Álvarez was handpicked to succeed him.

The Corpus Christi Massacre of 1971 occurred during the *sexenio* of President Echeverría, but its origins, like any historic phenomenon, rely on early precedent. For the purposes of patterned violence, the *sexenios* of Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría deserve acute attention. But, to unearth the complexity of patterned political violence between 1968 and 1971, one must begin with Mexico's post-war period, its consolidation of political power, its burgeoning economic might, and its changing demographics.

Approaching an official engagement in World War II, Mexico's foreign policy could be described as neutral in nature. Anti-fascist in its positions, Mexico still shied away from aggressive confrontation; President Ávila Camacho focused instead on the prevention of war

from reaching Mexican shores to begin with. This isn't to say that Mexico had little at stake; the country did, of course, lose precious territory to the United States less than a century before. Mexico instead chastized any infringement on national sovereignty in Europe or elsewhere—regardless of wartime allegiances or ideological motive.<sup>3</sup> But, Mexico's war on fascism had begun domestically years before. In fact, fascist ideologies had already posed a threat to the political status quo in Mexico; the Unión Nacional Sinarquista, for example, was a clerical fascist political party vehemently opposed to the policies of leftist Lázaro Cárdenas which grew out of the religious fervor of the Cristero War in the late 1920s. Article 145, an amendment to the Penal Code, was passed in 1941 solidifying Mexico's position against fascism at large. The proposal was met with widespread support from both the ideological Left and Right who endorsed opposition to fascism while ignoring the associated risks of sweeping legal language down the road. The finalized amendment read:

“Prison of two to six years will be applied to a foreigner or Mexican national who, in spoken or written form, or by any other means, performs political propaganda among foreigners or between Mexican nationals, spreading ideas, programs or rules of action of any foreign government that disrupt public order or affect the sovereignty of the Mexican state. Public order is disturbed when the acts determined in the previous paragraph tend to produce rebellion, sedition, or riot. National sovereignty is affected when said acts endanger the territorial integrity of the Republic, hinder the functioning of its legitimate institutions or propagate contempt on the part of Mexican nationals to their civic duties. Prison of six to ten years will be applied to the foreigner or Mexican national who, in any way, performs acts of any nature that prepare materially or morally the invasion of the national territory, or the submission of the country to any foreign government. When the person sentenced in the case of the foregoing paragraphs is a foreigner, the penalties

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<sup>3</sup> Jones, Halbert. *War Has Brought Peace to Mexico : World War II and the Consolidation of the Post-Revolutionary State*, University of New Mexico Press, 2014. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/detail.action?docID=1643633>.

referred to above shall be applied without prejudice to the power granted to the President of the Republic by Article 33 of the Constitution”.<sup>4</sup>

Most troubling was the law’s intentional lack of clarity in defining the limits of who or what sorts of actions, physical or vocal, could be appropriately classified as “tend[ing] to produce rebellion, sedition, or riot.” According to Historian Halbert Jones, the penalty for acts that *could* inspire rebellion were punished with a firmer fist than those that actually *did* produce rebellion. The legislation’s language was flexible; definitions of “endangering”, “moral invasion”, “submission” were adjusted to fit new social demands. Amidst fears of fascist and international subversion, politicians across the ideological spectrum obliged a law that was designed to target those most harmful to them and their constituents, not a law that would eventually target the very ideas they themselves stood for.<sup>5</sup> But the law was subject to change depending on the ideological platform of the President enforcing it. PRI political debate in mid-century Mexico (what is often categorized as its heyday) was anything but homogeneous. Article 145 became as flexible in intention as the Party itself.

Presidents that locked up dissidents under Article 145 in one administration would find that their successor exonerated them the year after. Despite public suspicion of fraudulent elections, savvy politicians distanced themselves from the single-party system by distinguishing their policies from that of their predecessors— supplanting suspicion with support. Progress had little to do with public opinion, but politics always maintained the semblance of evolution. For years, allusions to democracy were enough to keep the system afloat.

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<sup>4</sup> Fernández, Óscar. “El Delito De Disolución Social y Su Uso Contra El Movimiento De Masas.” *La Izquierda Diario*, 29 July 2016, [www.laizquierdadiario.mx/El-Delito-de-Disolucion-Social-y-su-uso-contra-el-movimiento-de-masas](http://www.laizquierdadiario.mx/El-Delito-de-Disolucion-Social-y-su-uso-contra-el-movimiento-de-masas).

<sup>5</sup> Jones, Halbert, *War Has Brought Peace to Mexico*.

Following World War II, war time investments and the surging American economy meant large returns for Mexico. Allowing migrants to travel North in search of work, the staggeringly open and cooperative nature of Southern border politics<sup>6</sup> catalyzed the flow of American dollars to Mexican families. The middle class' emerging consumer power yielded families more goods and commodities, easier and more affordably. Conversely, goods that had previously been imported from abroad began to be manufactured at home. The transition, known as Import Substitution, yielded limited returns for the vast majority of Mexicans while deep-pocketed entrepreneurs continued to cash in.<sup>7</sup> Acquiring the loyalty of Mexican business elite and foreign investors, “the government dangled inducements before their eyes: import licenses, protective tariffs, tax breaks, and loans at low interest rates.”<sup>8</sup> Mexican business leaders, deeply tied to the PRI, swooped up contracts for some of the nation's largest conglomerates, leaving little room for the survival of small businesses. The makeup of Mexico's economy, too, had drastically changed since the nationalization of oil reserves in the 1930s. With investments in more industry, Mexican reliance on agriculture and investment in rural regions began to decline. Those who could moved to cities, engorging urban environments into metropolises. Those that couldn't were left in underdeveloped and under invested-in areas; rural communities grew more and more sparsely populated by the year.

Despite Article 145's use as a temporary war-time defense, the law had no expiration date and was used for other aims after the War. Article 145 was soon adapted as a permanent fixture

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<sup>6</sup> Staggering only in how open the labor relationship was with the United States considering the politicized nature of migration between the two countries today.

<sup>7</sup> Ramón Eduardo Ruiz. “False Miracle.” *Mexico: Why a Few Are Rich and the People Poor*, University of California Press, 2010, pp. 147–178.

<sup>8</sup> Eduardo Ruiz pp. 153-154.



of Mexican ideological battles including: increased control over unions, repression of students and worker protests and generally weaponized as a means of protecting PRI political might through the Cold War. An amendment to the Penal Code before the Korean War extended its reach even further.<sup>9</sup> Few within the Chamber of Deputies doubted the implications of a revised Article 145; they were all but certain that the strengthened legislation would be used to target internal ideological enemies rather than external foes. But Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, in the years before becoming President, approved of the amendment's necessity as head of the committee investigating its changes. Ordaz was then just a Senator, but his changes no doubt benefited his administration as President of the Republic in 1964.

More and more, the post-War Mexican economy began to mirror the policies of the United States. "Neither the Mexican nor the foreign capitalists lost any sleep because of unemployment brought about by the new machinery. The goal, after all was to keep wages low and profits high, on the assumption that money in the pockets of the *burguesía* would fatten domestic savings and spur reinvestment in productive enterprises. Industry magnates reaped huge profits...huge profit margins did not stem from either greater efficiency or more productivity but essentially from milking the public with high prices."<sup>10</sup> While urban industrial populations boomed, the power of unions dwindled. Under President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), the nation's largest unions became 'officialized' and placed under the protective wing of PRI control. Gaining membership to the *Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos* (Confederation of Mexican Workers, CTM) required personal registration with the PRI. Union

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<sup>9</sup> Jones, Halbert. "Social Dissolution: A History of Article 145 of the Mexican Penal Code, 1941-1970." *Social Dissolution: A History of Article 145 of the Mexican Penal Code, 1941-1970*. Social Dissolution: A History of Article 145 of the Mexican Penal Code, 1941-1970, 2019, London, United Kingdom.

<sup>10</sup> Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, p. 157.

and Party dues, indistinguishable from one another, were deducted from paychecks. Independent unions were barred from holding union meetings.<sup>11</sup> *Charros*, corrupt union leaders, grew in infamy as subservient conduits between the unions and the PRI leadership. The government thus worked on behalf of the business elite under the assumption that their investments would spawn development in Mexico's economic nether regions. But, much like 'trickle down' economics of the Reagan-era United States, business elites' social conscience seldom dictated their business philosophies. The PRI's revolutionary rhetoric was no match for the enticing accumulation of wealth and investment.

Article 145's reinterpretation as a tool for controlling its labor unions began in the 1950s. Fidel Velázquez Sánchez, Secretary General of the Mexican Federation of Labour, said this on the state of unions in contemporary Mexico: "*El sindicalismo mexicano es un sindicalismo libre, democratico, auto determinante en su vida interna con magnificas relaciones con el régimen de la revolución.*"<sup>12</sup> The "*relaciones*" with the Party were what, in fact, prohibited unions from achieving any semblance of true bargaining power. The autonomy of Mexico's national university system was the last standing institution with independence from the mechanisms of centralized State power.

After the changes to Article 145 in 1950, even existential threats to the Mexican economy as well as provocations that disturbed the 'public peace' were reframed as subversive activity.

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander, Robin, and Peter Gilmore. "Official and Independent Unions Angle for Power in Mexico." *NACLA*, 25 Sept. 2007, [nacla.org/article/official-and-independent-unions-angle-power-mexico](http://nacla.org/article/official-and-independent-unions-angle-power-mexico).

<sup>12</sup> "Unionism in Mexico is free unionism, democratic, self sufficient within its internal life with magnificent relations with the party of the revolution."

Gleyzer, Raymundo, director. *Mexico: the Frozen Revolution*. Released in the U.S. by Tricontinental Film Center, 1971.

This subtle change permitted President López Mateos to suppress teachers and railroad workers in the late 1950s. What had begun as an anti-fascist defense mechanism evolved into a pseudo-fascist political tool.

As Mexico's economic identity conformed to American values, the urban middle classes inherited cultural preferences from North of the border. Cheerleading and American football<sup>13</sup> arrived to much fanfare in the 1950s and university rivalries, much like those between Harvard and Yale or UC Berkeley and Stanford, for example, gained prominence within Mexico City's high education system. Members of *La Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM), often upper middle class intellectuals on track for PRI positions, clashed frequently with students from el *Instituto Politécnico Nacional* (National Polytechnic Institute, IPN). Clashes occasionally turned violent, but university culture was condemned less and sympathetically permitted across the 1950s. The youthful parades of UNAM students demonstrated not only their impressively nuanced and rigid hazing techniques, but also an Americanized culture of recreation and leisure that fostered a sense of Mexican economic opportunity.

Surely part of what made the student population an early friend of the PRI was their own economic makeup. Families of UNAM students emerged from the upper middle class and benefitted most from the burgeoning economic 'miracle.' In 1965, over sixty percent of UNAM households earned five times the minimum wage while a substantial 15 percent earned ten times that figure.<sup>14</sup> The future, for students and the Party alike, looked bright. And yet, there were signs

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<sup>13</sup> Pensado, Jaime. *Rebel Mexico: Student Unrest and Authoritarian Political Culture during the Long Sixties*, by Jaime M. Pensado, Stanford University Press, 2015, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> Pensado, Jaime, p. 22.

of economic fracture. “In 1960, the Prudential Insurance Company lent Mexico 100 million dollars...Direct investment in Mexico had soared from just over 900 million dollars in 1959 to 1.3 billion dollars in 1964. These funds, said Mexicans, were ‘indispensable’; without them economic development stood still”.<sup>15</sup> Mexico began to borrow excessively and American investment increased by a margin of 700 percent between 1950 and 1957. With more investment came more ways to shield the public and the PRI from impending disaster.

Constricted by single-party rule and oppressive anti-freedom of speech legislation, many still managed to voice their displeasure. Worker strikes were one way: railroad workers, doctors, and other professionals, received repeated and brutal repression at the hands of their government for decades. But, most widespread were the student demonstrations that consumed Mexico City. Student malaise had begun in some of the nation’s poorest populations; scholarships had dwindled and resources available were being usurped for other purposes. A growing percentage of Mexico’s population grew weary of economic inequalities and political stagnation. Mexico’s university population began to abandon their political apathy, long a quality cherished by the PRI establishment. As students politicized in the late 1950s, the government took new steps to combat the surge in student protest. Contracted by the government were *porros*—what the State Department referred to as ‘toughs.’ *Porros* can more aptly be described as non-governmental, but covertly government sponsored assets who spread misinformation and launched physical attack campaigns on left-leaning students.

While parts of post-War University culture enjoyed freedom from state aggression, the leftist fervor of Cold War-era youth encouraged middle class students to reject the anti-

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<sup>15</sup> Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, p. 163.

democratic tendencies of PRI rhetoric. It is in response to emerging student organizations that *porros* began to torment school campuses across Mexico. *Porros* began as middle-class and gang-like provocateurs during the 1950s whose territory was measured by university and preparatory school influence.<sup>16</sup> But, under the Presidential administration of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, *porros* took a more violent and political turn. Members were increasingly recruited from low-income Mexico City neighborhoods and mobilized to scare, intimidate, harm, and occasionally kill off student leaders, leftists, and union members.

Sponsored by PRI officials, *porros* launched ‘culture clubs’ or pseudo-cultural on campus organizations that borrowed names from popular icons like Sandino, Salvador Allende, and Martin Luther King Jr.. The intention of such clubs was to covertly promote violence, extremism, and misinformation amongst the student body. *Porros* like La Chabela reiterated the positivist<sup>17</sup> aims of their groups<sup>18</sup>; defending Mexico from the disease that was communism, *porros* saw themselves as neighborhood vigilantes whose work maintained the balance between Left and Right in Mexican political culture.

By the late 1950s, half of Mexico’s population was under the age of twenty-five. There was widespread consensus within the PRI that structure was required to correct the path of its university students before their worldviews were ‘corrupted’ by ‘subversive’ ideology.<sup>19</sup>

According to Juan Pensado, “a 1966 *Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales* (IPS) report...describes

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<sup>16</sup> Pensado, Jaime, p. 185.

<sup>17</sup> Asserts that laws are to be understood as social norms and are valid because they arise out of authority and an evolution of lawmaking that precedes it.

<sup>18</sup> Viale, Emilio, and Carlo Borbolla. “Delata Un Cabecilla: Porras Con Becas, Ligadas a Halcones: Pagaba El DDF.” *Excelsior*, 18 Oct. 1971, pp. 1–13.

<sup>19</sup> Pensado, Jaime, p. 188.

a step-by-step plan put together by government agents to be carried out by provocateurs in order to divide ‘the red agitation’ inside the school.”<sup>20</sup> ‘Culture clubs’ used structured entertainment to divert interest away from political protest. According to *porro* El Gato: “Following the Cuban Revolution we realized that the control of the student body no longer simply relied on the management of American football and *novatadas*<sup>21</sup>. Instead, organizing film festivals and rock concerts that alluded to some sort of liberation movement had become necessary.”<sup>22</sup> Attempting to reorient university culture towards recreation, *porros* strategy encapsulated the nostalgia that members of the PRI had for the youthful and directionless energy of university students from a bygone era. It also proved to be fertile ground for espionage.

*Porro* culture, though directly financed by the government, resembled the activities of neighborhood gangs. While serving clear political aims, ‘culture clubs’ were also large money making endeavors and the occupation of cafeteria and cineclub revenue by *porro* groups was widespread. But what most aptly displays *porro* culture’s gang-like nature was the territorial rivalry between one group of *porros* and another. When one *porro* leader was expelled, new territory was left vulnerable. For the PRI, contracting *porros* was simply convenient. But for the *porros*, a relationship to the university counter culture was complex. Considering their upbringing in low class and often violent corners of Mexico City, PRI contracts afforded *porros* educational opportunities otherwise unavailable to them. This isn’t to neglect the value of school territory as gang currency amongst *porro* leaders or their political ties to Mexican conservatism.

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<sup>20</sup> Pensado, Jaime, p. 188

<sup>21</sup> Pranks or practical jokes

<sup>22</sup> Pensado, Jaime, pp. 181-200.

But *porros*, while students in disguise, gained access to a middle class lifestyle that was out of reach for people like them coming from the places and experiences that they had.

The use of *porros*, instead of the less mundane paramilitary shock troops utilized later, killed two birds with one stone. PRI officials sought to distance Mexico from the likes of their Latin American neighbors, many of whom used transparent force and violence to silence leftist ideology. At the same time, PRI officials sought to reorient the country towards the ‘true revolution’—one which willfully rejected the influence of such ideologies as enemies of the state. Thus President Díaz Ordaz and later President Luis Echeverría were forced to embrace *porrismo* timidly. The culture of *porrismo* allowed the Mexican government control over an emerging resistance while preserving its illusion of neutrality. *Porro* culture was by all measures an effective strategy for PRI presidents to quietly disrupt student organizing. *Porros* arrived unannounced—only revealing their identities upon attacks on meetings or protests. If not their central aim, fear and paranoia became the successful trademark of the *porro* brand. The distortion of trust and conspiracy that proliferated among college youth allowed the PRI to continuously fracture the student body into smaller fractions.

Paranoid students had reason to be so; faculty and administrators were in on the *porro* scheme as well as Presidents and their cabinet members. In tandem, all orchestrated the missions and facilitated the scholarships that gave *porros* a claim to legitimacy. Vicente Méndez Rostro, for example, used his office on school campuses as a headquarters for the direction and sponsorship of *porro* missions. As the director of National Preparatory School No. 1, Méndez Rostro sponsored some of the most infamous *porros*, including *El Johnny* and *El Fish*. Even as disguised and contracted governmental agents, *porros* held a great deal of political power;

Echeverría was even photographed next to infamous *porro* leaders in Los Pinos<sup>23</sup>, causing students to protest. *Porros* were useful to the State apparatus because, not in spite of, their unpredictability and erratic behaviour. But *porro* culture was not enough to contain the culture of student grievances breeding within the UNAM and elsewhere. The global phenomenon of youth protest gave Mexican students a platform and a precedent. The government did not respond timidly.

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<sup>23</sup> Los Pinos is the Mexican presidential residence.

Mexico. Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto. *El 10 de Junio de 1971 y La Disidencia Estudiantil*. 2006. *The Office of the Attorney General of Mexico*. Page 4. Web Nov 11 2018.



## Chapter Two

In 1968, baby-boomers the world over had successfully pushed up against the limits of their governments. By the mid 1960s, the post-war birth boom had rendered the so-called Great Generation's grasp on social and political control moot. Youth were the majority and prepared to delegitimize the hegemonic realpolitik across both the Western and Eastern fronts. Authority was being questioned everywhere and from the bottom up.

Youth began to embrace new icons and ideologies. Che Guevara displayed a capacity for forceful political change that was widely appreciated. Violence and obstruction became true routes to change. In Washington D.C. and Oakland, the Black Panthers contrasted the philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by utilizing their second-ammendment rights to assist African Americans suffering from "poverty, discrimination, and disproportionate Vietnam draft duties."<sup>24</sup> Dr. King's assassination itself spiralled the country into violence, despair, and rioting. "It's time to end this non-violence bullshit," Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee leader Stokely Carmichael declared.<sup>25</sup>

The city of Berkeley was rattled when the university prohibited on-campus political organizing from groups such as the ultimately banned Congress on Racial Equality.<sup>26</sup> In 1964, hundreds of students attended a sit-in, leading administrators and faculty to repeal much of its antagonistic anti-political legislation. Yet, it was the Vietnam War that inspired the most violent and uproarious political dissent from Berkeley students. In 1967, 10,000 students against the war

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<sup>24</sup> Suri, Jeremi. "The Global Disruption of 1968," in *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 172.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Suri, Jeremi, p. 167.

mobilized to “block draft induction centers in Oakland and other areas nearby.”<sup>27</sup> The Berkeley model of political dissent inspired 50,000 more to march on Washington. Others failed in their attempt to occupy the Pentagon.

In West Berlin, students at the Free University<sup>28</sup> also protested the U.S. intervention in Vietnam, citing a similar intervention in their own country. By the 1960s, increased U.S. influence in Germany felt more like an occupation than a transition and West Germany had outgrown its love affair with John F. Kennedy’s idea of American influence abroad. Germans were well-versed in American Cold-War hypocrisy and its support of non-democratic pseudo-dictators while publicly crusading the democratic cause. West Germans themselves were directly beneath the boot of American military power, making such an observation all the easier. “Today Vietnam, Tomorrow Us!” students screamed.

By the 1960s, many of Paris’ burgeoning intellectuals had little to no recollection of World War II. President Charles De Gaulle, on the other hand, had developed his political career through deep roots in France’s military establishment. But, students feigned little interest in military tradition. Instead they grew increasingly committed to dismantling the imperialistic traditions of France’s colonial past. As the French education system shifted toward professionalism, students demanded that the “government stop trying to, ‘run society like an army.’”<sup>29</sup> Students attacked American establishments in the city and demanded a vast re-evaluation of the capitalist system at large, worker, and students issues across the East and West.

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<sup>27</sup> Suri, Jeremi, p. 170.

<sup>28</sup> Before the construction of the Berlin Wall, the University was open to students from East and West Germany.

<sup>29</sup> Suri, Jeremi, p. 187.

Students' protests were effective in drawing Paris' infrastructure to a halt.<sup>30</sup> This had the negative effect of isolating members of the middle class and otherwise sympathetic and older Parisians who sought to protect post-war stability. As De Gaulle's reputation dwindled and his ability to control the masses came to a close, a referendum showed enough support to keep him in office as a counterpoint to the increasingly rebellious student and worker populations. Post-war Parisian offspring had not quite wrestled complete political power away from their descendants. But, they had initiated a significant tear in the fabric of their society.

Struggle was not limited to States within the so-called West. The Prague Spring signalled similar generational divides which sparked armed conflict within Czechoslovakia and aimed at Moscow's concerned ability to maintain control of outside republics. The world order was up for grabs: between the West and the East and within each as well. Seeking the autonomy to create the sort of socialist republic that best matched the Czech nationstate, political leaders in Prague sought to create a national compromise. But, students desired a more lasting and violent rupture with the Soviet Union—one that would bring about direct representative democracy.

Fighting a war rooted in ideology and polarized hegemony, the U.S. sought to solidify the diplomatic ties it had established across the Western Hemisphere. And in fact, the U.S. was efficient in doing so. The Western European powers, the United States and South America were united, even if in multiple and often contradictory ways. Governments under the control of U.S. economic pressures gave in to American demands or were replaced with leaders who were willing to do so. And Western youth groups were, nonetheless, united across ideological lines (anti-imperialism, academic freedoms, anti-war, etc.) even if they were united against the very

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<sup>30</sup> Mexico. Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto. *Movimiento Estudiantil de 1968*. 2006. *The Office of the Attorney General of Mexico*. Page 4. Web Nov 11 2018.

governments that represented them. So, while the West was surely united, political powers were simultaneously troubled with uniting against the Communist bloc *and* a united dissident voice stemming from within its own boundaries. The same was true for Moscow. A growing brigade of global youth was on the move and, considering the inflamed proportion of baby-boomers to their elders, in a good position to make lasting change.

Mexico's changes in the 1960s mirrored those of many others: student demands for a decentralized school system and the maintenance of autonomy, democratic openings, solidarity within the third world, and otherwise. But, Mexico's 1968 differed in many ways too: namely the lethal response by the government and the unique nature of the Mexican political establishment. Mexico's 1968 promoted positive transformations in some ways, but also signalled the beginning of patterned violence and campaigns of armed authoritarian discipline. And what occurred in 1968 no doubt set a precedent for what would re-occur three years later. Deeper analysis of the 1968 student movement will illuminate some of the main characteristics inherited by the Echeverría administration and others.

Though student life had maintained some semblance of normalcy in the 1950s, there were also a number of opportunities for confrontation. After Article 145's revisions in 1950, the law was used as a counter measure to student demands for larger budgets, greater scholarship opportunities and more resources. Protestors from the IPN and UNAM were jailed for their participation in 'social disillusion', but youth still managed to use protest as a successful means for dialogue, if not outright legislation. Student protest in the 1960s did not emerge without precedent. Nor did it exclude opinions from a variety of class backgrounds, as has also been suggested. The nature of UNAM and IPN during the 1960s did reflect changing educational

priorities for the PRI (long since strayed from the sorts of opportunity-for-all educational initiatives of the Lázaro Cárdenas period). A greater proportion of students enrolled in Mexican high educational programs were well connected and of high-earning families. But, the structure of 1960s student protest was built atop a foundation of student grievances in the previous decade that pushed up against the stagnation in equitable education. The monolithic view of the 1968 student movement as an entirely middle class phenomenon deserves some reconsideration.

To the PRI, the 1960s were both a challenge and an opportunity. Selected as the host of the 1968 Olympics, Mexico rebranded itself and the event in order to appropriately reflect the circumstances of worldwide political protest and youth unrest. Considering the year (and the years leading up to it) of violent uproar, President Díaz Ordaz marketed an Olympic event that would stand for peace and global fraternity between nations. Mexico also attempted to garner the fervor of youth protest and appropriate it to its own needs. The dove would stand in as Olympic symbol of peace and an abundance of resources were expended to build up the Mexico City landscape—all in order to reflect an evolving Mexico, a Mexico coming into itself culturally and politically and an economic stability rivalled by only the most dominant markets.

Meanwhile students were beginning to radicalize in complex ways. In *Waking From the Dream: Mexico's Middle Class After 1968*, Historian Louise E. Walker describes the university-aged trend of *proletización*.<sup>31</sup> In an attempt to diversify the demands of student protest (as well as its scope and reputation), students visited shantytowns and low-income Mexico City neighborhoods. Arriving by bus rather than by car, students sported tattered clothes and dirty

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<sup>31</sup> Become proletarian.

hands and faces so as to confuse any of the otherwise dead giveaways of high social rank.<sup>32</sup> Most of the students performing *proletización* were from the sorts of families that benefited the most from the PRI's success; they were the middle and upper middle classes. Not surprisingly, high poverty neighborhoods grew perturbed by the frequent missionary visits by students to their corners of the capital. But, to reduce the student movement of 1968 to a majority privileged background is simply untrue.

The 1968 movement was a direct descendent of impassioned protests in the educational sector from years prior. The educational sector, of course, did include the middle class students of which made up the majority at UNAM. But it also included a much broader community of *normalistas* and rural school goers, students in other cities and states—all who were fed up in varying ways with the government's sweeping changes. *Normales* (schools providing teacher programs to rural areas) had become popular modes of education in Mexico and the United States in the early 20th century. When funding for *escuelas normales* was threatened after the War, rural and low-income communities commenced a long winded fight for educational resources. In 1949, for example, La Escuela Nacional de Maestros began a strike in demand of greater scholarships and the freedom for teachers to teach curricula untethered to State demands. In 1950, students from every rural *normal* school in the country demanded action on their “exiguous living conditions.”<sup>33</sup> Grouped together as *La Federación de Estudiantes y*

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<sup>32</sup> Walker, Louise. *Waking from the Dream: Mexico's Middle Classes after 1968*. Stanford University Press, 2015, p. 36.

<sup>33</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1968 Report, p. 45.

*Campesinos Socialistas de Mexico*, the demands were met just 34 days later. Funding was included in the next proposed federal budget.<sup>34</sup>

Protests in Sonora, Guerrero, Aguascalientes, and almost every corner of Mexico were transforming the political domain's relationship to education. Protest from the 1940s through the 1960s complicates the ways in which we have framed the student movement of 1968. When unions and agricultural industries were stripped of their own autonomous bargaining power, the PRI had begun to chip away at educational autonomy as well. A political awakening in Mexico is suggested to have begun with a giant and abrupt tear in 1968. But there was a more gradual and inclusive rupture between the educational front and the government beginning much earlier. The inclusion of lower-class workers to student protests was not nearly as impactful as the inclusion of middle class students to previously blue-collar and low-income educational protests of the 1940s and 1950s. 1968 requires the inclusion of its precursors without denying the influence that economic status and class divides had on the State's response. Framing the 1968 moment as a transformative moment without precedent denies the possibility of economically heterogeneous protest that predated 1968 by some ten to twenty years.<sup>35</sup> But neglecting the class differences that were proliferating in Mexico's higher education system (class stratification that, in fact, occurred thanks to a direct and intentional reallocation of education funds) paints an equally incomplete portrait.

The massive inclusion of Mexico City's middle class to earlier protest movements sounded an alarm for Díaz Ordaz and his administration. The movement that spanned the

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<sup>34</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1968 Report, p. 46.

<sup>35</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1968 Report, pp. 45-56.



summer of 1968 into October numbered in the thousands and while its aims have become coagulated through processes of memorialization, its sheer size created the space for differing and sometimes conflicting agendas. And yet, the overarching themes of the movement were democratization: of education, of state and local politics, and of Mexico as a whole. As Susana Draper wrote in the introduction to her recent book *Mexico 1968: Constellations of Freedom and Democracy*, “the movements of ’68 are often mired in the realm of the unclassifiable for having demanded a process of emancipation and democratization that did not conform to traditional representative politics (a party or a specific petition.)”<sup>36</sup> In the case of Mexico specifically, operating outside of the bounds of political parties or petitions meant operating outside of the PRI. Mexico 1968 was about demands for democracy, autonomy, the demilitarization of the police force, and the release of political prisoners. But, incapsulating all of these ideals was the challenge to operate outside of a system designed to infiltrate every corner of Mexican society. How far could students and sympathetic professors and staff push the boundaries of autonomy and what sort of threat did it pose to the foundations of the mid-century Mexican political apparatus?

Judging by the state’s response, the threat posed by students was overwhelmingly real. At the movement’s climax on October 2nd, a full-fledged military operation obliterated what little trust the student body had in their government. In the Plaza de Tres Culturas, the intersection of three stages in modern Mexico’s development, snipers resting on top of the middle class Chihuahua housing complex fired on students gathered below. Appearing were members of the military establishment, such as the head of the paratrooper division who was shot in the leg in

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<sup>36</sup> Draper, Susana. 1968 Mexico: Constellations of Freedom and Democracy. Duke University Press., 2018, p. 1.

what was likely ‘friendly fire.’ Undercover provocateurs, identified by a white glove on the left hand, beat down student protestors who had peacefully gathered for a rally that evening.

The Olympic events were set to begin just two weeks after the assault and the international community’s arrival provided the expiration date for the government’s more (though not entirely) lenient approach to student unrest. Exemplifying the Olympics’ influence on violence, the paramilitary group used at Tlatelolco was nicknamed the *Batallón Olimpia*. With an Olympic event intending to demonstrate ‘peace’ amidst global chaos, Díaz Ordaz saw violence as the only means to acquiring it. In a famous Mexican folk song released shortly after the events at Tlatelolco, Gabino Palomares sings:

*“Para que nunca se olviden  
las gloriosas olimpiadas  
mandó a matar el gobierno  
cuatrocientos camaradas.”<sup>37</sup>*

The opportunities bestowed upon the host country were clear; economic development over the course of the previous two decades was ready to welcome the world to a new Mexico. But the 1968 Olympics were also host to burgeoning youth counter culture that voiced its opinion in the face of oppression and intolerance. Within the global consciousness, the 1968

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<sup>37</sup> “So that nobody forgets,  
the glorious Olympics,  
the government set out to kill,  
four hundred comrades.”

“Gabino Palomares - México 68.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 14 Mar. 2010, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuEnrG4PMSY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuEnrG4PMSY).

Olympics will forever be remembered by the raising of two fists, those of African-American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos to invoke black power during the star spangled banner. But for the host country, memory of the games has been forever tainted by the events two weeks before. As the Díaz Ordaz administration intended to protect its games from the threat of protesting masses, it instead ensured that the Games would be branded by unnecessary violence and transparent suppression.

Considering our understanding of the Olympics' significance to Mexico, economic stability came at a high cost that the PRI was apparently willing to swallow. For weeks leading up to the rally, school campuses had been invaded by tanks and soldiers across the city. The subsequent massacre, as outlined in detail by Prosecutor Ignacio Prieto<sup>38</sup>, was carefully strategized and organized days in advance. Apartments of the Chihuahua housing complex were cleared in order to make room for military units, the hospitals and jails were vacated to make room for new patients and inmates, and members of the military awaited their command well before the rally had even commenced. At its start around 5 PM, there were 10,000 people in attendance at Plaza de las Tres Culturas. Major transportation hubs were guarded by military squadrons, all parcelled out by the Secretary of Defense by way of the President.

As helicopters flew overhead at 6:10 PM, flares fell from the sky and automatic gunfire began to rain on the crowd below. Some gunfire originated from the the Foreign Relations Secretary building across the street, further cementing the link between upper branches of the Mexican State and its rejected involvement in the Tlatelolco Massacre to follow.<sup>39</sup> At 6:15 PM,

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<sup>38</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, Report on 1968, p. 125.

<sup>39</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, Report on 1968, p. 127.

foot soldiers entered the square shooting aimlessly at protestors and the Chihuahua housing complex. Squadrons had been mobilized in various counter-protest initiatives for weeks. The *Batallón Olimpia*, for example, had most recently been utilized to storm the UNAM campus at *Ciudad Universitaria* two weeks earlier, effectively occupying the campus and terminating university autonomy. It was members of this troupe that guarded the Chihuahua housing complex sporting the previously referenced white gloves as undercover uniforms. The paramilitary group consisted of military men, hiding their inscriptions in the military hierarchy, who had been recruited by the Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios (head of Dirección Federal de Seguridad from 1964-1970).<sup>40</sup> While *porros* had been tormenting educational facilities for a decade or so, the *Batallón Olimpia* signalled an increased reliance on paramilitary forces as Cold War tools. As the Mexican Dirty War progressed, such tools under varying names would continue to be used as paralegal entities to quell subversive behavior and increasingly leftist rhetoric.

As the massacre came to an end some two hours later, leaders of the Consejo Nacional de Huelga<sup>41</sup> were arrested and bodies were found scattered across the ruins of Tlatelolco. To this day, it is unclear how many were detained, injured, and killed at the scene.<sup>42</sup> The government's claims were as follows: 1043 detained in various prisons across the city, 26 dead including four women and one soldier, 100 injured including paratrooper José Hernández Toledo, twelve soldiers and seven police. In 2007, however, student cadavers were discovered under the

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<sup>40</sup> *Mexican Political Biographies, 1935–2009, 4th edition*. By Roderic Ai Camp. Austin: University of Texas Press, August 2011. p. 448.

<sup>41</sup> National Strike Council—the leading force behind the Student Movements of 1968 and a continuous organizer of student protest and protest in general up until its disbandment and replacement with CoCo in 1970.

<sup>42</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, Report on 1968, pp. 139-143.

foundation of a nearby hospital. The investigation into their identities was quickly shut down by police authorities but it is believed that the bodies belong to fallen students from the October 2, 1968 intervention.<sup>43</sup>

The Consejo Nacional de Huelga would dispute these reports with their own statistics: an initial count of 40 dead and upwards of 100 injured students. In a more direct count, the father of one victim counted upwards of 120 bodies on his way to finding his 21 year old son Gilberto Reynoso Ortiz.<sup>44</sup> According to Francisco Taibo II: “*Declaraciones llegadas a la Comisión de a Verdad hablaban de que una parte de los cadáveres habían sido arrojados al Golfo de México por aviones militares.*”<sup>45</sup> He continues to testify of police threats and state-sponsored intimidation to ensure parents ‘agreed’ that their children and loved ones had died of natural causes. If true, Mexico’s lesser known disappearances mimic the same tactics used by the Argentine government (even predating them) in their battle for ideological control across the 1970s. What would be known to the public as the Tlatelolco Massacre was a planned attack coded by members of the state apparatus (including police, military, and politicians) as Operación Galeana. While the majority of the 10,000 participating protestors managed to avoid detention by the Army, some unlucky and numerous youth were transported to Campo Militar Numero Uno—some never to be seen or heard from again.

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<sup>43</sup> Jr., JAMES C. McKINLEY. “Bodies Found in Mexico City May Be Victims of 1968 Massacre.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 11 July 2007, [www.nytimes.com/2007/07/11/world/americas/11students.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/11/world/americas/11students.html).

<sup>44</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1968 Report, p. 140.

<sup>45</sup> “Declarations had arrived to the Truth Commission, talking about bodies being thrown from military planes into the Gulf of Mexico.” Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1968 Report, p. 140.

Most journalists escaped detainment at Tlatelolco. But, they were present and their presence had widespread consequences for the success of the State's operation. In the proceeding days and weeks it was their testimony and that of their fellow victims that ensured that the Tlatelolco Massacre be remembered and memorialized in music, literature, and public space across Mexico. Videos online still show the government's brute force as broadcasted on NBC in real time; Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci<sup>46</sup> was brutally injured and her testimony of the events there spread quickly; a whole new genre of '68 literature proliferated spearheaded by Elena Poniatowska, Francisco Taibo II, José Revueltas and others; films were recorded from within prison walls and documentarians traced the final months of the Student Movement.

The movement, often considered the breaking point for Mexico's tilt towards democracy,<sup>47</sup> demarcated the beginning of large-scale, violent, and repeated suppression of dissidents and the accompanied authoritative impunity. Tlatelolco, in effect, started the Mexican Dirty War of the 1970s. If it was a watershed moment for the country's democratization, change arose out of government suppression, not from protest alone.

After Tlatelolco, political protest took two very different turns. On the one hand, many resorted to violence and guerilla warfare in both urban areas like Guadalajara and rural areas such as Guerrero. The government thus succeeded in creating the enemy it had initially feared. Citing the influence of communist and foreign intervention, the government forced otherwise benign protestors into extreme circles. Members of MAR (Mexicanos Armados Revolucionaros), for example, studied at universities in the USSR before learning tactical warfare techniques in

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<sup>46</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Malkin, Elisabeth. "50 Years After a Student Massacre, Mexico Reflects on Democracy." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 1 Oct. 2018, [www.nytimes.com/2018/10/01/world/americas/mexico-tlatelolco-massacre.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/01/world/americas/mexico-tlatelolco-massacre.html).

North Korea. Yet, by forcing students into participation with armed groups, the government also created the enemy it preferred. Public support favored the government when their enemies sported arms rather than banners. Even after Tlatelolco, many residents of Mexico City (especially the thriving middle class) continued to support the PRI regime and its bloody strategy to quell massive capital protest. On the other hand, a large contingent of former university protestors largely stopped protesting the government altogether. Effectively scared off, leaders tried to reframe the movement to no avail. Rallies and protests were poorly attended and urban intellectuals soon returned to their books.<sup>48</sup>

In the aftermath of the 1968 tragedy it became clear to student leaders and others that serious changes needed to be made in order to refocus the struggle shut down by the government on October 2 of that year. No doubt—the government and military apparatus had fallen out of favor with the public. But, it had also sent a clear and effective message to those that had most directly questioned its authority. The government, for its part, expanded its programs of espionage and repression. Having missed classes for months, students participating in the general strike voted to return to the classrooms and continue the struggle from their respective school.

Thus, a diffusion in energy and influence branded the student movement in the interim between 1968 and 1971. A return to classes and the militarization of some reverted national focus to other groups including a burgeoning guerilla warfare movement emerging across Mexico. On the 4th of December, the leading organizing body for students (Consejo Nacional de Huelga or National Strike Council) dissolved in favor of a new assembly. The CNH's fall from grace gave

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<sup>48</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1968 Report, p. 146.

birth to a new student organizing body and a new phase in the evolving relations between the State and its public university system.

The CoCo (Coordinador de Comités de Lucha) became the new consolidation of student voices from across each of the 25 school systems. Organization expanded beyond student demands too: the new format welcomed the voices of workers, political prisoners, and other members of civil society who shared their desire to democratize Mexico. There was certainly a timid stagnation to student protest after 1968; this is understandable considering the impact that authoritative violence had on the morale of the students and the leniency with which their maneuvers diminished. After October 2, student demands had the surreal effect of being both magnified and erased. The violence replaced debate (similar to the debate sparked by youth all over the world) with simple outrage. On the surface, the government addressed the concerns of public safety and the heavy handed response at Tlatelolco by simply rejecting its involvement or responsibility. But, it also crushed the profound debate that was rattling the country to its core. One Mexican national security report from the fall of 1969 observes, “...*los activistas han estado tratando inútilmente de volver a levantar el movimiento, gastando bastante dinero en propaganda, pero se tropiezan con la desmovilización del estudiantado, que en su mayoría lo único que quiere es salvar el año lectivo, a las asambleas acude poca gente y sólo han logrado algunos paros esporádicos por escuelas, en muchos casos parciales y sin reales efectos de*



*politización.*”<sup>49</sup> The transition of power would at least reignite and refocus a movement hopelessly bound for the political periphery.

On the brink of the Presidential transfer of power in 1970, student leader Estévez Leninger proposed a new vision for student politics. In his candidacy for president of the Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios (FEUS), he proposed the abolishment of top-down power structures and its replacement with a mass-driven, democratic operation. And so the CoCo began to mirror the sort of direct democracy that students sought in the national sphere: each student committee was delegated an elected representative who would argue on behalf of their constituents.<sup>50</sup>

Between 1968 and 1971, the Mexican government may have outright denounced the attacks at Tlatelolco but it was proven that violence had become a profound political implement for both the State and radical youth alike. A political ritual began with Tlatelolco and undermined the social fabric and foundational validity of the PRI republic. But such a ritual also created the perception of social change and political evolution that was, for all accounts, absent or misguided. The documentation and subsequent publication of photos at Tlatelolco prevented the government from being very convincing, at least in its attempts to reframe the events through fake testimonials in its aftermath. But the country’s return to normalcy, thanks to the Olympic events, and widespread repression were convincing testimonies in their own right. The PRI may

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<sup>49</sup> “...activists have been unsuccessfully trying to reignite the movement, spending significant amounts of money on propaganda, but butting heads with the lack of motivation from the student body, that in its majority mostly wants to save the academic year, assemblies are poorly attended and they have only realized sporadic stops in schools, in many cases only partial and without real political effect.”

Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1968 Report, p. 2.

have been illuminated to its own fractures, but it was also confident in its unflinching malleability and resilience.

While Luis Echeverría still denies any involvement in the Tlatelolco Massacre, the former President's statements are difficult to believe. Under the administration of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, Luis Echeverría served as the Secretary of the Interior, the President's second-in-command whose responsibilities included the coordination of the cabinet, the oversight of security forces and the proper management of federal emergencies. His departing letter to Gustavo Díaz Ordaz upon selection to PRI presidential candidacy mentioned no regret or embarrassment for his role in the cabinet:

*“Le hago patente mi agradecimiento profundo por su guía, siempre aleccionadora y afectuosa, y por el trato generoso y cordial que siempre se sirvió dispensarme. Hoy expreso a usted, como ciudadano mexicano, mi solidaridad sin reservas hacia todos los actos de su Gobierno y mi sincera admiración por la obra moral, cultural y material que ha desarrollado, en estos cinco años, para bien del país. Su entrega personal a las mejores causas del pueblo marca ya una etapa fecunda de nuestra historia.”<sup>51</sup>*

Considering the widespread responsibilities of a man with his title, it is difficult to imagine how Echeverría could *not* have been somewhat involved in the planning, acting out, and

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<sup>51</sup> “I make clear to you my profound gratitude for your guidance, always humbling and affectionate, and for the generous and cordial treatment that you have always given me. Today I express to you, as a Mexican citizen, my solidarity without reservations towards all the acts of your government and my sincere admiration for the moral, cultural, and material, work that has been developed, in these past five years, for the well being of the country. Your personal commitment to the best causes of the people marks a fertile period in our history.”

García, Julio Scherer. “Los Patriotas De Tlatelolco A La Guerra Sucia.” *Los Patriotas: De Tlatelolco a La Guerra Sucia*, by Julio Scherer García and Monsiváis Carlos, Aguilar, 2004, p. 9.

later obfuscation of the 1968 tragedy. But written testimony and direct, documental evidence of Echeverría's involvement is scant. According to Ignacio Prieto's report, cooperation between the Interior and other departments preceded Tlatelolco attacks. The apartment of Echeverría's sister-in-law was even utilized as a sniper perch on October 2. In a recent interview with *El Universal* on the anniversary of the Tlatelolco Massacre, Echeverría again declined culpability: "the chief of the Army is the President, nobody influences—not even the secretary of Defense, nobody influences [the Army] more. It couldn't be. In accordance with the organic law of the Army, the President is the supreme commander." When asked why the president took ownership of Echeverría's responsibilities, he replied, "Beause of the urgency of the Olympic Games, because of his previous experience in the government as a high up official and secretary. Possibly out of a recognition that I didn't yet have the sufficient experience, because he had been in the government for many years. And thankfully so."<sup>52</sup> But, without knowing the degree to which Echeverría consented to these demands, it is difficult to ascertain anything more than remote conjecture in terms of the President-to-be's direct role in the massacre's orchestration.

In fact, some signs point to humble unwillingness to follow the administration line—or at least conceal his active participation in it. In response to the army's intrusive attack on school campuses in the summer of 1968, Alfonso Corona del Rosal<sup>53</sup> insisted that his office had been in direct and constant contact with the office of the Interior. Alternatively, Echeverría stated that, *"la autonomía de la universidad estuvo en peligro, debido a ello y en vista de la situación y para*

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<sup>52</sup> "Todo Lo Manejó El Presidente (Díaz Ordaz), Dijo Luis Echeverría En Entrevista Con EL UNIVERSAL En 1998." *El Universal*, 3 Oct. 2018, [www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/politica/todo-lo-manejo-diaz-ordaz-dijo-echeverria-el-universal-en-1998](http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/politica/todo-lo-manejo-diaz-ordaz-dijo-echeverria-el-universal-en-1998).

<sup>53</sup> Head of Delegación del Distrito Federal during Díaz Ordaz administration

*evitar derramamiento de sangre...fue que se pidió la intervención del ejército.*”<sup>54</sup> Secretary Echeverría’s aspirations for the presidency cannot be denied as palpable motive for his line-hugging stance. His campaign for democratic opening and open dialogue effectively began as a consequence of the 1968 movement and the outrage sparked by its climax. But his involvement either directly or indirectly at Tlatelolco and in the summer of 1968 set the stage for his opportunities and limitations as President.. His relationship to the Díaz Ordaz administration and rebranding of himself as a Cárdenas-like figure had serious effects on the Corpus Christi Massacre and its aftermath.

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In his book *Los presidentes*, Julio Scherer chronicles the eve of Echeverría’s nomination as PRI candidate: “*Unos cuantos minutos estuve con Echeverría el 21 de octubre de 1969. La víspera había sido destapado como precandidato a la Presidencia de la República. Desde el primer momento sus partidarios se adueñaron de los pasillos y antesalas de la Secretaría de Gobernación. Era suyo el espacio, el aire...gritaban sin cesar, cantaban. Echeverría sería candidato, presidente, dios, presidente-dios. Su toma de posesión tendría el significado de un*

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<sup>54</sup> “The autonomy of the university was in danger; due to that and the view of the situation and to avoid bloodshed...we ordered the intervention of the army.”

Batres, Viétnika. “Derriba Ejército Con Un Bazucazo La Puerta De La Prepa 1.” *Animal Político*, 23 Aug. 2018, [www.animalpolitico.com/2018/07/bazucazo-1968-prepa-unam/](http://www.animalpolitico.com/2018/07/bazucazo-1968-prepa-unam/).

*cambio de estación en la naturaleza. Reverdecería el país.*”<sup>55</sup> The certainty with which the upper echelons of PRI politics could operate signals the democratic performance that the Party had perfected. But the left-wing of the Party no doubt had reason to be celebratory.

Such was the state of affairs in Mexico’s capital in the lead-up to 1970’s transition of power. Echeverría’s ascension, as branded by himself and his cabinet, signalled a sharp veer leftward from the right-wing Díaz Ordaz administration. A champion of the revolutionary rhetoric that his party stood for, Echeverría marketed himself as a politician nostalgic for the socially-concious Lázaro Cárdenas—who was himself a supporter of Echeverría during the campaign. Under Cárdenas, peasants, students, educators, and syndicates experienced widespread support and investment. Echeverría’s anticipated ideological reversal was a political promise but in all likelihood an actual Presidential aspiration as well. Mexican politics required a fresh start after Tlatelolco and concessions to students were an easy way of achieving it.

This was the time of “perfect dictatorship”<sup>56</sup>—that magical contraption through which democracy saved face while perpetuating tyranny. Though the PRI operated under the guise of an electoral system, it was the transfer of power and personality that made its dictatorship seem more serendipitous. The presidential nomination increasingly included a more varied pool of

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<sup>55</sup> “I was with Echeverría on the 21 of October 1969 for just a few minutes. The evening before he had been selected as the pre-candidate for the Presidency. From the first instance his supporters took over the hallways and rooms of the Secretary of the Interior. The space and the air were his. they screamed without stop, and they sang. Echeverría would be candidate, President, God, President God. His innauguration would have the significane of a change in season for nature. He would revive the country.”

Scherer, Julio. *Los Presidentes*, Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial México, 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Term coined by Octavio Paz and Vargas Llosa to describe the deceptive nature of political transfer within the PRI.

Barba, Armando G. Lagos, director. *La Dictadura Perfecta Vargas Llosa Octavio Paz*. YouTube, YouTube, 30 Dec. 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTVX2rS8a-o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTVX2rS8a-o).

oppositional candidates. But the presidential *dedazo*<sup>57</sup> always fell on the PRI candidate, who in turn always won the election. The political liminality spawned by the electoral process provided an air of democracy within a structure of dictatorship. But, amidst the global movement of protest and political unrest, the democratic illusion's hypnotic effects proved ineffective to the increasingly rebellious student population. As the *dedazo* was challenged, the policies of the party it upheld were regarded as illegitimate. The government's status quo was facing the most pressing threat to its survival since its inception.

Echeverría's presidential branding began well before he entered Los Pinos. The 1968 massacre and aftermath provided Echeverría with a lucky break; with little direct evidence available, Echeverría could escape the associations he had with Mexico's most infamous evening. But at the same time, even a mere association with the Díaz Ordaz administration tainted his ability to garner trust from an angered student body. Campaigning across Mexico, Echeverría projected the image of a President set on transparency, democratic aperture, and inclusion. His wife María Esther Zuno wore traditional Mexican indigenous garb during campaign rallies while Echeverría rallied the indigenous population in visits to rural communities.<sup>58</sup> Echeverría was in the process of transforming the public image of not just himself, but that of the entire Party.

Standing in front of a mural painted by Diego Rivera and looking optimistic albeit uptight, Jorge Cruikshank García, leader of the Partido Popular Socialista (PPS)<sup>59</sup> was

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<sup>57</sup> Literally finger slap, but more fittingly, point

<sup>58</sup> Esther Zuno's wardrobe would become a national joke as her outfit choices were compared to waitresses and famed Mexican department store Sanborn's.

<sup>59</sup> Popular Socialist Party

interviewed by filmmaker Raymundo Gleyzer. The PPS was one of Mexico's left-leaning parties with ties to the PRI. It had undergone battles with the PAN and other far right oppositional parties in the past, claiming that disappearances and abductions were plots by the far right to undermine Mexico's stability. At the time of the interview, Cruikshank had just inherited his role as leader of Mexico's political left from party founder Vicente Lombardo Toledano. The presidential election was months away and Luis Echeverría's selection to the presidency eminent.

"The Popular Socialist Party, founded by the great Vicente Lombardo Toledano, being a marxist-leninist party fights to strengthen the State economy, that makes it possible to advance and fight successfully the pressures from the outside world," he tells Gleyzer.

*'But, what would lead a party such as this to support the candidacy of one Luis Echeverría, infamous politician from the PRI?'* Gleyzer narrates aloud.

"Well that is easy to explain in the context of countries such as our own. Which is to say developing countries, ones where American imperialism influence the economic, social and political life... We believe that it is possible, it is convenient, and it is necessary, in order to have a democratic advancement, an advancement independent of the foreigner, to maintain the unity of patriotic nationalistic progressive forces in revolutionary countries, such as in the case of Mexico. For this reason our party has proclaimed and applied an historical experience for the Mexican people, that of the national democratic political front. Because of this we have seen in the candidacy of Lic. Echeverría fundamental coincidences with our program, with the electoral

platform of our party and he also accepted publicly the nomination of our party and expressed the same fundamental similarities.”<sup>60</sup>

Despite the ties between PPS and the PRI, there was little reason to doubt Echeverría’s intentions to shift Mexico to the left. His embrace of exiled South American leaders and his open relationship with Fidel Castro were convincing. The release of political prisoners and the repeal of Article 145 satisfied the demands of the 1968 movement, further isolating him from that solemn chapter in Mexican history.<sup>61</sup> His aspirations for the Secretary General of the United Nations embraced a peace-making position that guided Echeverría’s attempted transformation of the PRI’s relationship to society. All of which makes what occurred in 1971 all the more confounding.

The ritualized process of Echeverría’s rapid approach to Los Pinos signalled the nature of Mexico’s anti democratic democracy—yes. But, it also represented the last time that such internal cohesion was palpable. As Echeverría’s *sexenio* began, the gap between the Díaz Ordaz administration and his own grew wider and wider, as did the gap between competing ideologies under the PRI umbrella. But, in traditional form, the Party did not pay the price of ideological fractures—the people did.

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<sup>60</sup> Gleyzer, Raymundo, director. *Mexico: the Frozen Revolution*. Released in the U.S. by Tricontinental Film Center, 1971.

<sup>61</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 10.



## Chapter Three

PRI politicians frequently emerged from the ranks of the military hierarchy. Though Echeverría broke the tradition of military prowess as Presidential prerequisites, his administration was filled with those who had paid their dues. Nicknamed ‘El Maestro’, Manuel Díaz Escobar Figueroa was one such member of the administration. He studied in the United States airforce and was later named the Mexican representative for the InterAmerican Defense Board, an organization and school devoted to hemispheric safety across borders.<sup>62</sup> His attempted ‘restructuring’ of the police department was the vague description reserved for the clandestine use of paramilitary forces under his control as Subdirector of General Services within the Federal District. It is also the way in which Mexican officials, such as Escobar, advertised their needs in a telegram sent to the U.S. State Department in the beginning of 1971. Escobar, with the blessing of his superiors, enlisted the help of the International Police Academy in the training of its employees. Having received the blessing of President Echeverría, relayed through Ambassador Gallástegui, Escobar traveled to Washington, D.C. in January of 1971 to discuss the logistics of a potential training program<sup>63</sup> for members of his burgeoning shock group.

As the United States waged an ideological battle across Latin America, its role in Mexico grew stronger. Three presidents were even placed under C.I.A. payroll: Adolfo López Mateos, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, and Luis Echeverría Álvarez.<sup>64</sup> Through the C.I.A. chief in Mexico,

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<sup>62</sup> Jornada, La. “Falleció Manuel Díaz Escobar, Vinculado a Matanza De Tlatelolco y Jueves De Corpus.” *La Jornada*, La Jornada, 11 Sept. 2008.

<sup>63</sup> American Embassy Mexico to Secretary of State Washington, D.C., “Police Training,” telegram. 30 January 1971, Corpus Christi Massacre 2003 Releases, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

<sup>64</sup> Aguayo, Sergio. “Chapter 1: Rethinking '68.” *El 68: Los Estudiantes, El Presidente y La CIA*, by Sergio Aguayo, Ideas y Palabras, 2018, pp. 1–7.

Winston Scott, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz received a monthly contribution to his campaign and direct support in reframing the 1968 movement according to government lines: “Scott and Díaz Ordaz were passionate anti-communists, and there is evidence that both the American and the Mexican contributed to the official narrative according to which the Movement of ’68 formed part of an international conspiracy assembled by the Soviets and the Cubans, among others.” Winston Scott proceeded to send Washington roughly fifteen contradictory explanations for what had occurred at Tlatelolco. He was dismissed shortly after because, “Washington could no longer defend someone who had lost all objectivity.” Mexico represented fertile ground for revolutionary rhetoric. Che Guevara had grown in popularity amongst the youth population and growing resentment of the PRI system was made clear by the 1968 student protests. But, U.S. aid in suppressing political dissidence would have to be kept quiet considering widespread anti-Americanism amongst youth there. To the U.S., Mexico was a nearby and required ally in its Cold War strategy.

According to documents released by the National Security Archives, Washington was made nervous by Mexico’s requests. There were fears within the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Mexico that the training programs could be put to use for violent and unsanctioned aims. In one memo from Washington dated January 8, 1971, the State Department shared, “Embassy’s reservations re proposed training program and politically unpopular uses to which trainees may be put after return.” They were, “particularly puzzled by professed interest in reorganizing and ‘cleaning up’ Mexico City police, in that the trainees’ role in such an operation remains unclear.”<sup>65</sup> But, the diplomatic message of cooperation with the new Mexican

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<sup>65</sup> Secretary of State Washington, D.C. to American Embassy Mexico, “Special Observation and Training Program in Police Activities.”

administration overrode its legitimate concerns. The U.S. commenced plans for a comprehensive program in metropolitan police and riot techniques early that year.

According to newspaper *La Jornada*, Escobar was appointed the leader of a new paramilitary group under then regent of the Federal District Alfonso Corona del Rosal's office in 1966<sup>66</sup>. This position coincided with the same year that he accepted his new bureaucratic post as Sub-Director of General Services within the Federal District. Under his new title, Escobar Figueroa was entrusted with the 'restructuring' of the Mexico City police department.<sup>67</sup> What the project truly encompassed was something else entirely. As Sub-Director, payments for employees of the Chapultepec Park, San Juan de Aragón, parks, gardens and maintenance programs were distributed by him alone. As head of finances for General Services, Escobar used his platform to recruit new members into his fledgling task force called 'Halcones'—hiring ex-military youth to parks and recreation positions and training them in secret facilities near the international airport.<sup>68</sup>

Díaz-Escobar is also said to have played a crucial role in the organizing of 1968 though it is unclear to what degree or exactly how. He rejected to comment when asked by the Special Prosecutor in 2006 and he died shortly thereafter. Yet, whether or not he was involved, the paramilitary activity at Tlatelolco certainly served as a precursor to the sorts of jobs he would be

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<sup>66</sup> *Jornada*, La. "Falleció Manuel Díaz Escobar, Vinculado a Matanza De Tlatelolco y Jueves De Corpus."

<sup>67</sup> American Embassy Mexico to Secretary of State Washington, D.C., "Special Observation and Training Program In Police Activities," telegram. 6 January 1971, Corpus Christi Massacre 2003 Releases, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

<sup>68</sup> García, Julio Scherer. "Los Patriotas De Tlatelolco A La Guerra Sucia." *Los Patriotas: De Tlatelolco a La Guerra Sucia*, by Julio Scherer García and Monsiváis Carlos, Aguilar, 2004, p. 62.

trusted with later. Many members of his ‘Halcones’ had participated at Tlaltelolco as members of the *Batallón Olimpia*.

Alfonso Corona del Rosal, who hired Escobar in 1966, also came from a military background but had compiled an impressive list of political accolades by the time he represented Mexico’s capital. Under President Díaz Ordaz, he was the direct authority over Escobar Figueroa and became one of the PRI’s pre-candidates for the 1970 presidential election. But when Echeverría took over the reigns of the Mexican presidency, Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, former PRI Party President<sup>69</sup> took the helm of the Federal District, displacing Alfonso Corona del Rosal, but continuing his programs.

Escobar’s trainees were mostly between 18 and 30 years of age, military college graduates and former employees of the Federal District’s Special Services. The Special Services, a program also led by Díaz Escobar, was an extralegal program prompted by fears of a communist revolution in Mexico. Many originated from the paratroop division of the military, headed by José Hernández Toledo, military leader of the same division during the massacre of October 2, 1968. Their membership into ‘Los Halcones’ increased word-of-mouth<sup>70</sup> and recruits were obliged to present a military identification card upon entrance. They trained in a warehouse behind the international airport in the neighborhood of Cuchilla del Tesoro in Colonia San Juan de Aragón. Once inscribed, members were given nicknames and communicated through the use of these secret pseudonyms. Other criteria for joining the Halcones included physical training standards, military discipline, martial arts background, blind obedience and a general lack of

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<sup>69</sup> *Mexican Political Biographies, 1935–2009, 4th edition*. By Roderic Ai Camp. Austin: University of Texas Press, August 2011. p. 221.

<sup>70</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 11.

morality. Most ‘Halcones’ kickstarted their careers in the military but were later removed due to poor behavior.<sup>71</sup>

‘Halcones’ trained in a facility near the airport for months. Here they received instructions on boxing techniques, judo, karate, and bo-jun-su. Martial arts training was supplemented by training in Japan while others learned riot techniques in the United States. The disguised identities of the ‘Halcones’ disintegrated what public support for students remained. Plain-clothed and young, ‘Halcones’ were instructed to conduct acts of “terrorism”<sup>72</sup> before and after June 10 in order to divert the public away from more heinous crimes. The age of ‘Halcones’ was important; similar to *porros*, it ensured that students and intellectuals navigated their communities with little trust for their neighbours. But, it also meant that the public’s general skepticism for youth was intensified.

In Mexico, university autonomy came with the privilege of existing outside of the sphere of the PRI’s controlled public sectors. This made the potential loss of autonomy, the insurgency of *porros* and the influx of university employees turned *porro* leaders that much more troubling. The autonomy of the university system was already threatened and then breached in 1968. But, legal threats rather than physical occupations were beginning to appear in greater numbers. Echeverría’s first real trial with university autonomy came in May of that year, on the campus of Monterrey’s Universidad de Nuevo León. Tensions grew when a law was passed which threatened the university’s capacity to enact changes on its own and without external

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<sup>71</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 12.

<sup>72</sup> García, Julio Scherer, Tlatelolco, p. 66.

oversight. Too many concessions to participants outside of the university pushed many to demand a reversal in policy.

Students had hopes to create a political equality between teachers, administrators and themselves in the ideological debate as well as the day-to-day operations of their institutions. But, hopes were squashed when engineer Héctor Ulises Leal Flores, recently elected as the new rector of the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, passed a law in direct opposition to student proposals. Governor Eduardo Elizondo, a former rector of the university himself, recommended a law that would create an Asamblea Popular, an authority consisting of 37 people—just three of which came from the student body.<sup>73</sup>

Violence in Mexico increased rapidly as youth mobilized towards extremism. Attempts to prevent such radicalism from spreading were underway in Monterrey. Contracted *porros* launched firecrackers in order to scare off the rallying students across the city.<sup>74</sup> In March of 1971, guerilla fighters in Guerrero were captured and detained by the army in an increasing effort to round up armed ‘subversive’ groups across the country. Echeverría mentioned the group’s capture as one of his administration’s main successes at the State of the Nation that year. Nuevo León and Monterrey specifically had been a hotbed of economic prosperity for a number of years. For the PRI, efforts to squash the radicalization of students there were urgent. But, attempts to do so yielded in even more uproarious protest. The expelled rector would later join the students in an accelerated protest in May of that year, joined by members and representatives of unions and other workers.

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<sup>73</sup> Heredia, Ana Lucía. “1971: El Año De Los Jóvenes Regios.” *El Barrio Antiguo*, 2 Mar. 2014, [www.elbarrioantiguo.com/1971-el-ano-de-los-jovenes-regios/](http://www.elbarrioantiguo.com/1971-el-ano-de-los-jovenes-regios/).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

Students marched across Monterrey (some in defense of the law and others in opposition)—resulting in weeks of halted classes and violence. Public opinion, however, favored the government— seemingly the quickest fix to send students back to the classroom. Governor Eduardo Elizondo responded to students with threats of force.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, local PRI representatives shut down unauthorized reporting from regional news outlets. The press was to stay in line with political policy and political policy was to, at all times, emerge from the center outwards. The limitations on press freedoms were made all the easier in Nuevo León, where 80 percent of the paper was sold via the enterprise of a well connected PRI functionary.

Protests in Nuevo León got out of control when one student was assassinated by police and the general repression by the State apparatus grew stronger with each passing day. Echeverría's Education Secretary Bravo Ahuja<sup>76</sup> arrived to the scene in late May. Treviño Garza, rector of the university, resigned shortly thereafter, followed by Governor Elizondo's resignation due to apparent "embarrassment," in his handling of the crisis. Though the executive branch was never directly open about its involvement in Nuevo León, its participation was poorly disguised.<sup>77</sup> A board of former rectors replaced Garza and the controversial law was scrapped, all at the request of a President admittedly more sympathetic to student demands.

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<sup>75</sup> American Consul Monterrey Mexico to Secretary of State Washington, D.C., "Student Violence in Monterrey," telegram. 26 May 1971, Corpus Christi Massacre 2003 Releases, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

<sup>76</sup> American Consul Monterrey to Secretary of State Washington, D.C., "Change of Government and the University Problem" telegram. 7 June 1971, Corpus Christi Massacre 2003 Releases, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C..

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* Conservative students in favor of both the rector and the governor's new proposal pointed to the stationary used for ex-rector Garza's resignation: decorated with Holiday Inn advertising, the very hotel that Bravo Ahuja was staying that night.



Echeverría's executive maneuver was by all means an exemplary PRI political transaction. A demonstration of political hierarchy of the PRI structure and the growing distance between Echeverría and his predecessors came early in his term but was not uncommon. Echeverría's ability to order the resignations of both the governor and the rector highlights the far-reaching power that presidents of Mexico were permitted, the absolute lack of university autonomy and the subservient nature of regional politics' relationship to Mexico City and the federal government. It also doubles down on previously noted ways in which presidents carved out space for their policies within the framework of the single-party State. Without any legitimate electoral process, politicians crafted their own vision of Mexico through the restructuring of the cabinet. Echeverría's ability to swiftly call for the resignations of two men in powerful positions highlighted his own power as well as the power of his predecessors to make similar decisions before him. Despite Echeverría's calls for a more democratic Mexico, he relied heavily on the dictatorial nature of PRI Mexico. And despite the outcome falling in favor of student protestors, many suspected foul play in the rapid turnaround of policy and the transparently non-democratic process that it signalled. Even those who benefitted from the law's reversal were remotely suspicious of the speed with which it was implemented.

The violent and pervasive history of *porrismo* continued, if not expanded, between 1968 and 1971. Yet, shared with paramilitary forces, *porrismo* was just one side of the same troubled coin. Autonomy of the university had been subverted by *porros*—who were, yes, acting on behalf of the government. But Nuevo León demonstrated something else entirely: the transparent and sweeping strip of authority from students and faculty as well as its transparent and speedy

return. Campuses were increasingly vulnerable to centralized PRI control. Youth protest was anxious to be reignited; June 10, 1971 appeared to be an opportunity.

Students from the center and the right threatened to protest the reversal of the law shortly after changes took effect. And even students who protested the law to begin with felt compelled to march. Before the law was reversed, students in Mexico City and across the country had planned a march in solidarity for their peers in Nuevo León. Even after news had arrived of the Governor and Rector's resignations, students continued with plans for a general march through the capital. Baffling to many, it was reportedly most angering to President Echeverría. According to the testimony of Alfonso Martínez Domínguez<sup>78</sup>, Echeverría told him that "*quieren calar a mi gobierno, pero les vamos a escarmentar.*"<sup>79</sup> Frustrated that his concessions to student demands in Nuevo León could not effectively silence their other motives, Echeverría's government prepared the city for a well-attended march from the Instituto Politécnico's Santo Tomás campus on the 10th of June.

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Through the CoCo, every university in Mexico City would eventually vote in favor of widespread protest— indicating a network across class backgrounds of youth actively trying to

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<sup>78</sup> The testimony of Martínez Domínguez is one to be careful with, as will be seen in later chapters. The rupture in his relationship with Echeverría may have influenced the validity of these statements.

<sup>79</sup> "They want to penetrate my government, but we're going to teach them a lesson" García, Julio Scherer, *Tlatelolco*, p. 52.

reorient the movement to the needs of a new decade.<sup>80</sup> Students were prepared to engage the same demands from protest three years prior, but also in dialogue with recent threats to the autonomy of universities like Nuevo León. The purpose of the proposed march was: to push up against the federal overreach in Monterrey and the rise in threats to student liberties, resources, scholarships and autonomy.

Though the students were resolute in their desire to protest a seemingly authoritarian government, their counterpart was, to their ignorance, ideologically fractured. How *would* the newly minted President Luis Echeverría handle his first major threat to legitimacy? How would he balance the pressure from the student body with pressures from the business community, his predecessors, and his political aspirations beyond the presidency?<sup>81</sup> These alone represented compelling reasons to protest; by testing the administrations new Presidential boundaries, students deciphered their evolved negotiating power and their open windows to instill lasting democratic change in their country. Students were, of course, still concerned for their safety. The imprint of Tlatelolco made it difficult for eager activists to ignore the potential for what another march could become. *“Había entre nosotros cierta inquietud por una posible represión, al mismo tiempo que una gran decisión de ejercer nuestro derecho a manifestarnos públicamente,”* said one student after the rally. *“Sabíamos que había cinco tanque antimotines, cerca de mil granaderos y cientos de agentes a lo largo de la ruta que íbamos a seguir.”*<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The vote was not initially unanimous. Universidad de Iberoamerica, a private institution, was the only initial negative vote (though they too would eventually vote in favor)

<sup>81</sup> Echeverría sought a nomination to Secretary General of the United Nations

<sup>82</sup> “There was between us a certain concern for possible repression, at the same time that we were resolute in our decision to exercise our right to protest publicly. We knew that there were five anti-rally tanks, about 1,000 riot police and hundreds of agents on the route that we were going to follow.”

All of Mexico City became quickly militarized on the morning of June 10. The majority of police and military support were stationed within close proximity of the march's starting point near Casco Santo Tomás at Instituto Politecnico Nacional—but the surrounding 10 mile radius was also suspended as cautionary preparation for violence. Located Northwest of the Historic Center, the campus of Santo Tomás is also located just 3 km from Estación Buenavista, a major transportation hub and crucial homebase for the 'Halcones.'<sup>83</sup> Communication between the Secretary of National Defense Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz, and the Secretary of Communications and Transportation ensured that bus drivers transporting students to and from the march across the city would notify their superiors. The military hospital at Chapultepec was advised to be on high alert for injured students and soldiers alike as Cuenca Díaz oversaw the movement of ammunition and military vehicles around the city. Everybody awaited in anticipation for their "period of operation."<sup>84</sup>

Meanwhile, the head of Capital Police Coronel Ángel Rodríguez García was busy maneuvering police units convened with members of the 'Halcones' to their respective positions. Order was to be established for preliminary control of specific locations surrounding the campus: near Casco Santo Tomás, for example, there would be stationed: "5 firetrucks, 8 sniper transporters, 20 panels and about 60 Halcones carrying banners with the efigy of Ché Guevara and with the saying: 'Until Victory Always,'" totalling 500 elements. Also nearby, "5 anti rally tanks, 6 [more] sniper transporters, 8 motorcycles under the Sub Direction of Police and Transit, 5 Jeeps, 2 Federal Police cars, all together carrying [another] 500 elements."<sup>85</sup> In addition to

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<sup>83</sup> "Halcones" referred to Buenavista as R2.

<sup>84</sup> "Periodo de operación"

<sup>85</sup> <sup>85</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 30.

these units, there included 350 snipers and many more vehicles within the radius of about 1 square mile. The police, the paramilitary and the uniformed army showed up in great numbers. But, more surprisingly, they showed up together: police and Halcón coordination allowed the police to channel protestors into the path of paramilitary shock troops. But still, most individual police officers were unaware of how their role contributed to the larger picture. Police testimony was thus limited only to what police could see themselves, not how their role had caused any of the violence or from which direction it had begun.

According to Ignacio Prieto's report, "*Estuvo presente también la infiltración deliberada para incitar a la violencia y al desorden y dar pie a la intervención de cuerpos policíacos o, como fue el caso, dar pretextos a los 'Halcones' para atacar.*"<sup>86</sup> The pretext to attack may have been true, but contradicting reports indicate that violent suppression may not have been intended. According to testimony from admitted 'Halcón' Barrón Rivera a.k.a. 'el Pichín':

*"(En) las proximidades de la Escuela Normal (...) recibieron las siguientes instrucciones: la primera era disolver a los estudiantes, la segunda persona sospechosa arrestarle, también no golpear a nadie en la cabeza, recoger los elementos del bando que fuese para llevarlos a la ambulancia pero al ser recibidos por parte de los estudiantes a golpes se vieron en la necesidad de hacer disparos al aire. Pero empezaron a dispararles de dentro de la Normal (otros estudiantes Halcones disfrazados con emblemas del Ché)..."*<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> "It was also planned the deliberate infiltration in order to incite violence and give solid grounding to the subsequent intervention by police forces, or, in this case, give the pretext to an attack by the 'Halcones.'"

Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 35.

<sup>87</sup> "Near the Normal School, they received the following instructions: the first was to to dissolve students, the second to arrest suspects, to not beat anybody in the head, deliver those on the side to the ambulance but receiving blows from the students, one needed to shoot their gun in the air. But other disguised Halcones with emblems of Ché Guevara began to shoot them from within the school..."

Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 36.

Instructions given to this Halcón clearly suggested that violence and lethal force would be a last resort only. But, protective measures by ‘Halcones’ confused those in disguise, causing violent disruptions to order. The lines between friend and foe were blurred for students and ‘Halcones’ alike. Because students had made the march public in nature, anybody and everybody was free to join without question.<sup>88</sup> Outlined in the report are three distinct groups that blended together: 1) the students protesting in the streets, being attacked, and ceaselessly returning to their march without rest, 2) a group of Halcones, about 60, waiting on the sidelines with police support and 3) another group of roughly 150 Halcones armed with bamboo sticks within the crowd. Much like the white gloves at Tlatelolco, these latter Halcones also sported a uniform to identify one another—a white t-shirt, jeans and a buzz cut. Within a crowd of thousands, nobody knew the difference. When ‘Halcones’ began to attack one another, police interfered to redirect their attention. 400 more ‘Halcones’ arrived to the scene shortly after, by way of gray trucks which had been leased out to the government by local funeral homes. These 400 made up the public officials’ last resort as lethal stopgaps to what was otherwise designed to be a non-fatal disavowal of protest activity.

As the government, paramilitary and military apparatus, as well as the police force were finalizing preparations of their own, students began to gather at Santo Tomás around 3:15. By 3:30, according to Federal Director of Security Capitán Luis de la Barreda, there were already roughly 1,300 students from various institutions there. As ‘Halcones’ found their ranks amongst

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<sup>88</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 33.

the students and disguised in Che paraphernalia, students arrived carrying red banners, effigies to Guevara, and other displays of allegiance to the global left.<sup>89</sup>

The march would, in fact, start on time, despite the ominous police and military presence. Beginning at 5 PM at the Escuela de Ciencias Biológicas on the Santo Tomás campus of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional, the aimed destination was the Monumento a la Revolución via Calle de San Luis, Mar Mediterráneo, Mexico Tacuba, and Avenida de los Insurgentes. As a tribute to Nuevo León, intellectual Manuel Aguilar Moya<sup>90</sup> read aloud the law proposed by students and faculty there weeks earlier. According to contradicting sources, the protest had filled out to between 8 and 10 thousand participants by 5 PM. Even the number at march's beginning (and undoubtedly the number at march's end) is left up to interpretation. As the Ignacio Prieto report indicates, "*La Dirección Federal de Seguridad, señalan que fueron 8 mil asistentes, los agentes de la Dirección de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, IPS calcularon cerca de 5 mil, los informes obtenidos de las declaraciones de miembros del grupo 'Halcones' hablan de 10 mil, no obstante el Folleto 'Hechos' señala que habrían 30 mil asistentes.*"<sup>91</sup>

Regardless of the exact figures at march's beginning, there is no denying that participation in the march was of colossal proportions. With a group of such a size and a police/military presence as widespread as it was, students' first confrontations differed in location and scope. For some, movements along Calle Carpio lasted just a brief moment before students were

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<sup>89</sup> Security briefings from the DFS never cease to mention the student's "communist" attire.

<sup>90</sup> As a faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Moya participated in the 1968 movement,

<sup>91</sup> "The DFS suggests that there were 8 thousand attendees, agents from the *Dirección de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales*, IPS calculated close to 5 thousand, information obtained from members of the groups called 'Halcones' speak of 10 thousands, however the pamphlet 'Hechos' suggests that there had been 30 thousand attendees."

surrounded by police elements. For others, first confrontations were by way of riot policemen on the corner of Amado Nervo. These protestors were questioned about their right to protest but ultimately moved on, thanks to ex-Director of the magazine *Política*, who responded with a recital of the nation's constitution. Singing the national anthem, students proceeded. Riot policemen on Salvador Díaz Mirón, just a few minutes later, physically challenged a swarming group of five thousand with tear gas. Unphased by the provocation, police began to surround marchers and corner them into the path of patiently waiting 'Halcones.'

In a final attempt to prevent students from proceeding, the Chief of the Academia de Policía yelled through a megaphone, "*¡Recordamos a ustedes que no hay autorización para que continúen su marcha por lo que, a la vez, les advertimos que la policía tomará todas las medidas que sean necesarias para reprimirla! Los invitamos a que regresen a sus planteles y se disuelvan a la mayor brevedad.*"<sup>92</sup> Students continued to march past the interruption when 'Halcones' lurched out and beat them down. Many bystanders uninvolved in either side of the drama were injured or killed due to the indiscriminate targeting by weaponized 'Halcones.' One reporter on the scene remembers:

*"Me adelanté a la columna para ver qué pasaba...cuando frente al Cine Cosmos los 'Halcones' vienen corriendo hacia nosotros con las varas, gritando '¡Viva el Che Guevara!' para confundir...me regresé para reunirme con mis compañeros y entonces la gente comenzó a correr y vi cómo le estaban pegando con mucha saña a unos chavos...[en un edificio que estaba en construcción...empezamos a quitar tablas y palos para repelar la agresión; de lo que yo me acuerdo con mucha claridad es que agarré una tabla bastante grande y me fui sobre los que*

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<sup>92</sup>"We remind you all that there is no authorization for the continuation of your march and we advise you that the police will take into its hands all measures deemed necessary to prevent it. We request that you return to your classrooms and quickly dissolve [the protest]."

<sup>92</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 36.



*estaban pegándole a los estudiantes y les empezamos a ganar, les rompimos sus varas, o sea, les pegamos, se les cayeron o se las quitamos y los teníamos palos éramos unos 50, los demás empezaron a agarrar rocas, en la desesperación agarraban lo que podían aventarles...cuando los empezamos a correatar llegaron más ‘Halcones’ y desde una calle intermedia entre la Avenida de los Maestros y lo que hoy es el Circuito Interior, uno de los tanques antimotines disparó una granada lacrimógena y los ‘Halcones’ empezaron a disparar. Los francotiradores estaban apostados en la esquina de Calle de Tláloc, en un edificio donde todavía hay una tienda de pinturas, en donde había un lote baldío y en un edificio al lado del Cine Cosmos.”<sup>93</sup>*

As the reporter began to walk away from the scene he was shot and fell down. “*No pensaba morirme por un balazo, lo que decía era—esos güeyes me van a venir a rematar.*”<sup>94</sup>

As ‘Halcones’ approached the large group of students of which he was a part, community members came to the protestors’ aid. Builders atop a construction site threw bricks other materials so that students had weapons with which to hurl at oncoming attackers. At this point, protestors began to run about in every which way. This reporter, Enrique Condés Lara, took

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<sup>93</sup> “I moved forward to see what was going on...when just in front of the Cine Cosmos, the ‘Halcones’ come running towards us with poles, screaming, ‘Long Live Che Guevara!’ so as to confuse us...I returned to meet up with my buddie and suddenly people began to run and I saw how they were beating young men with so much fury...From a construction site near the Normal Metro station, we started to throw boards and sticks to repel the aggresion; from what I can recall with extreme clarity, I grabbed a fairly large board and went towards those that were beating on the students and we began to make gains, we broke their sticks, or more likely, we beat them, they fell to the ground and we threw them away and we began to run around...it was a very scary moment for us...those of us that had sticks numbered about 50, the others began to grab rocks and in desperation they were grabbing anything that they could throw at them...when we began to run around them, more Halcones arrived and from an intermediary street between Avenida de los Maestros and what is today the Circuito Interior, one of the antirally tanks shot a great teargas canister and the Halcones began to shoot. The snipers were stationed on the corner of Calle de Tláloc, in a building where there is still a painting store, in where there had been an empty lot and in a building to the side of Cine Cosmos.”

Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 37.

<sup>94</sup> “I didn’t think of dying by a gun shot. What I said was—those dudes are going to come back and kill me off.”

<sup>94</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 37.

refuge in a neighbor's house where the disturbances had apparently done little to obstruct their Corpus Christi celebrations.<sup>95</sup>

Another student stated in his testimony of the events there:

*“Al llegar a la calzada Mexico-Tacuba se escuchó un disparo de lanzagranadas e inmediatamente aparecieron, de atrás de los granaderos en lo largo de la manifestación unos mil ‘Halcones’ divididos en seis grupos que portaban garrotes de bambú de dos metros, mascanas y varillas. Nuestra columna fue cortada en varios pedazos...De los edificios, el pueblo comenzó a lanzarnos palos y otros objetos para poder defendernos. De una obra de en construcción apareció en nuestra ayuda un grupo de albañiles cargando madero. Volvieron a la carga los ‘Halcones,’ pero esta vez respaldados por una descarga de gases lacrimógenos. Lograron avanzar un poco pero no pudieron hacernos huir y retrocedieron. Ahora de los edificios nos aventaban algodones ampapados con vinagre para los gases. Una vez más regresaron los agresores pero ahora armados con metralletas, fusiles automáticos M-1, M-2 e incluso M-16 (de los que usan los ‘marines en Vietnam) y pistolas automáticas de diversos calibres. Comenzaron a caer compañeros. Muertos unos, otros heridos. Entonces vino la dispersión: unos a la Normal otros al cine Cosmos, al Panteón Inglés, a cualquier edificio. Los heridos comenzaron a ser llevados a Rubén Leñero donde eran auxiliados y escondidos por los mismos enfermos y protegidos por grupos estudiantes. Mientras los ‘Halcones’ se entregaban a la persecución y a la masacre, a la caza de seres humanos y al saqueo y a la destrucción, todo esto con la complacencia de los granaderos. Autos particulares manejados por ‘Halcones’ levantaban cadáveres y heridos. Cuando ya no quedaba nadie en las calles, más que ellos, los Halcones empezaron a disparar sobre los edificios, sobre la gente que hacía un momento nos había auxiliado en su contra y que ahora nos protegieron en sus hogares. También disparaban con saña contra la Normal. Después de saquear algunas casas y hasta secuestrar a sus moradores, incluso con todo y niños, comenzaron a aparecer más ‘Halcones’ en las azoteas, disparando a diestra y siniestra. Mientras tanto, 3000 estudiantes y gente del pueblo, reagrupados, marcharán por San Cosme, llegando después de varios encuentros con los granaderos hasta el Hemiciclo a Juárez, en la Alameda. Estudiantes destruyen una panel de la policial otros toman un camión con el que tratan de embestir a los ‘Halcones’, pero son ametrallados. Los ‘Halcones’ asaltan, a balazos, el Rubén Leñero y se llevan a varios heridos. Estudiantes en el monumento a la Revolución, estudiantes en San Fernando, en el Caballito, en el Zócalo, en el Hemiciclo, rumbo a Tlatelolco, estudiantes en todas partes haciendo patente nuestra protesta, nuestro dolor, nuestra indignación. Y los granaderos de un lado para otro sin poder encontrarnos, pero seguidos por la mirada acusadora del pueblo que ya sabe la nueva. Cae la noche. Llamen al ejército. Paracaidistas y tanque nuevamente en las calles, como en 1968: del Zócalo, en reforma, la Normal y Nonoalco. Siguen saliendo estudiantes de sus refugios providenciales. En las calles hay pancartas mantas, sangre. Frente la Normal, junto un charco de sangre, había*

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<sup>95</sup> “El Día De Las Mulitas y Los Manueles.” *La Güera En México*, 5 June 2015, [elenmexico.wordpress.com/2015/06/05/el-dia-de-las-mulitas-y-los-manueles/](http://elenmexico.wordpress.com/2015/06/05/el-dia-de-las-mulitas-y-los-manueles/).

*unas veladoras en forma de cruz. Dijeron que allí murió una jovencita. Se dice que hay diez, veinte, treinta muertos; muchos más han desaparecido. Hay 150 compañeros detenidos. Son muchas razones más para seguir luchando. Mientras nos quede un aliento de vida. Un estudiante.*<sup>96</sup>

A warzone consumed the streets of Northern Mexico City for the better part of an evening. As detailed earlier, the lethal use of force by ‘Halcones’ was a last resort option—and with good reason. The Echeverría administration was not keen on tarnishing its reputation with yet another bloody massacre. And the students’ unwillingness to acquiesce signalled first a growing acceptance amongst the youth of guerilla warfare and the usefulness of violence to

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<sup>96</sup> “Arriving at Mexico-Tacuba one heard a shot of flares and immediately appeared, behind foot soldiers in the middle of the protest, thousands of ‘Halcones’ divided in six groups that carried bamboo sticks two meters long, *mascanas* and [metal] dipsticks. Our column was cut into various pieces...from the buildings, the people began to throw us rods and other objects to defend ourselves with. From a construction site, a group of builders carrying wood came to our help. The ‘Halcones’ reloaded, but this time with tear gas. They managed to advance a little but couldn’t make us escape so they retreated. Now, from the buildings they sent us cottons soaked in vinegar for the gases. One more time the aggressors returned but now armed with machine guns, automatic weapons M-1, M-2 and even M-16 (the kinds that Marines use in Vietnam) and automatic pistols of different calibres. Peers began to fall. Some dead, some injured. Thus began the dispersion: some to the Normal and others to the Cosmos Cinema, to the Panteón Ingles, to whatever building. The injured continued to be brought to Ruben Leñero Hospital where they were helped and hidden by students. All the while ‘Halcones’ dedicated themselves to the persecution and the massacre, the hunting of human beings and the pillaging and destruction; all of this with the complacency of foot soldiers. Particular cars driven by ‘Halcones’ carried bodies and injured students. When there was nobody left in the street, other than them, the ‘Halcones’ began to shoot up at the buildings, to the people that had helped us for just a moment and that now protected us in their homes. They also fired wildly at the Normal. After raiding various houses and kidnapping their residents, even children, more ‘Halcones’ began to emerge on the rooves, firing left and right. All the while, 3000 students and people of the city, regrouped, would march by San Cosme, arriving after various encounters with soldiers to the Hemiciclo a Juárez, in the Alameda [Park]. Students destroyed a police blockade, others took control of a truck with which they attempted to charge after ‘Halcones,’ but were machine gunned down. The ‘Halcones’ assaulted, in gun shots, the Ruben Leñero Hospital and carry various injured students away. Students at the Monument to the Revolution, students at San Fernando, in the Caballito, in the Zócalo, in the Hemiciclo, around Tlatelolco, students in all parts making clear our protest, our pain, our indignation. And the soldiers from one side to the other, without being able to find us, but followed by the accusing gaze of the public that already knows what they’ve done. Night falls. They call in the army. Parachutists and tanks once again in the streets, like in 1968: in the Zócalo, in reforma, in the Normal and Nonoalco. Students continue to leave their neighborhood refuges. In the streets there are muslin banners, blood. In front of the Normal, next to a blood stain, there were candles in the form of a cross. They said that it was there that a young girl died. They say there are 10, 20, 30 dead; many more have disappeared. There are 150 peers detained. There are many reasons to keep on fighting. While we still have one breath of life left. While there is still one student.”

<sup>96</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 38.

create change. The emergence of groups such as MAR and La Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre among others were actively engaged in gun-to-gun warfare across the country. But, student refusal to cease protest in Mexico City also showed an emerging understanding of the ways in which the government mediated public perception after Tlatelolco. The continuation of protest provided greater opportunity for danger, but also greater opportunity for exposure of the government's crimes. Students had become mobilized in 1968, but in 1971 they became politicized; not just presenting but embodying a different political apparatus, universities vis á vis CoCo didn't just push for democratic change, they became it. Students' authority stemmed first and foremost from themselves—thanks to the recent changes to the structure of student organising. The Tlatelolco massacre yielded little change in its immediate aftermath (largely through media campaigns and an economic bubble favoring a pro-PRI middle class). Stagnation signalled a need for violent combat, not just against the repression of protest or with traditional weaponry, but against the suppression of information and ideas through the reappropriation of language and the law.

Testimony also displays clear signs of pre-meditated violence. The preparedness of hospitals and Cruz Rojo personnel converted politically neutral institutions into ideological battlegrounds. The forced removal of the injured and deceased from ambulances and hospitals proved the government's concerted effort to prevent news sources from reporting stories damaging to the State's reputation. In an interview with *El Universal*, student protestor Severiano Sánchez revealed that he was left for dead at the Red Cross by patrolling 'Halcones';

deemed near dead already, he was luckily never transported to Ruben Leñero hospital by ‘Halcones’ that night. Once there, his fellow colleagues were likely given the fatal blow.<sup>97</sup>

Though sources disagree, most estimate that 120 students were killed on June 10. But many others have likely been unaccounted for. If the recent discovery of cadavers at Tlatelolco is any indication, there is reason to believe many more fell victim to ‘Halcones’ than is currently known. After major confrontations had dragged to a halt, a widespread effort commenced to detain those involved and obfuscate the details. A number of steps ensured that word of the events on June 10 remained vague and uninformed. The first and most obvious route taken was the silencing of participants, mainly through their subsequent detention in military camps. Youth were indiscriminately targeted and subsequently detained, even if they hadn’t participated at all. Mass paranoia spread through the Mexico City police and military force; anybody under the age of 25 in the periphery of the protest was likely to be questioned or detained. Javier García Álvarez, for example, was detained because he had begun to run due to those running beside him. He was 16. Despite declaring herself politically unmotivated and insisting on her absence from the rally, Maria Guadalupe Guzmán González, 20 years old, was intercepted by police on her way to a friend’s party.

The executive branch of the government, for its part, flatly rejected *any* government involvement in the atrocities and vowed for a complete and thorough investigation into the matters at hand. On the night of the massacre, its response to the press was clear: there would unequivocally be no mistaking the government as a responsible perpetrator in the accused

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<sup>97</sup> Raphael, Ricardo. “Severiano Durante El ‘Jueves De Corpus.’” *El Universal*, 11 June 2018, [www.eluniversal.com.mx/columna/ricardo-raphael/nacion/severiano-durante-el-jueves-de-corpus](http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/columna/ricardo-raphael/nacion/severiano-durante-el-jueves-de-corpus).

actions and results. Below are some of the questions and subsequent answers given by Alfonso

Martinez Dominguez:

*-“Daniel Soto, Jefe de reporteros gráficos de El Universal. Con los hechos ocurridos hoy, la prensa mexicana ha sufrido una agresión en la persona de los reporteros gráficos. Hemos sido agredidos brutalmente por elementos que han sido identificados como ‘los Halcones.’ Muchos compañeros nuestros han sido golpeados y a sus cámaras les han quitado sus rollos de película. Yo quisiera (una respuesta), a nombre de los diarios de Mexico.”<sup>98</sup>*

*-“...lamento profundamente los acontecimientos pero sí quiero decirle que en la jerga de la opinión de la calle, existen los ‘charros’, los ‘gorilas’, los ‘halcones’ y otros nombres. El Departamento del Distrito Federal y el Gobierno de la Republica, no tienen ningún cuerpo de este tipo. No existen ‘Los Halcones’. Esta es una leyenda y están a disposición de ustedes los medios necesarios para comprobarlo.”*

And again:

*-“¿Se agotaron otros medios, para el convencimiento, hablar con ellos? Ellos solicitaron permiso para la manifestación?”*

*-“No se solicitó y debería de haberse hecho. Además no hay tal grupo al servicio del D.D.F.”<sup>99</sup>*

Lastly, and most interestingly, came the following question regarding the resort to violence:

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<sup>98</sup> Question: “Daniel Soto, Chief of photojournalists for El Universal. With the occurrences today, the Mexican press has suffered a personal aggression against graphic reporters. We have been beaten brutally by elements that have been identified as ‘Halcones.’ Many of our peers have been beaten and their film has been removed from their cameras. I would like an answer, in the name of Mexican newspapers.”

Answer: “...I deeply regret the accusations but I would like to tell you that in the opinion of the street there exist ‘charros’, ‘gorilas’, ‘halcones’, and other names. The Department of the Federal District and the Government of the Republic, do not have any organization of this type. The ‘Halcones’ do not exist. This is a legend and they are at the disposition of you all the necessary means to make sure.”

<sup>98</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 44.

<sup>99</sup> Question: “Had you tried all other means, for convincing the students, to talk to them? Did they seek permission for the march?”

Answer: “They never requested permission and they should have done so. Also there is no such group in service of the DDF”

<sup>99</sup> Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 44.

- *“Cree usted que la agresión puede ser una manera para llegar a un diálogo?”*

- *“La policía no ha realizado ninguna agresión contra los estudiantes. Simplemente hizo acto de presencia cuando los desórdenes en la calle alcanzaron proporciones que obligaron mediante acto de presencia, para dar seguridad a la sociedad.”<sup>100</sup>*

This was true. Police had not interfered directly (or rather, not consciously) in the subsequent terror. The use of disparate groups (military, paramilitary, police, Cruz Rojo, hospital, federal, municipal, etc.) allowed for the detachment of one group’s participation from another. Such preparations made the use of language by Dominguez at the press conference less a distortion of the truth than a concealment of the truth in its entirety.

At the orders of Echeverría, Alfonso Martínez Domínguez organized a pro-PRI rally in front of the Palacio Nacional on June 15. According to some estimates there were 500,000 in attendance though numbers were likely exaggerated. President Echeverría declared that he, “does not seek the unconditional approval of the people. The right to dissent is the essence of democracy.”<sup>101</sup> At the request of the President, Martínez Domínguez would resign from his post

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<sup>100</sup> Question: “Do you believe that aggression can be a way of reaching a dialogue?”

Answer: The police never committed any aggression against the students. They simply were present when the disorder in the streets reached proportions that obligated their presence, to give security to the rest of society.”

Office of Special Prosecutor Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, 1971 Report, p. 44.

<sup>101</sup> American Embassy Mexico to Secretary of State Washington, D.C., “Student Demonstration” telegram. 16 June 1971, Corpus Christi Massacre 2003 Releases, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C..

shortly after. Whether he was truly responsible, a scapegoat, or both is up for debate. One man surely responsible for some of the most heinous activity, Manuel Díaz Escobar Figueroa, would be sent to Chile along with his entire family by President Echeverría, only to return some years later and reassume his responsibilities within the Mexican military establishment.

Before his departure, however, Escobar Figueroa convened at San Juan Aragón with the ‘Halcones’ under his command and instructed them to perform acts of terrorism around the city. As an effort to divert the public’s attention, ‘Halcones’ conducted authorized bank robberies, auto thefts, and other petty crimes for weeks after the massacre. Their subsequent return to so called normal life would become tainted by participation in such events. According to one ‘Halcón’, most businesses required a reference for sustained work. Escobar Figueroa and involvement with a paramilitary group did not qualify as suitable experience and many ‘Halcones’ either returned to hardship or maintained their ties with the military/paramilitary network for years.

Students, for their part, knew to be steadfast in compiling all evidence in the likely event that the government would reject, conceal, or outright destroy it. Thus, students on June 11 organized meetings to consolidate and disseminate information from all willing participants. According to one DFS report from the meetings, students demanded that the rector vouch for the resignation of DDF chief Alfonso Martínez Domínguez which, as we know, soon in fact followed. However, no consensus grew on who exactly to place the blame. Some students chose Martínez Domínguez while others focused their attention on the President. The students finally reached an agreement on the following: first, to hold the Mexican government accountable in general and in its entirety. Second, to request the payment for four burials from the Director of



Economics. Third, to set out in brigades to locate disappeared participants in the Red and Green Cross and to go to Military Camp No. 1 and the police headquarters. And fourth, to attend a rally at the rector's residence.

A great effort by the CoCo began in simply remembering: the victims, the trajectory of paramilitary efforts taken that evening, and all known actors for whom should be held accountable. In the CoCo newsletter, a full denouncement of Manuel Figueroa was published detailing his involvement with the now infamous 'Halcones.' In a brochure of Lucha Popular, testimony traced the Halcones' role in Mexican politics at large:

*“Pasado (el 68), reprimieron varios mítines y la manifestación estudiantil del 4 de noviembre de 1970 en el Politécnico. Con el cambio de régimen, el nuevo regente, Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, no sólo conserva este grupo sino que lo reestructura y amplía. Algunas de sus acciones más recientes, realizadas antes del jueves 10, fueron: vigilancia a la terminal de una línea de camiones que se encontraba en huelga, para que ‘no hubiera problemas’; agresión a estudiantes de la Preparatoria Popular y a algunos periodistas en la estación Insurgentes del Metro; el sabotaje en los Ferrocarriles, en enero de este año y, también en este centro de trabajo, ya al servicio del gángster que tienen los trabajadores como Secretario General de su sindicato, Mariano Villanueva Molina, lo ayudan en varias ocasiones para controlar las asambleas llamen en amendrentar a los obreros.”<sup>102</sup>*

If the students were uncertain regarding the guilt of Echeverría, the President himself was certainly invested in keeping it that way. He insisted on a stance of unwavering rejection. “Se reitera una vez más que el Ejército no intervino en la proyectada manifestación ni intervendrá en

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<sup>102</sup> “In the past (68), they repressed various rallies and the student protest of November 4, 1970 at IPN. With the regime change, the new head of the DDF, Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, not only conserved this group but also restructured and grew it. Some of the most recent actions, realized before 10th of June, were: surveillance at the bus station that was under strike, so there there ‘wouldn’t be any problems’; aggression against students at the Preparatoria Popular and against certain journalists at the Insurgentes Metro Station; sabotage of Railroad workers in January of this year and, also in this area of work, already in service of the gangster that workers already had as Secretary General of their union, Mariano Villanueva Molina, they were called in in order to intimidate the workers.”

*los asuntos propios de los estudiantes pero cumpliendo con los mandatos Constitucionales, asegurará la tranquilidad y la paz pública para mantener el orden interno; con este motivo y como las manifestaciones estudiantiles desgeneran en desorden, el Ejército tomó posiciones que estimó convenientes para dar cumplimiento el mandato de la Carta Magna.*"<sup>103</sup> This statement is familiar: according to his statements after 1968, the President is the only man in Mexico capable of overseeing the army. Yet now that he himself was President, his responsibility for the army's actions seemingly disappeared. The army's "assuming of positions that it deemed fit," is either an outright lie or an embarrassing indigntment on his authority as President.

The attorney general's report that was quickly promised yielded limited results at best. The report released on June 14 (just 4 days after the massacre) contained quotes from witnesses saying that "groups of armed students were fighting among themselves."<sup>104</sup> This despite students' interviews with the Attorney General and their opportunity to set the record straight. The CoCo soon resorted, with some success, to creating its own report.

Meanwhile, perhaps out of the realization that even a tardy report would cause uproar amongst the student body, Echeverría's administration launched a full-out assault on the culture of *porrismo* in Mexico City. Beginning in August of 1971, *porros* were locked up in escalating

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<sup>103</sup> "I shall reiterate again that the Army did not intervene in the protests nor will it intervene in the issues of the students but complying with the Constitutional mandates, it assures the tranquility and the public peace in order to maintain internal order with this motivation and with the student protests degenerating into disorder, the Army assumed positions that it deemed fit in compliance with the Constitution of Mexico."

<sup>104</sup> American Embassy Mexico to Secretary of State Washington, D.C., "Student Demonstration" telegram. 16 June 1971, Corpus Christi Massacre 2003 Releases, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C..

numbers.<sup>105</sup> The government had officially abandoned the two troubled youth upon which it had relied that summer: first, the ‘Halcones’ of which few members could find promising employment after June 10 and the infamous *porros*, whose campus terrorism had deterred student protest at the behest of Mexican presidents for decades.

Discerning individual accountability is difficult, considering the contradictory testimony available. Each member of Echeverría’s administration appears to have a different notion of how the June 10 massacre came about. The first theory came by way of Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, the Distrito Federal chief charged with the task of delivering the government’s first press conference on the evening of June 10. In an interview with *Proceso*, Martínez Domínguez targeted Echeverría as an unabashedly hypocritical opportunist. “*Echeverría tenía los ojos de serpiente,*”<sup>106</sup> he told the magazine. According to Domínguez’s interpretation, Echeverría had coordinated the attack on students from Los Pinos and intentionally placed the weight of the event’s aftermath on Domínguez’s shoulders. This, Domínguez reiterates, was because Echeverría sought to kill two birds with one stone: to become independent of ties to the Díaz Ordaz administration and deliver a forceful message to the student body without bearing the weight of responsibility. The instability and unpredictability of the government was something Echeverría ultimately believed could be to his benefit.

According to Alfonso Dominguez, Echeverría had been preoccupied with the march all evening. Martinez Dominguez and the Governor of the State of Mexico had been summoned to

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<sup>105</sup> American Embassy Mexico to Department of State Washington, D.C., “GOM Anti-‘Porra’ Campaign” airgram. 19 August 1971, Corpus Christi Massacre 2003 Releases, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C..

<sup>106</sup> “Echeverría had the eyes of a snake.”

Scherer, *Tlatelolco*, p. 51.

Los Pinos on the evening of June 10 to discuss issues surrounding water access. Every so often, Martinez Dominguez remembers, the telephone would ring and Echeverría would reply with stern and direct instructions: “*Sí, dígame. ¿Heridos? Llévelos al Campo Militar. No permitan fotografías.*” Echeverría returned to the table and talk of solving the water dilemma would resume unphazed. The phone would ring again: “*¿Herido uno de los nuestros? ¿Muerto? Al Campo Militar. ¿Hay may enfrentamientos, muchos muertos? Todos para el Campo Militar. ¿A la Cruz Verde? No, no. No permitan fotos. ¡Quemenlos!*” Instructions were to burn the people, not the photographs. “*Quemen a los muertos. Que nadie quede. No permitan fotografías.*”<sup>107</sup>

Alfonso Martinez Dominguez’s story posits that he was only told of the events at IPN that evening. Echeverría had summoned him before departing Los Pinos to discuss his role in obfuscating the details. The rally and press conference previously mentioned were all ways in which Echeverría could distance himself from the massacre while placing the blame on subversive elements of his regime and orchestrating the manipulation and release of details from the back seat.

But, Martinez Dominguez’s protests of foul play don’t add up. “*Cuando iba rumbo a Los Pinos,, tenía mayor información de los hechos,*” he told *Proceso*. “*Los ‘halcones’ habían masacrado a los manifestantes, habían entrado incluso en la Cruz Verde que está muy cerca de la Normal de San Cosme...y habían rescatado prisioneros arrebatándolos de los brazos de los*

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<sup>107</sup> -“Yes, tell me. Injured? Bring them to the Military Camp. Don’t allow photographs.”

“One of our own is injured? Dead? To the military camp. Are there many clashes? Many deaths? All to the military camp. To the Green Cross? No, no. Don’t allow pictures. Burn them.

-“Burn the dead. Nobody stays. Don’t allow photographs.”

Scherer, *Tlatelolco*, pp. 52-53.

*médicos y de las enfermeras. La policía no había intervenido. Todo había sido orquestrado por Echeverría a través de Gobernación.*"<sup>108</sup> Alfonso Martínez Domínguez was a willing and conscious participant in the organization of the 'Halcones' from within his own department. There is little reason to believe in any purported innocence on the part of Alfonso Martínez Domínguez. As leader of the D.D.F., he actively extended and continued the program of paramilitary training programs through the General Services department begun by his predecessor under Díaz Ordaz. Alfonso Martínez Domínguez's resignation very well may have been a convenient political tactic. By forcing the resignation of one of the men most targeted by impassioned and angry students after June 10, the appearance of accountability was upheld. But his innocence as a result of his resignation is untrue. His forced resignation and his culpability are not mutually exclusive.

Another theory comes by way of famed engineer, political activist, and politician Heriberto Castillo.<sup>109</sup> "*En casa oímos la renuncia de Alfonso Martínez Domínguez. La celebramos. Parecía que las cosas cambiaban en México. Sonó el teléfono,*"<sup>110</sup> he told *Proceso* on the 15 of June 1979. Secretario de Gobernación Moya Palencio was on the other end of the line. He explained to Castillo that Echeverría had important documents to show him relating to

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<sup>108</sup>"When I went straight to Los Pinos, I had more information about the events. The 'halcones' had massacred the protestors, they had even entered into the Cruz Verde that is near the Normal of San Cosme and they had rescued prisoners, stripping them from the arms of medics and nurses. The police had not intervened. All had been orchestrated by Echeverría through Governance."

"Alfonso Martínez Domínguez:" Edited by La Redacción, *Proceso*, 9 June 1979, [www.proceso.com.mx/126246/alfonso-martinez-dominguez](http://www.proceso.com.mx/126246/alfonso-martinez-dominguez).

<sup>109</sup> As a leader of the 1968 student movements, he was jailed between 1968 and 1971

<sup>110</sup> "In my house we heard of the resignation of Alfonso Martínez Domínguez. We celebrated it. It seems that things were changing in Mexico. Then the phone rang."

"Alfonso Martínez Domínguez:" Edited by La Redacción, *Proceso*, 9 June 1979, [www.proceso.com.mx/126246/alfonso-martinez-dominguez](http://www.proceso.com.mx/126246/alfonso-martinez-dominguez).

June 10. He requested Castillo's presence at the Secretary of Governance's office. "...*decenas de fotografías,*"<sup>111</sup> Castillo described seeing spread across the table in Moya Palencia's office. The photos illustrated all that had occurred on the 10th of June: students on their knees covering their faces from the wild and unrelenting attacks of kendo-stick waving 'Halcones,' photos of students being ripped away from ambulances, an agent ready to pull the trigger on a hospital patient, photos of gun shower falling from the rooves of buildings, from police patrols, and from riot police trucks. "*Espeluznantes fotografías.*"<sup>112</sup>

Moya Palencia explained: "...*no hay duda de la participación de las ex autoridades del Departamento del Distrito Federal.*"<sup>113</sup> He continued on, according to Castillo, that there were subversive elements within the administration that wanted to sabotage the democratic opening that Echeverría had begun. What Moya Palencia referred to was the use of massacre as the preface to a political coup d'état. But, Echeverría's statements continued to send mixed messages. On June 14, 1971, Echeverría told journalists that Mexicans must unify in the fight "for sovereignty of country, for its advancement and for well-being of its people, independently of political or ideological postures that each person, as a citizen, can hold." Was this targeted at the students or was this targeted at members of his administration that may have betrayed him? State Department documents dated June 30, 1971 suggest the latter:

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<sup>111</sup> "...dozens of photographs."

<sup>112</sup> "Spooky photographs."

<sup>113</sup> "There is no doubt of the participation of the ex-authorities of the Department of the Federal District [ or DDF]."

“Legatt<sup>114</sup> sources report information, transmitted thus far only to their headquarters in Washington, that ex-Federal District Regent Alfonso Martínez Domínguez and other politicians have been holding meetings at which the possible overthrow of President Echeverría has been discussed. If true, this is a serious development although not unprecedented... individuals specifically named as participating in these meetings are: Alfonso Martínez Domínguez..., Coronel Manuel Díaz Escobar... Miguel Osorio Marban (former Federal Deputy with Martínez Domínguez... from 1967-1970), Fluvio Vista Altamirano (until recently, official Mayor of the Department of the Federal District), and Everardo Gamiz Fernandez (President of the Federal District PRI Committee).”<sup>115</sup>

All of these individuals had connections to the Díaz Ordaz regime and likely rejected Echeverría’s democratic opening and pivot to the left, not to mention their own forced resignations. “The professed intention of the group is to protect Mexico from becoming a Marxist State as the result of weak leadership,” the same document posits. The threat was real, said the legal attaché; military leaders had not been contacted yet but all involved saw its involvement as a necessary force to bring their conspiracy to fruition. Possible successor? Alfonso Corona del Rosal, Federal District Regent from 1966 to 1970 and first man to launch the ‘Halcones’ into being. Whether the plot to take down Echeverría arose before or after June 10 is unclear. In other words, whether or not the events on June 10 were purposefully used as a backbone for a potential coup or merely provided its bitter inspiration is left to conjecture.

In another theory suggested by the State Department, Echeverría used the violence incited not as a means to undercut Martínez Domínguez or others but as an opportunity to meet student demands while simultaneously intimidating them. “Possibly out of anger,” the report speculates, “over the fact that the students insisted on demonstrating even after he had gone to

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<sup>114</sup> Legatt, in State Department language, means Legal attaché.

<sup>115</sup> American Embassy Mexico to Secretary of State Washington, D.C., “Group Alleged To Be Plotting Ouster of Echeverría” telegram. 30 June 1971, Corpus Christi Massacre 2003 Releases, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C..

great lengths to meet their aspirations, Echeverría may well have given his blessing to the use of the group against the IPN demonstration. For reasons not yet clear, the operation got out of hand.”<sup>116</sup>

Theories of great variety abound. In others, the leading figure was Secretary of the Interior Moya Palencia and his alleged attempts to reach the presidency in the following *sexenio*.<sup>117</sup> According to this State Department hypothesis, Alfonso Martínez Domínguez<sup>118</sup> orchestrated the uproar not to embarrass Echeverría directly but to tarnish the reputation of Moya Palencia—whose presence limited Alfonso Martínez Domínguez and others’ attempts at reaching Los Pinos. Such a strategy would have used and created public uproar for personal political ascendance. Tlatelolco did little to slow down Echeverría’s upward swing. It remained unclear if the Corpus Christi Massacre would yield a different result for those that represented *his* administration.

In the most likely event, everybody was used by everybody else. The PRI and the process of presidential selection had become such a transparently corrupt process that politicians were willing to do anything to reach office and whatever else to centralize their power once they got there. Since political competition was non-electoral and intra-party, extraordinary (and extralegal) measures were taken to ensure personal gain. Echeverría, whether in defense from a

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<sup>116</sup> Department of State United States of America, “Mexico: Government Repression of Students Causes Crisis”. 18 June 1971, Corpus Christi Massacre 2003 Releases, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C..

<sup>117</sup> American Embassy Mexico to Secretary of State Washington, D.C., “Group Alleged To Be Plotting Ouster of Echeverría” telegram. 30 June 1971, Corpus Christi Massacre 2003 Releases, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C..

<sup>118</sup> A man who in this telegram the State Department refers to as: “at least, and probably more, corrupt than most. He has the reputation of a ‘dirty politician,’ one who is not adverse to using force when the needs of the political system or his own interests so dictate.”



real threat or not, had real reasons to believe that centralizing his authority would be of benefit to him.

But, what is lost amid the mess of backstabbing politics is the clarity to discern and recall the event's true victims. The students and activists who lost their lives were the day's biggest losers, not any politician or another who lost their reputation, job, or social standing. The universal factor underlying each and every theory is that the lives of youth and leftists were utilized as expendable political capital in an everlasting battle for political authority. Echeverría's democratic opening may have been in earnest. But, his ability to *not* be aware of both the Tlatelolco Massacre as Secretary of Governance (whose office oversees the central intelligence agency DFS which had widespread details on the preparations for the event) and the Corpus Christi Massacre as President of the Republic defies credibility as much as Domínguez's own declaration of innocence. Students, youth, and intellectuals either 'disappeared' and died due to malicious political intent or out of a disorganized and disappointing lack of communication and responsibility. Neither is particularly comforting.

And for all intensive purposes, all whose political careers were marked by tit-for-tat politics are legally innocent. In the words of the law, Dominguez, Echeverría, Palencia, Figueroa and others are unscathed and free of the guilt associated with a dirty record. Though placed under house arrest, Echeverría was subsequently released without charges in 2009. Martínez Domínguez went on to advance his political career, becoming governor of Nuevo León in 1979 (perhaps because of his support for a resolution to the conflict there in May of 1971). And what is most remarkable is how the troubling and disturbing was turned commonplace. None of the occurrences of 1971 were an anomaly; they became a pattern.

The Mexican political machine (corporatist, centralized, corrupt, and all powerful) was in fact designed to provide and subsequently overcome obstacles. The pseudo-democratic society that had thrived, in 1971, for more than thirty years had done so *because* not in spite of turmoil. Intra-party conflicts were tradition. In a State Department briefing on plots to de-thrown Echeverría, one realizes the tradition of turmoil as manifest by past attempts to overthrow the Presidential administration:

“There were similar rumors of a plot against Díaz Ordaz during the 1968 student disturbances,” the report describes. “Many of Lopez Mateos’ closest associates were strongly opposed to Díaz Orfaz and may well have expressed their feelings, in private, about his presidency in terms no less alarmig than those now being attributed to the Martínez Domínguez group with reference to Echeverría... In the strnage underworld of Mexican politics, it may even be that Martínez Dominguez and his group are not adverse to Echeverría hearing rumors of their possible plotting. That he has heard is at least a good presumption. From the Martínez Domínguez point of view such rumors may serve the purpose of warning Echeverría not to make further moves against his and the interests of his associates.”<sup>119</sup>

The PRI machine grew well-oiled over the years from its inception to the 1970s. It was the so-called “perfect dictatorship” not so much due to its democratic façade as its conversion of turmoil into self-sufficiency. The PRI, as a party isolated from the individuals that claimed it, grew stronger as a result of the internal struggles that ocured in its name. When done correctly, turmoil yields transition and transition evokes, if it doesn’t represent, democracy and public political choice. The PRI survived for decades to come—even if it had to sacrifice some of its main representatives and constituents. The Corpus Christi Massacre illustrated that the PRI as an autonomous political system had properly obtained the ability to use crisis as political leverage—

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<sup>119</sup> American Embassy Mexico to Secretary of State Washington, D.C., “Group Alleged To Be Plotting Ouster of Echeverría” telegram. 30 June 1971, Corpus Christi Massacre 2003 Releases, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C..

even if no one individual was aware of it. In fact, the political purpose of Corpus Christi served more than any individual could fathom or care about. It didn't disturb or progress Mexico's single party. It simply preserved it.

## Conclusion

Why has the Corpus Christi Massacre fallen into the cracks of Mexican collective consciousness? For a number of reasons: first, the economic stability of Mexico's post-war years and subsequent cracks encouraged the Mexican government to fight against ideologies that posed threats to its capitalist structures. The middle class in Mexico, invested in maintaining its stability, took the government's word as a means of fiscal preservation and endorsed the government's false report on the events there. Second, the use of language labelled students as *subversive* and leftists as *insurrectionist*. Student radicalization after Tlatelolco, but more dramatically after the Corpus Christi Massacre, confirmed the government's labels—even if the government had cornered students into inhabiting these roles themselves. Third, media presence in 1971 was limited due to widespread repression of photojournalists and newspaper writers. Reports struggled to ascertain firm details in the events direct aftermath and few photos of the event surface today. And lastly, the Tlatelolco Massacre has long overshadowed the history that directly preceded and followed it. One cannot understand the Corpus Christi Massacre without placing it in the context of 1968. But one can also not understand the ramifications of Tlatelolco on present day Mexico without an understanding of similar actions that occurred in the interim.

But Tlatelolco is also remembered because it was the most widely broadcasted massacre in a long and arduous history of State violence that has continued to this day. Memorialization favors the extraordinary over the ordinary and when massacre is annual tradition, its ability to be memorialized in physical space is diminished; and as markers of space neglect to commemorate, individual and then collective recollection discard historical moments from catalogues of perceived importance. In 2014, 43 *normalistas* from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero disappeared en route to commemorate the Tlatelolco Massacre in Mexico City. Their disappearance provoked national

protest and incomplete investigations suggest coordination between local police and regional government in their kidnapping and subsequent disappearance. Many other fatal confrontations have occurred between students and the State between 1971 and the present. When violence is perpetuated against the same enemy, tragedy is converted into normalcy. Memory of tragic events requires distance and until State violence against youth wavers, Corpus Christi and other examples of ruthless violence targeting students will continue to be forgotten in favor of the recent and unusual.

The Massacre in 1971 illustrates the ways in which the American government carefully crafted its Cold War strategy: offering paramilitary training programs through the State Department and paying off Mexican presidents through the C.I.A. Surely the American government is to be held accountable for its role in the 1971 Massacre, as well as its role in other Cold War-era conflicts across the continent. The U.S. Cold War provided the impetus, legitimacy, and platform for violence against students and persons deemed vulnerable to Communist influence. Mexican Presidents and politics had internal reasons to utilize violence. But such violence was never scrutinized by North America's biggest power; instead, it was rewarded.

If Echeverría didn't orchestrate the Massacre himself, he surely knew of the 'Halcones,' and their training. Multiple State Department archives emphasize the President's signature on training paramilitary groups abroad. At the same time, the Mexican 1970s required a President who could walk a thin line between American interests and student demands. As students grew increasingly radical across the 1960s, Mexico's new President was obligated to quell student protest through concessions whilst ensuring the U.S. of its unwavering and subservient support.

Mexico was thus in a sort of Cold War purgatory. Too little concessions to student demands and they may radicalize. Too many radicalized students and the U.S. may intervene more directly.

Attempts in Mexico have begun to resurrect the Corpus Christi Massacre into public consciousness. In 2018, Alfonso Cuarón's film *Roma* utilized the Corpus Christi Massacre as an emotional backdrop. The film, one of the only fictional representations of the Massacre in the forty-eight years since it occurred, portrays the preparations and personal backstories of 'Halcones', as well as the social and political tensions of the Echeverría era. As Cleo, the family's housekeeper and film's protagonist, shops for a baby crib in the Northern corner of Mexico City, the streets erupt into protest and violent confrontation. The clocks display 5 PM and one is certain that the Corpus Christi Massacre is afoot. An 'Halcon', her former lover, storms the department store seeking protestors to fire at. In the corner of the store, he recognizes Cleo. Her water breaks.

In *Roma*, details are exact. But, their importance is disguised through the arc of character development and personal story. Historical memory is illuminated through personal storytelling. The Massacre interrupts the film's trajectory. But, it also interrupts attempts of historical erasure. Projects like *Roma* are reminders of art's political potential. After the Tlatelolco Massacre, artistic endeavors ensured that the events were remembered in numerous and diverse ways. With the placement of historical tragedy into the depths of the film's plotline, story is elevated by history. *Roma* challenges social standards while reminding people of their shared political and social past. *Roma* is truthful revisionist history in combat against decades of erasure and obfuscation.

If there was a sure symbol of the Massacre's process of memorialization this year, it was the film's projection at Los Pinos in December of 2018. In 1971, the government neglected to admit any role at Corpus Christi. Decades have gone by with little recognition or interest. But nearly fifty years later, the administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador opened the doors of the Presidential residence and reminded the public of a history that other administrations had buried. On the lawn of the President, past government abuses were accepted as fact and memory of the Massacre was, even if just for a moment, resurrected.



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