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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

The Dividing Line:
Myth and Experience in Mexico's 1968 Student Movement

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Sara Katherine Sanders

Committee in Charge:

Professor Michael Monteón, Chair
Professor Christine Hunefeldt, Co-Chair
Professor Milos Kokotovic
Professor Everard Meade
Professor Eric Van Young

2011

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The dissertation of Sara Katherine Sanders is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Co-Chair

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2011

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CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS

July 22 – Fighting breaks out between students from the Vocational Schools 2 and 5 and the Preparatory School “Isaac Ochoterena” after the Preparatory students lost a soccer game to the Vocational students.

July 23 – The fighting between Preparatory and Vocational students continues. When the number of students involved exceeds 3,000, more than 200 *granaderos* are called in to put an end to the conflict. The confrontation then becomes one between students and the state’s riot corp.

July 26 – The Federation of Technical Students plans a march to protest the presence of *granaderos* in the Vocational School 5. On the same day, the National Democratic Students’ Organization and the Communist Youth plan a march in celebration of the Cuban Revolution. The two marches collide, *granaderos* are called in and fighting continues for days. That night, the Department of Federal Security and Secret Service occupy the offices of the Mexican Communist Party.

July 29 – The first strikes are called in the UNAM and the IPN.

July 30 – Armed with bazookas, soldiers occupy the UNAM’s Preparatory Schools 1, 3, 4, 5, and San Ildefonso and Vocational Schools 2, 5, and 7.

August 1 – The first joint demonstration with students from the UNAM and IPN. The six-point petition, the movement’s official list of demands, is made public.

August 5 – The National Strike Committee is officially formed.

August 8 – The National Coalition of Professors is formed.

August 12 – In a press conference, students propose to engage in a public dialogue with the state.

August 13 – The first march to the Zócalo.

August 27 – The second march to the Zócalo, beginning at the Museum of History and Anthropology in the Bosque de Chapultepec. Protestors, numbering at least 100,000, demands a public dialogue on September 1 and establish a guard of 3,000 students to occupy the Zócalo until that demand is met. Soldiers clear the square and fighting between students, soldiers, and *granaderos* continues for days.

September 1 – The annual Presidential Address in which Gustavo Díaz Ordaz vows to “do what is necessary” to defend Mexico.

September 13 – The “Silent Demonstration,” beginning at the Museum of History and Anthropology and ending in the Zócalo. Protestors march in silence.

September 18 – More than 10,000 soldiers equipped with tanks occupy University City, detaining over 700 students in the process. The fighting between students and soldier continues until the troops withdraw on September 30.

September 21 – The conflict is extended to residents of the housing development, Nonoalco-Tlatelolco, when soldiers arrive with tanks looking for members of the National Strike Committee.

September 23 – Soldiers occupy the IPN’s Casco de Santo Tomás leaving many wounded and dead.

September 27 – The CNH announces a hunger strike of those imprisoned since the beginning of the conflict, scheduled to commence on October 2nd.

September 30 – Troops withdraw from the UNAM.

October 2 – A protest in Tlatelolco ends in a massacre.

ORGANIZATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos (National Center of Democratic Students, CNED)

Coalición Nacional de Profesores (National Coalition of Professors)

Confederación de Trabajadores de México (Confederation of Mexican Workers, CTM)

Consejo Nacional de Huelga (National Strike Committee, CNH)

Dirección Federal de Seguridad (Directorate of Federal Security, DFS)

Federación de Estudiantes Socialista Campesino de México (Federation of Socialist Campesino Students of Mexico, FESCM)

Federación Nacional de Estudiantes Tecnicos (National Federation of Technical Students, FNET)

Instituto Politécnico Nacional (National Polytechnic Institute, IPN)

Juventud Comunista (Communist Youth)

Liga Comunista Espartaco (Spartacus Communist League)

Movimiento Universitario de Renovadora Orientación (University Movement for Moral Regeneration, MURO)

Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Revolutionary Institutional Party, PRI)

Partido Comunista de México (Mexican Communist Party)

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM)

Union Nacional de Estudiantes Revolucionarios (National Union of Revolutionary Students)

Union Nacional de Mujeres Mexicana (National Union of Mexican Women, The Union or UNMM)

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Constantine Rudbeck Johnson arrived during the final stages, accompanied me during the revisions, and was and is a mighty, joyous force in his mother's life. Matthew Johnson's constancy – as friend, intellectual companion, fellow adventurer, editor, and life companion – sustained this project throughout. To him, I owe my deepest gratitude and love.

In memory of Mona.

For Matt.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Dividing Line: Myth and Experience in Mexico's 1968 Student Movement

by

Sara Katherine Sanders

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, San Diego, 2011

Professor Michael Monteón, Chair

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My dissertation seeks to examine conceptions of the 1968 Mexican student movement—both academic and popular—in light of new sources. As a whole, the literature on 1968 focuses on the unique nature of the movement and its tragic end, yet with the result that the social, economic and political origins of the movement, and their

specific global-historical context, remain obscured. Moreover, this scholarship has less to say concerning the specific modes of political organization which shaped the movement and linked it to other recent protests and strikes in postwar Mexico. Based on recently declassified state security documents, newspapers, memoirs, and interviews, my dissertation reconstructs the movement focusing on the daily behavior of the students, and reveals the scope and breadth of their activities, their interactions with other groups as well as agents of the state, and their use of city space.

What emerges is a new understanding of how and why students protested. Students adeptly manipulated their urban environment, attempting to form alliances with workers, campesinos, and doctors. The city itself was an area of contestation in which state authorities and protestors confronted each other daily on the streets. By observing the interaction between students and state, I am able to show how a case was built for violence as a legitimate response. In this, the larger context of Cold War geopolitical competition frequently intruded into the government's ability to comprehend what was in fact a largely national movement.

Because 1968 is considered to have shaped the politics of a generation, I also examine the effects of the mobilization on political consciousness and identity. I examine the way in which university students become politicized, the meaning of student politics, and the frames through which students articulated their critique. What comes to light is more complete understanding of the types of consciousness which drove participation in the 1968 movement, as well as students' relationship to political authority and to each other. While ultimately a national movement, these must be understood within the context of the 1960s, a period in which students mobilized around the world.

Introduction

Reflecting on Mexico's 1968 student movement, activist and politician Sergio Aguayo Quezada asserted: "We are the generation of change, there is no doubt about it. And Tlatelolco was the dividing line. We are unable to forget. We are still haunted by what happened."¹ In strikingly similar language, participant Luis Gonzalez de Alba characterized the movement with these words: "There was one Mexico before 1968 and one Mexico afterward. Tlatelolco was the dividing line."² Mexican politician Manuel Camacho Solis remembered the movement in this way: "The events of 1968 constitute a phenomenon that had a tremendous impact on an entire generation, and they continue to have an impact."³

These sentiments resonate with those expressed by participants in Sixties Politics throughout the world, highlighting what is perceived as the unique nature of that period, and in particular, the year 1968. Fidel Castro called 1968 "the year of the heroic guerrilla."⁴ Hannah Arendt wrote: "It seems to me that the children of the next century

¹ Scott Sherman, "Remembering Tlatelolco," *The Nation*, 267, (December 7, 1998).

² Dave Zirin, "The Ghosts of Olympics Past," in Minky Worden, ed., *China's Great Leap: The Beijing Games and Olympian Human Rights Challenges* (Seven Stories Press, May 2008), 82. These remembrances echo popular interpretations of 1968, a year that, as commonly stated, "shook the world."

³ Manuel Camacho Silis, quoted in *The New York Times*, (October 2, 1988).

⁴ Castro coined this phrase in his New Year's Eve address to the nation on that year.

will learn about 1968 the way we once learned about 1848.”⁵ Jean Paul Sartre described France in 1968 with these words: “For me the movement in May was the first large-scale social movement which temporarily brought about something akin to freedom ...”⁶ Bill Clinton characterized the Sixties as a dividing line in American politics. He claimed: “If you look back on the ‘60s and think there was more good than harm, you’re probably a Democrat. If you think there was more harm than good, you’re probably a Republican.”⁷

In many ways, the events of 1968 resulted in little change: no governments were overthrown. The movements around the world were either violently put down or fizzled of their own accord, and in numerous instances, politics and life returned to earlier routines. Yet many consider 1968 to be a watershed moment in the twentieth century, a marker in the history of the Cold War that designated the break between confrontation and détente.⁸ The number, intensity, and geographic range of protests in 1968 have led scholars and journalists to call it “a magical year,” a “miraculous year,” the “year of the student,” or the “year that shook the world.” Sixty-eight has been termed a “symbolic dividing line,” a “cultural revolution,” a “clash of generations,” a “moment of global revolution,” in which the “generation,” or the “youth generation,” or “the generation of

⁵ Hannah Arendt, as quoted in Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, “1968 in Europe: An Introduction,” in Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, eds., *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 7.

⁶ Jean Paul Sartre, *Life/Situations*, (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 52.

⁷ <http://www.quotedb.com/quotes/3761>.

⁸ Carole Fink, Phillipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3; Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

change,” or even “restless youth,” challenged existing norms and institutions, in what has been called “the spirit of ’68.” Journalist and activist Chris Harman captured this “spirit” with these words: “Every so often there is a year which casts a spell on a generation. ... there are millions of people throughout the world who still feel their lives were changed decisively by what happened in those 12 months.”⁹ Taken together, these reflections hint at the joy and tragedy experienced by participants and reveal the near-mythic proportions the year has assumed in popular memory.

Beyond the adventures and traumas, successes and failures, highs and lows, what happened in the daily life of participants in the movements of 1968? I will examine the everyday experiences of the Mexican student movement – the actions and attitudes of participants and the ways in which the state daily built an argument for its repression of the protest. In this study, I look to the languages, subjectivity, and practices of participants in the streets and neighborhoods as they fought for social change and encountered state forces determined to stop them. Popular protest and state violence will be understood in relation to each other, revealing the nature of popular struggle as experienced “on the ground.” What emerges is a perspective that challenges the notion of generational conflict, usually cast in familial terms (between youth and parents or students and state), that erupted from nowhere in the year 1968 and spread across the world. Rather, the Mexican movement was a diverse mobilization, involving a range of groups, who in their protest repertoire drew on earlier Mexican social movements and focused on national concerns. The movement called into question social norms,

⁹ Harman, vii

especially those relating to gender, but political ones as well. In Mexico, Sixty-Eight is seen as a dramatic and tragic end to a period of peaceful state-led growth typically known as the “Golden Age.” Yet the protest was one of a series of mid-century clashes between the state and those involved in popular uprisings and throws into relief the terror that sustained the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Revolutionary Institutional Party)¹⁰ throughout its reign, questioning the very notion of a Golden Age.

The Mexican student movement began in July 1968 and rapidly gained momentum. Drawing students from all over Mexico City and, at times, the provinces, the mobilization centered on the two largest schools of higher education in the nation, both located in Mexico City: the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (National Autonomous University of Mexico)¹¹ and the *Instituto Politécnico Nacional* (National Polytechnic Institute)¹², the former devoted to training professionals, the latter, technicians. The mobilization also occurred in the months prior to the opening of the 1968 Olympic Games which Mexico hosted that year, a symbol of the economic progress the country had achieved in the post-WWII period. The students held varied ideologies and brought together a range of experiences. Nonetheless, a petition of six points, created by the movement’s leadership, the *Consejo Nacional de Huelga* (National Strike Committee),¹³ would define it.

¹⁰ Hereafter, PRI.

¹¹ Hereafter, UNAM.

¹² Hereafter, IPN.

¹³ Hereafter, CNH.

Functioning as its explicit agenda and formal list of demands, the petition included the following: 1) that the government abolish the *granaderos*, a riot corps whose violence started the rebellion; 2) that it dismiss police chiefs Luis Cueto Ramírez, Raúl Mendiola, and Armando Frías, who organized state repression against the movement; 3) that it identify the government officials implicated in the bloodshed accompanying the repression of the movement; 4) that it indemnify the families of the dead and wounded in the aggression that occurred after July 23; 5) that it release all political prisoners; 6) that it abolish articles 145 and 146 of the Penal Code which pertained to “social dissolution” and had been used to justify the government’s conduct against the students and other dissident groups. Furthermore, students protested the state policies of President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970) and accused the PRI of clientelism, paternalism, and authoritarianism. In short, they believed the single party state to be abusive and corrupt with few possibilities for popular participation and the emergence of democracy.

The movement gained momentum throughout the summer and early fall as the Olympics approached. On October 2nd, ten days prior to the opening of the Games, police encircled protesting students in Mexico City’s historic *Plaza of the Three Cultures*, also known as Tlatelolco, and opened fire, resulting in an estimated 400 deaths and over 2000 arrests on that day alone.¹⁴ As the culmination of an ongoing campaign of violence, the October 2nd massacre generated such fear that the movement effectively ended. Many

¹⁴ State estimates for the death toll on October 2nd were much lower with a reported 37 dead and the initiation of violence attributed to the students.

were appalled when the then Secretary of Interior, Luis Echeverría (1970-1976), widely believed to have ordered the massacre, gained the office of the president two years later.

Within Mexico, the student protest developed in the context of considerable economic, demographic, and ideological change. Students came of age during the Mexican “miracle,” a period of modernization, economic growth, and dramatic, demographic expansion. From 1940 to 1970, Mexican GDP growth averaged 6 percent, making it one of the most prosperous countries in the developing world. Concurrently, the population increased dramatically to just fewer than 49 million people in 1970, a number almost two and a half times the pre-1940 population figure of approximately 20 million. During this period, more people moved to the cities, especially Mexico City, resulting in their dramatic growth. Greater numbers of students entered higher education, perhaps disguising increasing levels of unemployment, and the state consciously fostered policies to create a more diverse student body, seeking to develop a skilled and ideologically imbued labor force. Along with these demographic and economic changes, movement participants were part of a leftist resurgence in Latin America in the wake of the Cuban Revolution of 1959, as well as the Mexican mobilizations of the 1950s and 1960s. These mobilizations were by factions dissatisfied with the state, most notably campesino revolts in the 1950s, the Mexican railroad workers who carried out strikes in 1958 and 1959, along with strikes by medical workers and students in the 1960s. Like the student movement of 1968, these mobilizations were suppressed by the state. The official language of the state proclaimed Mexico a democracy, ruled benevolently by a single party, the PRI, who governed on behalf of workers and campesinos. The PRI held

elections and, for decades, achieved peaceful transfers of power, making it one of the most stable “democracies” in Latin America during that period.

These processes reflected broader, global transformations. Perhaps, most important, was the unmatched growth of the post-World War II era, a period of economic boom throughout much of the Western world. However, by 1968, the first signs of the limits to growth were becoming visible. Eric Hobsbawm has noted that 1968 seemed to signal the “end of the feast.”¹⁵ The promises of economic growth had created greater expectations for many sectors of society, especially educated youth.¹⁶ Growth was coupled with the post-war population explosion, leading to higher numbers of young people in all countries, and resulting in the subsequent development of a youth consumer culture. These overlapped with growing urbanization, larger schools, greater access to higher education, and technological advance. A growing news media covered global events, familiarizing audiences, not only with local news, but also with events from

¹⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, “1968 – A Retrospective,” in *Marxism Today*, May 1978, 136. In *1968: The World Transformed*, Fink, et al argue that between 1968 and 1973 a shift in the world economy became apparent, mostly notably marked the oil shocks of 1973-4 that ended a quarter century of growth in the West, p. 7-8. For a further exploration of these themes, see Rober M. Collins, “Growth Liberalism in the Sixties: Great Societies at Home and Grand Designs Abroad,” in David Farber, ed., *The Sixties: From Memory to History* (Chapel Hill: 1994) 11-44.

¹⁶ In *The Year of the Heroic Guerrilla: World Revolution and Counterrevolution in 1968* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), Robert Daniels argued that revolutions are most likely to occur not when society is in a state of hopelessness but rather during periods of dynamic development during which social expectations rise. When groups fail to socially or economically advance the result is outrage at the government or customs that prevent them.

abroad as protestors used the media to disseminate their messages.¹⁷ The success of the Cuban Revolution, despite efforts on the part of the United States to thwart it, as well as the Vietnamese resistance and African movements for liberation, inspired students and others to believe that they too could resist entrenched powers and further the movement against imperialism.

The Mexican student movement is generally considered a watershed, revealing the moral bankruptcy of the PRI which had dominated Mexican politics under different names since 1929. It had positioned itself as the inheritor of the Revolution of 1910, but when government officials ordered the deaths of peacefully protesting students, they exposed the deep cynicism of the party and marked the end of the PRI's long-term period of economic growth and political stability. Scholars and participants, as mentioned above, have argued that the events of 1968 shaped the politics of a generation and led to the eventual decline of single-party politics in Mexico. They characterize Sixty-Eight as a moment in which Mexico, a country often noted for its poverty and corruption, was the vanguard of an international movement during which students led the nation, and perhaps the world, toward a more progressive future.

In general, the literature on the 1968 student movement falls into two camps. The first written by sociologists, activists, and many former participants in the 1970s, evaluates the movement, determining the causes for its demise as well as its long-term

¹⁷ For an exploration of media and the New Left, see Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media and the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

impact on Mexican politics.¹⁸ Many authors were themselves members of the CNH, and the literature is largely focused on the movement's leadership and attempts to make sense of the nature of the revolutionary state, revising previous understandings of the regime in light of the violence against the movement. It focuses on the trajectory of the movement, student grievances vis-à-vis the state, and the aftermath of the tragic massacre. A more recent body of work draws on methods of cultural analysis and seeks to understand the student movement in cultural terms.¹⁹ Given that 1968 in Mexico and elsewhere was a period of considerable cultural transformation, altering accepted normative patterns, especially in terms of gender and sexuality, the newer literature contributes to an understanding of the politics of culture both in the student movement and, more broadly, mid-century Mexico. This dissertation draws on methods from both, examining the languages and behaviors of the actors involved while also seeking to identify the points

¹⁸ The majority of works on the politics of 1968 seek to assert the state's responsibility for the Tlatelolco massacre or to establish the importance of the student movement in Mexico's transition to democracy. See Esteban Ascencio, ed., *1968: Más Allá del Mito* (México, D.F.: Ediciones del Milenio, 1998); José Revueltas, *México 68: Juventud y Revolución* (México, D.F.: Editorial Posada, S.A. 1976); Raúl Álvarez Garín, *La estela de Tlatelolco: Una reconstrucción histórica del Movimiento estudiantil del 68* (México, D.F.: ITACA, 1998).

¹⁹ This paper is part of a small body of recent work that explores the relationship between gender and the student movement of 1968 in Mexico. Elaine Carey's recent work, *Plaza of Sacrifice: Gender, Power and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), as well as Deborah Cohen and Lessie Jo Frazier's paper in the *Hispanic American Historical Review* (83:4, November 2003), offer insightful initial analyses of the role of women and nature of gender relations in the student movement. Eric Zolov's *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) offers an excellent analysis of the development of youth culture in 1960s Mexico and his "Showcasing the 'Land of Tomorrow': Mexico and the 1968 Olympics" *The Americas* (61:2, October 2004) examines representations of Mexico during the Olympics.

of contact and the nature of the confrontation between participants and the state, delving into the murky and often obscured nature of state violence.

The student movement cannot be examined outside the context of the Cold War. The anti-communist thrust of state leaders during the period is crucial to understanding the development of the movement as well as the state response. The Mexican elite feared communists might form a fifth column by manipulating students. This dissertation contributes to the small but growing field of Cold War studies that examines how it influenced the politics of a Third World nation and the experiences of those mobilized into action.²⁰

This work also adds to an emerging body of work on the global Sixties, particularly the global experience of 1968. The social movements of 1968 varied by country and the grievances differed. There was no global agenda for social and political change, nor did the participants share a common and defined view of the future. Yet, given the frequency of movements that year, with protests in such places as the United States, France, Italy, Germany, England, Prague, Tokyo, China, and Mexico City among others, scholars have sought to find similarities among them. Indeed, historians Carole Fink, Phillip Gassert, and Detlef Junker argue that, "... activists throughout the world operated as part of formal and informal networks of communication and collaboration. Thus, 1968 was a global phenomenon because of the actual and perceived cooperation

²⁰ Among the most important of these new works are Odd Arne Westad's, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), and Gilbert Joseph and Daniella Spencer's *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: Duke, 2007).

among protest movements in different countries. ... [and] because the protagonists believed in a common cause ... ²¹ Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth similarly assert the importance of transnational networks in Europe during 1968, arguing that they allowed for exchanges between student organizations throughout Europe that diffused both ideas and strategies. Moreover, such networks encouraged students to outline transnational solutions for global problems and to prepare a global revolutionary strategy that would result in the transformation of the Cold War system.²²

The movements of 1968 are typically characterized as liberal or left and opposed to imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism. Furthermore, most argue that the struggle was not between classes, but rather, between generations. Indeed, the notion of generational conflict is a cornerstone of the 1968 literature. Student rejection of state policies and paternalism, normative personal relationships, and parental authority are viewed as part of a continuum encapsulated by the North American axiom “don’t trust anyone over thirty.” With students as the protagonists, most scholars typify the movements of 1968 by citing their departure from traditional leftism with its focus on the working class and replacing it with demands for equality, individual liberty, and direct democracy. As historian Robert Daniels describes:

²¹ Fink, Gassert, and Junker, 2.

²² Klimke and Scharloth, 4. While Mexican students may have participated in some of the events Klimke and Scharloth describe, such as the Annual Youth Festival in Bulgaria in 1968, there is little evidence of such exchange in 1968 Mexico. Rather, goals and strategies were much more national in nature and pan-regional leftist networks were of greater significance than global youth networks.

The worldwide revolutionary wave of the 1960s had a common denominator that distinguishes it ... It took for granted, even deprecated, the old struggles for political rights and economic redistribution, and focused instead on issues of inequality and coercion in face-to-face human relationships. The driving force ... was not the downtrodden masses but the disaffected youth of the privileged classes, induced ... to reject any relationship based on power and subordination.²³

Today, among the dominant memories of 1968 are the social and personal challenges issued by students who defied cultural norms whether through their musical preferences, clothing, or repudiation of gender roles and normative sexual practices. These are seen as invoking cries for equality in all relationships: between the powerful and the powerless, among all races, men and women, old and young, teacher and student, expert and amateur as well as in the international and political realm between nations and those who govern and are governed.²⁴ Thus, 1968 is generally understood as a cultural revolution that introduced notions of individual equality which remain to this day and, in many ways, led to the development of later identity politics.

While aspects of this are true for Mexico, the student movement shows some of the limitations of such an analysis. International developments and relations were important in 1968, but movement participants were far more concerned with their national implications. Earlier Mexican social movements and pan-Latin American networks were of greater significance than global 1968 youth networks, and most participants remained rooted in Mexican soil. Moreover, class relations and an

²³ Daniels, 235.

²⁴ Daniels succinctly characterizes the movements of 1968 and their relationship to demands for equality. See *Year of the Heroic Guerrilla*, 5.

understanding of these relationships, were central to the student movement. While participants did make demands for individual liberty and democracy, they coupled these with cries for economic justice, and repeatedly called into question the ability of the state to adequately represent the interests of the working class. One of the central principles of the movement was the joining of intellectual contestation and workers struggle. These, perhaps, distinguish Mexico, a low income, developing state, from its more developed counterparts, providing insight into the Third World experience of 1968.²⁵ While there was considerable simultaneity in terms of protest movements across the world, more comparative work on the protest repertoires of individual nations is needed so as not to homogenize the movements, or the geographic, economic, and historical differences among the countries in which they occurred.

Ultimately, the Mexican movement should be understood within the context of Mexican mid-century economic, demographic, ideological and cultural change, connecting it to earlier historical processes and events. It was part of an ongoing revolt against the PRI, and should be considered part, perhaps the most vibrant part, of a series of mid-century movements. The participants in the Mexican mobilization ultimately accepted the logic of the developmentalist state. They too believed that Mexico should continue to grow and develop, but that the gains should be shared more broadly. At heart, it was a national movement, premised on restoring constitutional rights, as well as the

²⁵ Kristin Ross has made a similar case for France where, she argues, the notion of workers struggle was central to the development of the May '68 movement yet this has been written out of much of the history and popular memory of the movement. In doing so, the movement is rendered far more innocuous. See, Kristin Ross, *May 1968 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

notion of equality between economic groups in relation to Mexican politics. In this sense it differed from other movements of 1968. Rather than viewing equality in terms of what the historian Daniels calls “equality in direct social relationships,” meaning a focus on individual rights or an incipient identity politics, a phrase he uses to characterize the 1968 movements, Mexican students continued to employ a class analysis and to argue for broad social and economic rights while simultaneously arguing for civil liberties.

New Sources and Research

This dissertation is based on a variety of sources, including state security records, newspapers, memoirs or testimonials, and interviews. Begun several years after what was known as the “transition to democracy,” or the election of President Vicente Fox (2000-2006) of the National Action Party in 2000 that broke the stranglehold of the PRI on Mexican politics, the research especially makes use of newspapers and newly declassified state security records, heretofore unavailable to scholars of the movement. Participants in 1968 claimed partial responsibility for the transition as the events of 1968 exposed the limitations of the PRI, opening up new political possibilities decades later. Among the acts of President Fox was the opening of the security reports of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (Directorate of Federal Security)²⁶, Mexico’s federal intelligence agency. The declassification was part of a larger program to discredit the PRI in the

²⁶ Hereafter, DFS.

hopes of curtailing their future electoral success by making public their long and secret history of corruption and violence. While much of their activities are widely known, and in the case of 1968, the PRI is commonly believed to be responsible for the October massacre, the sources newly open to researchers and journalists would provide hard evidence.

These sources, many of them daily reports on the movement – its participants, activities, and alleged beliefs – were, in turn, produced by a sophisticated intelligence-gathering apparatus which permeated virtually the entire organizational structure of student politics. In terms of its mandate and functions, the DFS was a government security agency responsible for preserving stability within Mexico against subversion and terrorist threats.²⁷ Few restrictions governed the behavior of DFS agents which did not come from within the organization itself. Indeed, its clandestine nature meant that DFS operatives worked in the legal shadows, with little public record or awareness of their activities. Agents and directors alike worked closely with the United States and were influenced and trained by intelligence agencies there, primarily the Central Intelligence Agency. The head of the DFS was appointed directly by the President, making Presidential aims and security the top priority. In 1968, it was headed by Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, who controlled its operations during the presidencies of both Díaz

²⁷ For an overview of the DFS, see Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 2001). The discussion of the agency, its functions, and history reproduced here is heavily indebted to that work, which substantiates this dissertation's methodological assertion that the DFS records can be used to create a reasonably accurate and inclusive day-by-day narrative of the Mexico City movement as a whole, given the degree of penetration by DFS agents (also referred to as "state agents" hereafter) and the frequency of agent reports.

Ordaz and Echeverría. Gutiérrez was directly responsible to Echeverría but worked closely with Díaz Ordaz as well and the three frequently met in secret to discuss issues of national security. A central concern was the possibility of a leftist threat to political stability within Mexico, and thus the bulk of DFS activity was directed toward gathering intelligence on professed and suspected leftists, union members, foreigners, journalists, and other politicians who challenged the legitimacy of either the PRI or the President.

The DFS collected its information primarily through a system of paid informants and infiltrators, generating daily reports to the President and Secretary and accumulating vast amounts of information on the student movement and other dissenting groups and individuals. In 1961, Díaz Ordaz created the Military Camp #1, a special prison to deal with “security threats” where DFS agents interrogated the people they detained, and which further contributed to the collection of high-value intelligence, much of it undoubtedly coerced, concerning incipient threats or challenges to state power. While the DFS remained institutionally distinct from the military, in 1968 it operated jointly with the Army, Secret Service of the Department of the Federal District, capital police forces, and Olympic Battalion – the latter a paramilitary organization created to maintain order during the Olympic Games. Taken together, these security forces assembled a formidable coalition of state agents charged with maintaining control of Mexico City, culminating with the unleashing on October 2 of 5,000 to 10,000 armed soldiers, police, and paramilitary personnel on 8,000 protesting students, and which accounts in part for both the severity and scope of the movement’s violent dispersal.

The declassified DFS sources are both impressive and deceptive. Impressive, in the sense that they appear to cover nearly every event connected to the movement as a whole, but deceptive insofar as their rationale was to build a portrait of the movement as an organized, violent, and underground coalition with anti-state intent – in some sense a mirror image of the DFS itself. While the reports figure prominently in this dissertation, they are used as a record of protest-related incidents rather than proof that a single “movement” existed – a claim that is difficult to sustain, for reasons described below – and as evidence for how the state itself came to perceive the movement as a potential catalyst for wider domestic, and even regional, chaos, thus effectively and misguidedly sanctioning the use of brutal violence against protestors. Where possible, the DFS sources have corroborated with other sources such as newspaper reports, journalistic articles, and movement publications in order to develop a more complete perspective on the events of the movement and massacre which followed. These printed materials are additionally supplemented by memoirs and interviews conducted in Mexico City by the author between 2003 and 2006, and which are used to access realms of experience, such as sexuality, not typically mentioned in either public discourse or by state agents.²⁸

Taken together, these various transcripts reveal a more diverse and nationally oriented movement than is commonly portrayed in the literature, as well as a more nuanced understanding of the workings of the state. To begin, the notion of a generation

²⁸ In her work on France, Ross completely eschews interviews. Given the abundance of testimonials and memoirs relating to May '68, she argues that there is little need for additional interviews and that the “voices” are well recorded. Moreover, Ross asserts the primacy of published testimonies over private interviews because the participants were willing to publically attach their name to the former.

as a harbinger of change, or of the movement as one of students, erases from the narrative the other groups who were present in 1968, as well as the widely varying ages of those who participated. While the literature on the Mexican student movement generally admits the presence of other groups, it nonetheless consistently frames its analysis in terms of students. In part, this reflects the attitudes of participants who believed that among their key “failures” was their inability to attract workers to the movement. The evidence reveals that students were accompanied by teachers and professors, medical workers, union members, campesinos, organizations of mothers and parents, and other civic groups. While the movement had its origins in the schools, and the bulk of its organizational apparatus was comprised of students and based on institutional educational structures, many different groups of varying ages and identities participated. Moreover, Mexico has a long history of cooperation between intellectuals and activists, making students a less distinct group with goals separate from other social sectors.

As the movement grew, students became ever more aggressive in their attempts to include workers and campesinos in the mobilization, as they were well aware that these groups would swell their ranks and provide them with leftist legitimacy. They sent brigades into Mexico’s provinces, kicked down factory doors, and held “lightning strike” meetings in working class neighborhoods. They met with some success, and as the mobilization grew, more workers threw their support behind the movement. The staff of seven city hospitals went on strike by September, a daunting development for state officials and Olympic planners who anticipated the arrival of large numbers of tourists shortly thereafter. The state-sponsored union of workers publically condemned the

movement, and although the number of members who broke with official union leadership was comparatively small, it was nevertheless significant. The state, as evidenced by their security reports, viewed these developments with increasing alarm. There is a direct correlation between the deployment of state violence and the proximity of students to factories. In other words, the composition of the movement went far beyond students and included more than a single generation.

Moreover, the meaning of the term “student” is problematical. In Mexico, the category of student itself was a large one, ranging from young, twelve to fourteen year old preparatory students, to those well beyond the thirty year mark. University and Polytechnic professors played a key role, as did parents and members of organizations outside the educational system, many of whom were much older than what is commonly meant by the category “youth.” Thus to see the conflict as one of generational change or as comprised exclusively of students, erases from the memory of 1968 key groups such as workers and parents. The conflict was not one between generations alone, but rather between protestors and the state.

The new sources also reveal the depth of disorder the movement generated. While the protests were largely peaceful, especially when considering the numbers of people involved, they nonetheless seriously disrupted the city. Participants were strategic about such disruption, choosing to occupy central squares, shutting down major thoroughfares, and flocking to areas sure to have tourists. At times, strike committees sent out directives encouraging students to come armed to demonstrations. They did so, bringing sticks, stones, and Molotov cocktails. These, however, provided limited defense

against the bayonets, tanks, and bazookas of the state. There was considerable vandalism, at times politically motivated, but at other times resulting from the euphoria of the moment, a sort of mob mentality. Students seized public buses daily, as well as on days of protest, shutting down key public transportation routes, burning busses in major intersections, and preventing many people from going about the daily business of their lives. These developments were viewed with concern by state officials as the Olympics approached and tourists began to descend, especially as the protests were concentrated in the historic and business centers of the city where foreigners were bound to gather en masse. Nonetheless, Sartre's statement in reference to the French movement seems equally applicable here: "A regime is not brought down by 100,000 unarmed students, no matter how courageous."²⁹

The focus on 1968 as an exceptional, magical year of transformation obscures the broader processes that gave rise to the Mexican student movement. Indeed, many of the student concerns were voiced by earlier movements, including earlier Mexican student movements. Among the most important would be the University mobilization of 1966, yet earlier outbreaks of student dissent hinted at what would come in 1968. Students in the 1950s and 1960s protested the elite nature of educational politics, decried imperialism and colonialism, and supported leftist movements in Mexico and Latin America. More broadly, they rejected the coup against Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, and celebrated the Cuban Revolution in 1959. These earlier movements remained largely

²⁹Quoted in Ross, p. 64.

contained within educational structures and typically advocated programs of educational reform while using these to comment on broader political trends.³⁰

The difference between earlier movements and 1968, however, was one of scale. Earlier movements may have voiced similar claims, but they failed to garner the widespread support. In 1968 the demonstrations numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Rather than directly attacking the President and the state in central, public areas of Mexico City, previous student demonstrations typically occurred on school campuses and ultimately focused on educational reform. Nonetheless, 1968 should be viewed in terms of earlier mid-century protests, especially as participants in 1968 sought to position themselves as the inheritors of these movements. These earlier movements were from sectors relatively privileged within Mexican society, sectors that felt they received too few of the benefits of the economic miracle. The focus on 1968 as a unique year obscures the similarities to earlier movements, as well as the broader processes of change in twentieth century Mexico.

As the movement developed, there was a clear awareness of international relations – images of Che Guevara and Mao were displayed - and participants condemned what they termed an “imperialist” set of global relations in which the resources of Mexico were exploited for the benefit of foreign interests. They decried the presence and

³⁰ While beyond the scope of this dissertation, many of the political characteristics of the 1968 movement can be found in the earlier student movements, particularly in terms of their condemnation of Cold War geopolitics, imperialism, encroaching United States investment in Latin America, and their solidarity with Mexico’s workers and campesinos. Women are present in the earlier movements as well, participating in very small numbers at the top levels of organization. Materials relating to earlier protests can be found in the AGN, Galería 1, with reports on the UNAM and IPN beginning in 1954.

involvement of the CIA throughout Latin America, and particularly implicated their own government for complicity with foreign powers. Students exchanged letters internationally, released statements to the press directed to the students of the world, and occasionally crossed borders. Nevertheless, the new sources point to the deeply national nature of the movement. For the Mexican students, the belief in the global nature of the movement largely existed at the rhetorical level. Much of the student discourse remained focused on Mexico, drawing on patriotic themes and icons and invoking the political history of the country. At base, the movement centered on the restoration of constitutional rights, and protestors asserted that government agents and officials violated the Constitution by ignoring the political liberties of students and their fellow citizens. When international matters were invoked, the point was most often to comment on the national and to condemn Mexico's leaders. Although students were affected by international events, and believed themselves part of an international movement, their concerns and discourse were essentially national, focused on Mexico, its people and its future.

Finally, the new sources provide insight, not only into the workings of the movement, but also into the activities of the state. Typically, the Mexican government in 1968 is depicted as a weak authoritarian state with a President and Secretary of the Interior who were bent on silencing students regardless of constitutional protections. While this is accurate in many ways, at times, what emerges in the literature is an image of a deranged state willing to kill its own citizens to protect its international image. Depicting state leaders as having taken leave of their senses minimizes the ongoing and

strategic nature of state terror. Taken together, newspapers and security reports reveal a two-pronged state response: 1) the deployment of daily violence, and at times, extreme violence (as evidenced in the massacre) against movement participants and 2) attempts to create moral panic by fostering fears of student behavior. The state launched a program of daily violence against the students, using the *granaderos*, the police, and the military to detain protestors, threaten union members, and violently clear students from public areas such as the Zócalo (the city center) during many demonstrations. Along with occupying the University, an institution with a guarantee of autonomy, state agents were likely to disperse students from historic centers and to quickly end any lightening strike meetings near factories. Students were detained by and came into physical conflict with state agents daily.

The rumors of “disappeared students” are more difficult to verify. If state documents ordering the disappearance of students exist, they are not public. Nonetheless, many movement participants believed that disappearances did take place, and rumors circulated that state agents gathered students onto airplanes and pushed them into the Gulf of Mexico, or that their bodies were taken to secret incinerators in the Military Camp #1 and burned in the basement. While these cannot be proven, they nonetheless created a feeling of terror that pervaded the movement and, following the massacre of October 2nd, ultimately ended it.³¹

³¹ The recent recovery of bodies beneath a hospital in Mexico City has been attributed to state attempts to hide the level of violence during the 1968 student movement. See, “Bodies Found in Mexico May be Victims of 1968 Massacre,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 2007.

Beyond this, state sponsored organizations, both student and otherwise, wrote letters to the editor condemning the movement as a communist plot and decrying the lack of patriotism among the protestors. Rumors of communist infiltration abounded, although the security reports show little evidence of foreign agitation despite their persistent efforts to find such proof. Indeed, they noted that those in the Soviet Embassy seemed completely surprised by the outbreak of the protests. In this government campaign, norms of gender, race, class, and sexuality were central. Participants were condemned for lascivious behavior, for dressing like peasants, for being feminine men and masculine women, for being young women who wore short skirts, and for remaining out all night. Above all, participants were judged for failing to appreciate the advantages and privileges of their class position, as well as the sacrifices of earlier generations for their sake. Many could not understand how “middle class kids” could go so awry. Like many histories of Mexico’s 1968 movement, the state sought to obscure the diversity of groups present, and to refocus attention on the morality of students rather than their political demands and the mass nature of the mobilization.

The Promise of Post-Revolutionary Education

While the demands of the student movement went beyond educational reform and the participants beyond the student body, its origins can nonetheless be found in the educational system, and further, the majority of the leadership and participants were from

Mexico's schools, and most movement activity focused on the UNAM and the IPN. One contemporary observer estimated that the movement was comprised of 90,000 students from the UNAM, 70,000 from the IPN, and 40,000 students from a combination of the Normal School, the National School of Agriculture at Chapingo, the Iberoamericana University, and students from states beyond Mexico City.³² Indeed, students considered the unification of protesting students from these institutions, but especially the UNAM and the IPN, among the most notable accomplishments of the movement, given their very different histories and student bodies. Thus, the educational system as a locus of political activity is central to understanding the Sixty-Eight movement. Within the revolutionary Mexican state, education functioned as a key site of political struggle and as an important rhetorical device in the constitution of the state.

Following the Revolution, the Mexican state sought to consolidate power through the political incorporation of different social and economic sectors, forming labor unions, redistributing land, and issuing the promise of free, secular, and comprehensive education from elementary school to higher education. Educational reform was among the first reforms of the Revolutionary state, and it remained symbolic of its promises and closely linked to Mexico's economic and political development. Educators and policymakers considered education essential to fostering national cohesion and democracy. In fact, given that political dissent was rarely expressed through the vote for much of the

³²Ramón Ramírez, *El movimiento estudiantil de México (Julio/Diciembre de 1968)* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1969), 23. He argues that the student participant base was roughly 200,000 with the bulk coming from Mexico City as well as universities from the states of Veracruz, Sinaloa, Puebla, Tabasco, Morelos, Guadalajara, Nuevo León, and Morelia.

twentieth century, the educational system was a site where middle and upper class citizens responded to policy changes. Thus educational consensus was connected to political consensus and the university became an important zone of elite political expression in Mexico.³³ How then, did the educational system develop and what was its role within the post-revolutionary system?

Soon after the Revolution, Mexico's newly appointed Secretary of Education, José Vasconcelos (1920-1925), developed a program of educational reform. On the eve of the revolution of 1910, 84 percent of the country was illiterate with 50 percent of urban adults falling into that category.³⁴ The Constitution of 1917 made education free and compulsory, placing it under the control of the state and beyond the hands of the clergy. Mexico's first literacy campaign began in 1921 under President Alvaro Obregón (1920-1924) who radically increased the number of rural schools, teachers, and students, as well as creating the position of Secretary of Education. Thus, education in Mexico was a populist enterprise designed to incorporate a largely illiterate population into the emergent state and to foster a sense of national identity in the process. As such, it was among the first national symbols of state building and revolutionary consolidation, giving it particular symbolic resonance within the revolutionary state and providing political legitimization for the state's existence. Among the most important educational institutions were the UNAM and the IPN. Between them, the two schools dominated

³³ Soledad Loaeza, *Clases Medias y Política en México: La Querrela Escolar, 1959-1963* (México, D.F.: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Internacionales, 1988), 13.

³⁴ Daniel A. Morales-Gómez and Carlos Alberto Torres, *The State, Corporatist Politics, and Educational Policy Making in Mexico* (New York : Praeger, 1990), 12.

the enrollment in higher education particularly for Mexico City but, in fact, for the whole of Mexico.

The UNAM was created in 1910 during the Porfiriato with the aim of creating a secular and nationalist system of higher education, freed from the restrictions of the Catholic Church and able to promote liberalism within the country. Officially granted autonomy in 1929, the UNAM was made fully autonomous in 1933 when President Abelardo Rodríguez (1932-1934) withdrew almost all federal funding, claiming that the UNAM refused to support the goals of the Mexican Revolution. Recognizing the importance of education and the political power of the alumni, President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) arranged a compromise two years later. In return for regular federal funds, the University would accept the appointment of a Cárdenista rector, thus marking the start of a state-education rapprochement in which the University, while considered “autonomous,” was still supported by the state. During the student uprising, the state used its power over the university leadership and sponsored student groups known as *porras*.

By 1968 the University offered both professional and secondary degrees and was intended to foster a sense of national identity and political consensus thereby promoting national unity. As such, university administrators and state officials considered the UNAM to be comprised of a fairly homogenous community with little conflict of interest, premised solely on the disinterested transmission of knowledge. Thus, politics were to remain firmly outside the scope of daily university life. In this way, any political activity

was considered to have extra-university origins.³⁵ Political engagement was believed to be instigated by those outside the university system, intent on using the school for their own ends.³⁶ Despite this, the University trained a disproportionately large number of politicians, funneling their students into the PRI. Indeed, President Miguel Alemán is reported to have said “How good it is that the University students have now come to the presidency,” filling his cabinet with former UNAM students and building University City.³⁷

In contrast to the UNAM, the IPN was intended to train workers and technicians and was under the direct control of the state. Founded by Cárdenas in 1937, the president was responsible for the appointment of the rector and could do so with little or no consultation with the IPN’s academic community. The school was intended to form highly trained workers and technicians, beginning with the National School of Builders and the School of Engineers, Mechanics, and Electricians. With the aim of providing an education for the children of workers and campesinos, students of the IPN had a reputation for a far more militant class background and a greater propensity for political activity than their university counterparts.³⁸ Their protests often led them into conflict

³⁵ Imanol Ordorika, *Power and Politics in University Governance: Organization and Change at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2003), 64.

³⁶ Odorika, 197.

³⁷ Javier Mendoza Rojas, *Los Conflictos de la UNAM en el siglo XX* (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Sobre la Universidad, 2001), 111.

³⁸ Alberto Domingo, “El IPN: comienzos,” *Siempre!*, December 21, 2000. There is a paucity of scholarship on the IPN particularly when compared with that on the UNAM or

with the police and the military, both of whom had long made their presence felt on the campus, an interference from which the UNAM was protected by its guarantee of autonomy. Indeed, as one student flier phrased it: “The Uni’s no longer a little miss,” implicitly comparing the university to the greater radicalism and militancy of the IPN.³⁹ The clear difference in the objectives of the two schools, the UNAM as the home to Mexico’s intellectuals and politicians, and the IPN providing for the technical needs of the nation, would result in an ongoing and at times ferocious rivalry between the two institutions. Among the notable trends of 1968, was the ability of movement participants to cross over this established divide.

Not only did President Lázaro Cárdenas establish the IPN, he also consolidated the educational system, particularly higher education. He increased state investment in education during his presidency.⁴⁰ Most of the new money went to rural schools and the promotion of a more “socialist” form of education. Cárdenas’ highly popular reforms, which preceded the wartime expansion of WWII, fostered a sense of nationalism and community. He instituted a wide-ranging program of social assistance, including scholarships and cafeterias to help low income students. At the UNAM, tuition fees, already low, remained so. These programs and policies were aimed at developing

the rural schools. This may reflect what Salvador Martínez Della Rocca called the IPN’s “aura of being second class to the professional school.” See, Salvador Martínez Della Rocca, *Estado y Universidad en Mexico: Historia de los movimientos estudiantiles en la UNAM* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés, Editores, 1986), 23.

³⁹ Archivo General de la Nación, Dirección Federal de Seguridad hereafter referred to as AGN, DFS), Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 15. Aug. 9, 1968.

⁴⁰ Morales, 15.

national values and promoting greater equality in terms of wealth and labor. They were intended to develop a strong culture of political and economic independence. As such, they incorporated a key sector of the population into the Cárdenista practice of mass politics. Building on reforms made during the Cárdenas years, post-war Mexico fostered a greater state-intellectual alliance, attempting to move away from “socialist” forms of education, and to consolidate support among Mexico’s small but emergent middle and consumer class whose development was very much bound to the University system with its greater opportunities for alumni.

Both UNAM and the IPN felt the effects of the nation’s rapid growth from 1940 to 1970. This, combined with growth of the urban population, meant that the majority of the country’s students could be found in the capital city. By 1960, Mexico’s entire urban population was 17,700,000, over half of the country’s total population of 34,920,000, showing that Mexico had become an urban nation.⁴¹ Within this, Mexico City was the largest urban center. The dual processes of industrialization and urbanization meant greater demand for educational opportunities, and by 1960 the capital’s educational system had grown enormously. The nation’s student population grew considerably from 1960 to 1970, beginning the decade with 75,788 students in higher education and ending it with 251,054.⁴² From 1950 to 1960, the nation’s population of students in higher

⁴¹ Ordorika, 54.

⁴² Mendoza Rojas, 121 and 143.

education increased from 32,000 to 76,000 enrollees with 66,000 in the UNAM alone.⁴³ Of the students in the UNAM, 11,000 were women, a number that gradually increased over the decade.⁴⁴ The UNAM was also home to the bulk of the nation's postgraduate students with 75 percent of these attending the university in 1970.⁴⁵ One contemporary observer noted the largely middle class nature of the student population in 1968, asserting that the student movement followed these demographics with approximately 3 percent of the students from campesino families, 15 percent from working class families, and the remainder from "low, middle, or high bourgeoisie."⁴⁶ Since university tuition and fees remained low throughout the century, a university or technical degree was widely accessible, particularly in the urbanized regions of the country. In this way, the revolutionary party established a mass base of support for its politics while promoting social order through notions of democracy and inclusion, although, at times, these were sacrificed in practice.

Within this system of corporatist politics, education served multiple functions. It provided fertile ground for the development of a political and technical class, often

⁴³ Mendoza Rojas, *Los Conflictos de la UNAM en el siglo XX*, 100. While the effects of the student movement were felt beyond the capital city, the concentration of students in the Federal District made it the key site of the mobilization. For an analysis of the student movement beyond Mexico City, see Erik Lee, *Tambien pasó aquí! : Student movements in Sonora and Sinaloa, 1966-1974* (Master's Thesis, University of California, San Diego, 2001).

⁴⁴ Mendoza Rojas, *Los Conflictos de la UNAM en el siglo XX*, 129.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 101.

⁴⁶ Ramirez, *El movimiento estudiantil de México*, 29.

incorporated into the state apparatus. Indeed, from the 1940s onward, six of Mexico's presidents were schooled at the UNAM.⁴⁷ The incorporation of students and intellectuals from Mexico's advanced educational centers was an important method of promoting political consensus and eliminating dissatisfaction among these groups. Given the mandate for university autonomy, the educational system preserved the appearance of a liberal democratic arena in the face of an increasingly authoritarian regime.⁴⁸

Taken together, the two institutions, UNAM and IPN, covered considerable ground within the capital city. The UNAM, located in the southern part of the city was the largest campus in Latin America. University City, the main campus, was built in the 1950s and is adorned with murals by some of Mexico's most notable artists such as David Alfaro Siqueiros and Juan O'Gorman. This along with the Olympic Stadium, home to the 1968 Olympics, made the UNAM an attractive tourist site during the 1968 Games. While the UNAM was located in the south of the city, the IPN held prime real estate in the historic center of the city. Similarly, the UNAM's preparatory schools and many student homes were found near Tlatelolco, the historic site where the massacre occurred as well as in the city center. In 1968, Tlatelolco would be of interest to tourists looking to experience Mexico's pre-Columbian and colonial past, and it was also home to new high-rise apartment buildings, symbolizing the modernity accessible to the middle

⁴⁷ These include Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Miguel de la Madrid, José López Portillo, Luis Echeverría, Miguel Alemán, and Alfonso Portillo.

⁴⁸ As Imanol Ordorika has shown in his book, *Power and Politics in University Governance: Organization and Change at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, such autonomy was considerably restricted by repeated state intervention, particularly in regard to the appointment of university Rectors.

class, many of whom sent their children to the University. The confluence of events that brought students into high tourist areas as the Olympics approached would generate considerable concern among state officials, and this use of space is essential to understanding the violent state response to the mobilization.

Throughout the “economic miracle,” from the Cárdenas presidency to the early 1970s, the state established itself in an authoritarian form under the leadership of the PRI. The PRI, as the official party of the Revolution, would rule Mexico for seventy-one years. By mid-century, Mexican politicians claimed to have fostered political stability and economic growth under the aegis of a modernizing, industrializing, and nationalist party. As such, politicians highlighted the modernization, growth of the middle class, and development of consumerism that occurred on this watch. The PRI also consolidated its power through the mobilization of popular support among different sectors of the citizenry through state-sponsored unions and federations. This allowed party members to assert that the PRI best represented all sectors of society as the party of revolution and acted on behalf of the populace as a whole. Reforms were typically dependent on the president, and populist politics reinforced the presidency as the key arena of political power in Mexico. As part of the PRI’s “revolutionary” agenda, politicians made promises of social and economic reform intended to benefit major portions of the population. At the same time, during this period, the party supported the development of private enterprise and courted foreign investment, especially from the United States. Yet while Mexico industrialized, it remained underdeveloped and the distribution of wealth

was among the most unequal in Latin America.⁴⁹ In short, party members and politicians curtailed the social promises of the Revolution to promote growth and industrialization.

The failure of the party to make good on the revolutionary promises of social reform did not go unnoted, and different sectors of Mexican society protested the material inequality and the authoritarian nature of politics. Powerful labor strikes developed by the late 1950s, and the next decade would see the rise of social discontent among the middle class. What began as material demands in both the countryside and the cities would develop into larger political clashes. When railway workers and teachers both launched unrelated strikes in 1958, arguing that they should receive a bigger piece of the economic gains incurred during the “miracle,” the state responded with violence, breaking up demonstrations, making arrests, and imprisoning labor leaders. Similarly, in the countryside, protesting workers, led by organizer Rubén Jaramillo, were met with state violence. By the mid-1960s, protesting doctors and, later, students would find their public expressions of political discontent countered with state violence. The Tlatelolco massacre was the largest and most public of a series of state attempts to violently repress political protests.

During this period, Mexico was increasingly tied to foreign income as a means of accelerating growth, despite the continued use of nationalist, revolutionary rhetoric that rejected a foreign economic presence in Mexico. As these events unfolded, education, both in terms of policy and ideological assumptions, was closely tied to Mexico’s

⁴⁹ Between 1960 and 1976 the economy grew at an average rate of 6% annually but employment grew at a rate of only at 2.3%.

economic development. In the decades preceding the student movement, educational policies were based on the idea that the effective way to reach stable economic growth was for educational change to keep pace with rapid industrialization.⁵⁰ The changes that took place in education during this period occurred in the context of a stable political system and widespread economic growth. The educational system grew both in terms of enrollment and number of schools. In fact, from 1945 to 1968, government subsidies for the UNAM increased 774 percent while student enrollment grew 342.8 percent.⁵¹

Yet the growth in enrollment and funding masked deeper inequalities that were felt by both faculty and students alike. From 1940 to 1970, real salaries for faculty dropped by approximately 60 percent, meaning that their salaries had not risen in real terms since the 1920s.⁵² Students, instructors, and administrators felt the pinch, so to speak, despite Mexico's burgeoning economy. Their ability to participate in the rewards of such growth was in jeopardy, a threat to the university-state alliance. By the end of the 1960s, the "miracle" was on the wane, and the systemic tensions became more tangible. While the economic context had changed considerably from the early days of the Revolution, the revolutionary idea of education as social glue remained entrenched. By the 1970s, there was unemployment, inflation, import dependency, and a worsening

⁵⁰ Moralies, xiv.

⁵¹ Imanol Ordorika, *Power and Politics in University Governance: Organization and Change at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2003), 216.

⁵² Morales, 21.

distribution of wealth. These three groups, students, faculty, and administrators, would be active participants in the movement of 1968.

The modernizing policies of the state during the “miracle” greatly influenced the educational system, setting the stage for the student movement. During this period, a “pact” emerged between educators and students on the one hand and the state on the other. By expanding enrollment, schools were to provide human resources, preparing an educated group for the work force, while also creating a more modern populace acclimated to changing economic conditions and cognizant of their purchasing power. Policy makers assumed that education would be a vehicle for economic growth, political modernization, and liberal reforms.⁵³ In turn, the concessions offered by the state to its educated citizens, in terms of employment, resulted in the expansion of the middle class who saw education as a key to social mobility. This allowed for the cultivation of increasingly international cultural “tastes,” consumption, and work opportunities. The result was the massification of the school system, particularly the UNAM, with a population that held high expectations upon graduation. These expectations were directly linked to the vociferous outburst of student discontent in 1968.

This is indicative of a mid-century process whereby the educational system became increasingly tied to the consolidated power of Mexico’s authoritarian regime. There were no tuition or fee increases from 1951 to 1968. In return, the president exercised great power over the appointment of the rector, with the understanding that any student protests would remain confined within the university. In other words, autonomy

⁵³ Morales, xiii.

entailed considerable depoliticization. As Imanol Ordorika has argued, this symbolized a pact between the Mexican state and urban intellectuals in which the latter were awarded a relatively autonomous political space in exchange for loyalty to the state.⁵⁴ The result of this alliance was that the government, while accepting some student protests, expected support of their policies, or at least complicity, and many students, following graduation, counted on rewards in terms of employment, both in government and in a stable, growing economy.

The perception that the university could be a vehicle for social mobility marked the PRI as a party of social reform and improvement. Indeed, Gilberto Guevara Niebla argues that within the revolutionary state, education replaced the ideology of class struggle, portraying the schools as autonomous from social class, open to all, and providing opportunities for all regardless of class background.⁵⁵ This elision obscured the profound importance of class within the educational system, both in terms of students' future employment possibilities and the effects of Mexico's development policies on the general populace.

Beyond providing the human resources and social mobility, education served as an important means of political socialization, fostering notions of citizenship along with national and political identity. As a key group in Mexico's incipient consumer class, students "assisted the state in its efforts to redefine and change values, attitudes, and sociopolitical behaviors and to influence the collective performance of individuals as

⁵⁴ Ordorika, 69.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Ordorika, 56.

producers and citizens.”⁵⁶ The relationship between education, the promise of middle class status, and the assumed political participation of students, were closely intertwined in Mexico and undergirded the expectations of students during Sixty-Eight.

The educational system as an “autonomous” zone, free from government interference was crucial to the events of 1968. Most obviously, the presence of military and police troops on educational campuses blatantly violated the constitutional mandate for autonomy. In a more subtle manner, the “freedom” of the schools allowed for state-sponsored groups to label dissident voices as “reactionary,” “anti-Mexican,” and foreign. This was done while maintaining the illusion that such determinations were made outside of official state practice, and that the student movement was legitimately challenged by such organizations, preserving the veneer of separate state politics.

The Golden Age: The Limits to Growth and Mid-Century Social Protest

Because of the historical importance of education within the Revolutionary state, significant promise was embedded in the popular understanding of education with considerable effect on individual and familial decisions to pursue higher education. It was seen as a way to benefit personally from Mexico’s economic development. Political leaders promised increased national wealth, higher standards of education and greater access to these, in short, a higher standard of living. Pablo González Casanova, a

⁵⁶ Morales, xiii.

sociologist and Rector of the UNAM from 1970-1972, stated: “In today’s Mexico, which is being industrialized and urbanized, there is permanent social mobility. The peasants of yesterday are today’s workers, and the workers’ children can be professionals.”⁵⁷ By 1968, education was one of the most important revolutionary symbols, believed to confer upward mobility and social status. Students thought that their years of higher education held the promise of a better future for themselves and their families.

Despite this widespread belief, mid-century Mexican economics were in transition with important consequences for graduates. By the late 1950s, the Mexican educational system produced large numbers of graduates who were unable to find professional employment. As David Lorey has shown, the education of professionals and the employment of professionals rose steadily until 1960 and then began a gradual decline.⁵⁸ Thus the ability of the Mexican economy to absorb college graduates did not keep pace with the number of students produced. Yet the state and the educational system continued to promise upward mobility through professionalization, and the system of higher education maintained this promise in order to contain the social and political pressures stemming from rapid development.

The university and institutions of advanced education continued to accept large numbers of students, disguising growing levels of unemployment in the 1960s. The number of awarded degrees continued to grow, yet the number of jobs did not. The result

⁵⁷ David E. Lorey, *The University System and Economic Development in Mexico Since 1929* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 6.

⁵⁸ Lorey, 77.

was that from the late 1950s onward, students found fewer jobs as professionals, and those trained for the professions were more likely to accept work as technicians, making it more difficult for students with technical degrees to find employment. During the 1960s, the GDP growth meant new jobs, yet the creation of professional jobs did not keep pace with those at the lower occupational levels.⁵⁹ Furthermore, from the late 1930s through the late 1950s, many university graduates had been employed by the state, thus masking low demand in the private sector. Government employment in nationalized industries such as the rail system, petroleum, and electricity all required a certain number of experts.

While access to education coupled with economic development occurred throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s during Mexico's industrialization, by the 1960s the economic landscape had changed. The students in 1968 were attuned to such a shift. That the student movement would occur in the context of rapid economic growth with a high GDP appears unusual. The nation's reliance on imported technology and capital goods resulted in a pattern of foreign investment which may have provided educational stimulus and professional employment opportunities in countries exporting to Mexico, but failed to do so in Mexico.⁶⁰ For example, from 1950 to 1980, the growth rate of university students exceeded the growth rate of jobs by a factor of roughly two.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Lorey, 92-93.

⁶⁰ Lorey, 93-94.

⁶¹ Lorey, 144.

In the years prior to the student movement, the university system diversified its enrollment, admitted more students, gave greater government subsidies, and thereby camouflaged the higher levels of unemployment among the nation's youth. The university also opened its doors to students from a greater number of working class families, as well as students from Mexico's provinces, thus maintaining the myth of social mobility. The changing character of the student body certainly had an effect on the student movement. In short, changes in Mexico's educational system and the growth in student protests reflected deep social and economic change.

The economic foundations of the student movement have been largely invisible, given that the movement occurred in a context of considerable prosperity and economic growth along with political stability. While the GDP was strong, wealth was increasingly concentrated at the top. During this period, Mexico was among the Latin American countries with the highest levels of inequality in the distribution of wealth, with a significant portion of the population living in poverty. Yet because of its steady growth, Mexico was heralded internationally as a model for third world development. This was coupled with Mexico's perceived political stability. All of this occurred under the leadership of the PRI, which exerted control from the local to the national levels. Policy makers promoted strategies intended to foster modernization, consumerism, and the development of a middle class, asserting that these would bring prosperity to all sectors.

The underbelly to this Golden Age is revealed in the number of mid-century protests that challenged the PRI, both in the countryside and in Mexico City. To many, the repression of the student movement of 1968 was perhaps among the most shocking

and visible acts of state violence given that the brutality was directed against middle class students, and not just workers and campesinos. This was compounded by the fact that the repression occurred prior to the Olympic Games and in sight of the international press. Given the prior history of protests, the student movement of 1968 should be understood as part of a series of mid-century protests such as the Jaramillista movement in Morelos, the teachers' strikes throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the railroad workers' strikes of the late 1950s, and the doctors' strike of the mid-1960s.⁶² Invariably, the state responded with violence, imprisoning leaders, dispersing marches, occupying buildings, and refusing to allow citizens to gather publically. Taken together, these protests reveal deep

⁶² These movement all ended in state violence, deployed in similar fashion to event in 1968. For campesinos see, Christopher Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos: politics, identity, and agrarian struggle in postrevolutionary Michoacán, 1920-1935* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) and Tanalís Padilla, *Rural resistance in the land of Zapata : the Jaramillista Movement and the myth of the Pax Priísta, 1940-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). For the railway workers strike see, Antonio Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero en México, 1958-1959; de la conciliación a la lucha de clases* (Mexico City: Era 1972), Mario Gill, *Los ferrocarrileros* (Mexico City: Editorial Extemporáneos, 1971) and José Luis Reyna, "El conflicto ferrocarrilero: De la inmovilidad a la acción," *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*, vol.22, (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1978.). For teachers movements, see Joe Foweraker, *Popular mobilization in Mexico : the teachers' movement, 1977-87* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), O'Neill Blacker-Hanson, "La Lucha Siege! (The Struggle Continues!): Teacher Activism in Guerrero and the Continuum of Democratic Struggle in Mexico," Ph.D diss., University of Washington, 2005, and Aurora Loyo Brambila, *El movimiento magisterial de 1958 in México* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1979). For the violence of the PRI see, Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *1968: los archivos de la violencia* (Mexico City: Reforma, 1998) and *La charola: una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México* (Mexico City: Hechos Confiables, 2001), Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, Luis Alberto Fierro, trans. *In the shadow of the Mexican revolution: contemporary Mexican history, 1910-1989* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), Barry Carr, *La izquierda mexicana a través del siglo XX* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1996) and *Marxism & communism in twentieth-century Mexico* (Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

dissatisfaction with the PRI and its failure to make good on earlier political promises, as well as the desire of disparate groups to gain access to the rewards of the “miracle.” They also reveal that violence and terror were employed by the state long before 1968. Rather than an aberration of a frightened and irrational government, the October 2nd massacre was part of an ongoing state strategy to silence dissent through repression.

Schools were a key site for social protest,⁶³ and Mexico’s system of higher education experienced a series of conflicts that grew in number by the middle of the century.⁶⁴ Students demanded new forms of professional training, celebrated the Cuban Revolution, protested the raising of fees, decried the war in Vietnam, and struck to protest a hike in bus fares during which students hijacked hundreds of city buses.⁶⁵ By

⁶³ Mary Kay Vaughan outlines the importance of educational institutions to movements of resistance arguing that they provided the tools for contesting state policies and helped to create the civil society that would eventually render obsolete the political monopoly of the PRI. See, Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (University of Arizona Press, 1997), 200. In this instance, they also provided the physical and intellectual space for dissent within an authoritarian regime because of the at least nominal commitment to liberal democracy within the system of higher education.

⁶⁴ Soledad Loaeza argues that movements for educational reform were essential to the development of middle class protest in mid-century Mexico because they were the only movements that touched on the principle elements of nationalist and liberal consensus. See, Soledad Loaeza, *Clases Medias y Política en México: La Querrela Escolar, 1959-1963* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Internacionales, 1988), 184. Similarly, Vaughan argues that schools became the arena for intense, often violent negotiations over power, culture, knowledge, and rights. See, Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 7.

⁶⁵ For an overview of student protest in the 1950s and 1960s, see Salvador Martínez Della Roca, *Estado y Universidad en México: Historia de los movimientos estudiantiles en la UNAM* (Mexico City: J. Boldó i Climent, 1986). He outlines the protests that occurred throughout the country, highlighting the UNAM strikes in 1966 and 1967, arguing that these indicated the broad dissatisfaction of the middle classes.

1963, the *Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos* (National Center of Democratic Students)⁶⁶ was formed and was shortly followed by the radical group, 23 de Septiembre, making notions of democracy and revolution more central within student politics.⁶⁷ That protest in the schools, widespread by 1968, was a key development bucking the historical potential of education to co-opt dissenting leaders and eliminate political dissatisfaction among the middle classes.⁶⁸

This discontent was fueled by the success of the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The Revolution ushered in a period of hope throughout Latin America, making the possibility for radical political change seem real and immediate. Along with a shift in political consciousness, Cuba's new regime organized transcontinental conferences and meetings intended to foster solidarity in the region. Some participants in the Mexican student movement of 1968 had attended gatherings in Cuba.

The Cuban Revolution also engendered considerable fear among elites and politicians throughout the region. The United States, of course, viewed the revolution with alarm and tracked the region closely for similar developments elsewhere. Fears of

⁶⁶ Hereafter, CNED.

⁶⁷ Gilberto Guevara Niebla lists these, along with labor protest, as among the most important factors that influenced the radicalization of student politics. See, Gilberto Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle. Crónica del movimiento estudiantil mexicano* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1988), 36. Ramón Ramírez sites similar influences on the Sixty-Eight movement. See, Ramón Ramírez, *El movimiento estudiantil de México (Julio/Diciembre de 1968)* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1969), 25.

⁶⁸ On the importance of this development, see Daniel A. Morales-Gómez and Carlos Alberto Torres, *The State, Corporatist Politics, and Educational Policy Making in Mexico* (New York : Praeger, 1990), 51.

communist insurgency permeated governments, and Mexican leaders feared the presence of communists in their own country. The state response to the Sixty-Eight student movement and other contemporaneous movements must be understood in light of these global political developments.

For students in Sixty-Eight, the previously mentioned miners', railroad workers', teachers', and doctors' strikes as well as the earlier university movement of 1966 and student movements in the 1960s in the states of Morelia, Sonora and Puebla served as predecessors. Moreover, while student in name, the movement encompassed significant numbers from these other groups who brought their experiences of past political participation to bear on the mobilization. The movement gave voice to the grievances of many sectors of society, developed over the previous decades. What emerged was a mass political movement with a wide-ranging agenda.

The student mobilization was primarily a movement for popular democracy based on constitutional principles and the enforcement of these principles. That being said, the movement was a heterogeneous one that incorporated many groups under its banner: communist, Christian democrats, liberals, Trotskyites, Maoists, Guevarists, socialists, and others. Together they presented a loose but unified agenda, embodied in the six-point petition. This framework created for a simple and cohesive message while also allowing participants to behave in a somewhat spontaneous, inconsistent, and heterogeneous fashion.

While ideologically diffuse, movement participants emphasized the Constitution of 1917 and individual and collective rights, most particularly the rights to free

association and freedom of thought, the right to protest and gather peaceably, liberty for political prisoners, and an end to articles of the Penal Code that violated these rights.

Throughout the movement, participants brought into relief multiple aspects of the Mexican political and economic system. Among these, was the increasing dependence on foreign investment, resulting in accusations of an imperialist state.⁶⁹

Movement participants also questioned the capability of the PRI to govern on behalf of all sectors of society, calling into doubt notions of national unity and the ability of the state to reconcile the interests of workers and industrialists. In doing so, they questioned the notion of a Pax Priísta, and challenged the assumptions concerning the social and political stability as they underlined the state's frequent resort to coercion. They noted that workers and campesinos had little say in state-led organizations, the absence of a free press, and the proliferation of unrepresentative bureaucracies. They also mocked the president, condemned his policies, and moved dissent well beyond the bounds of the university. Intellectuals and large numbers of citizens knew that the PRI did not believe in and would never sponsor a turn towards truly democratic practices. As the state met the students with violence, the importance of civil liberties took on greater significance and radicalized certain segments of the mobilization.

⁶⁹ In fact, from 1955 to 1965 total net foreign income on investment increased by 195.1% with the United States dominating foreign investment. See, Morales, 21.

Given the participants emphasis on democracy, movement organization followed a fairly democratic model.⁷⁰ When the student strike committees and the CNH officially formed, only two weeks into the movement, between August 8th and August 10th, they began with elections in every school and faculty. From these, 210 representatives were elected, three from each of the seventy schools and faculties. Students from the UNAM, the IPN, the Normal School, and the National School of Agriculture at Chapingo participated with the UNAM and the IPN, forming the dominant presence in the movement.⁷¹ While centered in Mexico City, students received and sent ambassadors and letters of support from their colleagues in Veracruz, Sinaloa, Puebla, Tabasco, Morelos, Guadalajara, Nuevo León, and Morelia.

Within each school and faculty, students formed brigades, usually comprised of five to six students who were the primary means of contact between movement leadership, the student body, and the general public. The brigades spread the message of the movement and received directives from the CNH and the strike committees of the schools and faculties. They distributed propaganda, painted slogans on walls and buses, and talked to people in the streets, going to movie theaters, plazas, bus terminals, markets, churches, and anywhere people gathered in large numbers. They brought an awareness

⁷⁰ While leaders were democratically elected, it should be noted that organization of the mobilization followed pre-existing structures – namely, those of the state-sponsored educational system.

⁷¹ Movement participant and chronicler, Ramón Ramírez, asserted that there were approximately 200,000 participants from the schools of Mexico City. Students from the UNAM accounted for 90,000, the IPN for 70,000, and the remained from the Normal Schools and the National School of Agriculture at Chapingo. See, *El movimiento estudiantil de Mexico (Julio/Diciembre de 1968)*, p. 22.

of the movement to the public. While the organization was largely student-led, they joined with workers and campesinos, who formed their own brigades or sent delegations to the demonstrations. In its short life span of approximately 120 days, the movement grew rapidly, from a mobilization comprised of students to a more diverse and inclusive mass movement for democratization.

This dissertation will examine the daily movements of participants in order to better understand the nature of the mobilization and the ways in which citizens protested. Because Sixty-Eight is considered to have shaped the politics of a generation, I also look to the effects of the mobilization on political consciousness and identity. I begin with an examination of student politics that investigates the importance of youth and generational differences, as well as the ways in which participants sought to exceed these limitations. Chapter 2 describes the concrete ways in which students sought to turn their mobilization into a mass movement by incorporating workers, doctors, and campesinos. As the Olympics approached, the President and other leaders viewed such developments with increasing alarm. Chapter 3 investigates the nature of confrontations between state agents and movement participants, examining the ways in which the state deployed violence throughout the movement. It also highlights the level of disruption generated by the protests and the types of violent behavior found among the students themselves, despite ubiquitous claims that the protests were peaceful.

The student movement is typically heralded as a moment of considerable change in social norms, and the final chapters examine two of these. In Chapter 4, I look at the ways that gender shaped the experiences of movement participants, as well as the

importance of the movement in shaping gender norms in Mexico in 1968 and thereafter. Given the rise of “youth” or “student” as an international category of identity, the final chapter focuses on the tension between the national and international aspects of 1968 Mexico. While touching on an important aspect of the political identities of participants, the chapter also highlights the “global” nature of 1968 as well as the limitations of a “transnational ’68.”

Chapter 1

The Meaning and Practice of a *Student Politics*

The historic relationship between education, youth, and radicalism in Mexico City, and Mexico more broadly, is an important one that influenced the development of the 1968 student movement. While youth and student were important categories within the mobilization, participants sought to exceed these, creating a more diverse undertaking that moved beyond a “generation” of change. Participants drew on the country’s long history of cooperation between intellectuals and activists, and students repeatedly invoked their role of “public intellectual” to justify their actions: they spoke on behalf of the people. They were not alone in this role and were joined by other artists and intellectuals who criticized the government for its failure to make good on the Revolutionary promises of social and economic justice. Students were very much a part of this public critique of the Mexican state and, unlike the state-led unions, had sufficient autonomy from officialdom to take their grievances into the streets. Indeed, as Jean Franco describes in her writing on literary production in Cold War Latin America, it was “the outsider status claimed by writers that gave them a critical space, independent of the state.”¹ Students had a simultaneous feeling of belonging and exclusion that led them to believe that they should speak for change on behalf of the larger populace. Trained to believe that they had a stake in Mexico, they found that their possibilities for participation were diminished as the “miracle” waned. This notion was vital to the

¹ Jean Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 6. Franco describes a process in which artists became the arbiters of taste among urban youth, promoting a feeling that the time was ripe for change.

formation of the movement, providing students with the feeling that they occupied a unique position from which to critique the politics of Mexico.

Angel Rama described a similar process earlier in the century during which intellectuals like Justo Sierra and Mariano Azuela felt they belonged to the “city of letters,” but were not admitted to the inner circle of cultural authority, resulting in powerful criticisms of the state.² Rama outlined how the revolutionary generation had felt:

... most citizens of the nation (if not all) possessed an irrefutable right to education – a tenant that ... tacitly suggested the redistribution of wealth and thus challenged the unrestricted enrichment of the elite ... the young champions of this cause carefully avoided explicit economic demands, taking instead the rhetorical high ground with expressions of lofty ideals, personal disinterest, and commitment to social justice, while accusing those in power – with a vehemence seldom equaled before or after – of the most scandalous greed and corruption.³

Students assumed that they held a unique social and political position from which to argue for change. In their view, this was a responsibility and an obligation that they bore. At a demonstration in CU, one student speaker stated: ...liberties have been suspended in Mexico for a long time, but the people don't have the ability to protest these acts of repression ... because of fear of the Government ... Before these affronts to the dignity and democracy of the people we can't remain on the margins of the student movement.”⁴

² Angel Rama, John Charles Chasteen, trans, *The Lettered City* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 23.

³ Rama, 101.

⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 228-240, Aug. 20, 1968.

The uniqueness of their student role lent them legitimacy unattainable by other groups. They had the duty to defend the Constitution and protect the population, eventually drawing them into their movement. During a demonstration on August 20th, a student speaker said that Díaz Ordaz had trampled the civil liberties of many Mexican citizens, and so, “the role of the student is to tell the truth and vindicate the fundamental principles that are guaranteed in the Constitution and that our Revolution has only served to create demagoguery ...”⁵

Movement participants believed that their issues could be expanded to speak to Mexicans in general. At a meeting in the National School of Economy, a student argued, “... this movement has been based in student objectives, [we need] to turn it into a movement of popular vindication and because of this it is the necessity and the obligation of the student body, to actively participate in the political brigades...”⁶ These brigades ran throughout the city, leafleting and holding “lightening strike meetings” to arouse popular support.⁷

During the 1968 mobilization, participants distributed numerous images throughout Mexico City and in the schools of higher education. One shows a human mask with a gun being pulled away to reveal the gorilla beneath, a reference to what the president was often called. In large print the caption reads: “The Police and the Military Kill Your Best Children.” The arm removing the mask has an arrow pointing to it with

⁵Ibid.

⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 246-265, August 8, 1968.

⁷Ibid.

the caption, “Students and the people removing the mask.” The mask and guns are identified with arrows from a caption that reads, “In the service of the C.I.A. and the Government.” In the bottom corner is the Olympic insignia, each circle enclosing a helmeted gorilla and the signature of the CNH.

The metaphor was echoed by one student leader who took the floor during an early demonstration in August and stated, “... we need to use the analytic methods that are available to the students to remove the masks of those students who provoke conflicts in our struggle ...”⁸ Both the words and the metaphor point to one of the central conceptions of the student participants in the 1968 movement: their role as truth tellers, revealers of what was hidden, and giving voice to popular needs.

Schools, whether rural, secondary, or higher, held a critical place within Mexico’s post-revolutionary system. Indeed, Mexico’s system of higher education was founded within the Revolutionary context, with the University intended to promote the training of professionals and the Polytechnic School that of technicians. By the 1960s, the numbers of students enrolled in these schools had increased dramatically as had the urban population. In other words, the capital was home to a growing number of youths who, sensing the economic uncertainty of their futures, felt the time was right for change. They had learned the language of liberal democracy, were already politicized, and had sufficient autonomy to launch a public campaign against the state. The Olympics provided them with a unique opportunity for access to public space. Students believed,

⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 246-265, August 8, 1968.

like those before them, that they occupied a unique space in which they could speak “truths” that others believed but could less safely say.

Much of the scholarship on education locates its role within a sphere of hegemonic practice. In doing so, education is considered the means of creating political consensus and furthering the ideologies of the PRI, invariably terming Sixty-Eight a breakdown of political hegemony. However, much of the scholarship has failed to provide an “on the ground” analysis of these processes and as a result the state is viewed as monolithic and in control of the educational practice. We know that students protested and that this means “something” about the PRI’s political influence, yet the nuances remain unknown. What were the feelings and goals of students as they joined a complex mobilization to challenge state hegemony? While there were some who saw these months of activism as a revolutionary moment, most believed they were working within the nation’s political culture to establish democracy and end the corruption and official impunity that were an everyday part of Mexicans’ lives. They wanted a new political order, but one framed within the values they had been taught, not the ones that were in practice.

While student protests were fairly common during the twentieth century, the magnitude as well as the direct condemnation of state politics and policies in 1968 were relatively new. That the movement drew on a coalition of students from the various schools of Mexico City, despite their long-standing rivalries, and without overt political affiliations, marked a turning point in the chapter of student politics in Mexico City. In 1968, the identity of *student* seemed sufficient to draw large numbers into the

mobilization, including many who hardly fit the description of an enrolled, studious youth. Yet given the broad, although short-lived success of the movement, students alone do not account for its numbers. Rather, students sought to create coalitions and formed an agenda that had little to do with educational reform or their particular educational grievances. They sought to form a movement that was broadly inclusive, and to expand both the meaning of student politics and the types of people who could be incorporated into the movement. In doing so they incorporated, among others, professors, instructors, parents and relatives, workers, campesinos, mothers and wives. Yet the students were not a homogenous group; they were internally divided. Some students condemned other student participants for their lack of patriotism and irresponsibility, and state-sponsored student organizations came into violent conflict with movement participants.

As the movement developed, the identity of students became increasingly political. Students and the state alike gave it new meaning. Students saw their identity as giving them a unique position from which to educate the general populace and to break the state-promoted image of the government as benevolent and progressive. Furthermore, many believed that their youth endowed them with the potential for creating new ideas and practices. The state looked with alarm on this development, and increasingly criminalized the students, resulting in innumerable detentions, arrests, and violent conflict between participants and state agents. Many young people were detained simply because they had the appearance of a student. This process demonstrates one of the key ways in which state officials sought to dismantle the movement, a process that began

with the movement's inception and continued well after the culminating moment of the conflict, the massacre in October, 1968 just before the Olympics.

The politicization of students and youth

Student politics thus became a phenomenon greater than just students. It included “youth;” it often included parents and many idealists and democrats. Given the history of strong ties between higher education and the state, the category of student was often linked to state power. Many considered the role of the student to be one that promoted state authority. The state sponsored university group, *Federación Nacional de Estudiantes Tecnicos* (National Federation of Technical Students),⁹ declared that their group wanted to promote the “fundamental principles in creating a strong, useful, and prepared youth, prepared to better serve the highest designs of the Country.” They called for the elimination from their ranks of the students who “give a bad name to studious youth.”¹⁰ While this role was widely promoted by state-sponsored groups and the educational establishment, the 1968 movement participants redefined the boundaries of serving the nation. A flier circulated in the preparatory schools in early August accused the state of “using the student body for their aims,” mainly serving the “dominant class

⁹ Hereafter, FNET.

¹⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hoja 60-67, August 27, 1968.

and government” through rigged elections and the Olympic showcases.¹¹ Students signaled that would no longer be part of this hypocrisy and would mount a campaign against it.

Student identity provided a “natural” base for collective action. Many connected their studies with the possibility for political action and felt that the goal of academic study was to combine formal knowledge with social action. They raised issues of social justice, of economic abuses, as well as political fraud. They also painted the government as the *comprador* class, serving a national plutocracy and the United States government and North American capitalists. At a meeting on the UNAM campus on August 9th, one teacher argued that “... students go to the Faculty of Law not just to study but also to prepare themselves for life ...”¹² and implied that life had to extend beyond the current careerism. In early August, the UNAM’s Faculty of Law held a largely attended meeting (over 600 students) with the theme, “Struggle While You Study.”¹³ At this meeting, many noted that those who refused to organize were largely “government men.”¹⁴ In August of 1968, at the start of the movement, a flier of the Vocational School 5 declared: “The students of Mexico, who are conscious of the present problem, have united into a single fighting unit.”¹⁵ They attributed the pan-student mobilization to the

¹¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 1-15, Aug. 9, 1968.

¹² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 1-15, Aug. 9, 1968.

¹³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 246-265, August 8, 1968.

¹⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 246-265, August 8, 1968.

¹⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hoja 3-14, August, 1968.

sustained state violence against them, arguing that such a critique should resonate with others, students and non-students alike. Spreading the message that “Today the aggression was against the students, tomorrow it could be against you.”¹⁶

Those in the movement praised the young but welcomed older participants. The prominent writer and left-wing activist, José Revueltas, 54 at the time, asserted: “... comrades, we are young, our Movement is young. Everything we fight for, everything we have to win, everything we struggle for is young and ruled by reason and human dignity. ... You are and we all are, a generation with very special historical traits that distinguish and delimit us precisely from earlier generations.”¹⁷ The word “youth” meant new ways of thinking.

Students consciously drew on this, emphasizing their disagreement with politicians of an earlier generation. A flier from the earliest days of the movement highlighted this:

Youth produces power, the students form the vanguard of a popular movement that seeks a democratic revolution. Everyone should join the armed struggle against our executioners. We will recover the bodies of our assassinated comrades. We will liberate the country from plutocratic imperialism. The youth will go to the barricades and with them the workers and *campesinos* who want to fight for liberty. ... March on to the victory of democracy and the resurgence of Popular Government.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Mexico City, Mexico, Archivo Histórico of the Centro de Estudios Sobre la Universidad of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (hereafter referred to as CESU, UNAM), Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 48, Newspaper article. April 4, 1969.

¹⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hoja 231-242, July 26, 1969.

The flier brought together notions of youth, radicalism, and nationalism, and expressed a conceptualization of politics in which youth was a category of experience and position much like worker or campesino.

Throughout the movement, youth became tied to the category of student, and both were endowed with political significance. In August, students of the Vocational School 5 authored a flier that explained:

The student body of Mexico, aware of the problem at hand, has joined into a single front against the aggression directed toward them by the Government, whose actions demonstrate once again that there are no guarantees for the individual or for the student body. Today the aggression was against students, tomorrow it could be against you.”¹⁹

They argued that they, given the corrupt system, had been forced into political action. At a minimum, they represented themselves, their families, and the nation’s hopes. During a press conference, student leaders outlined the “power of all the students of the Republic” that derived from their parents who supported them and because “students are part of the people, so the people are with their movement ...”²⁰

Participants believed that students had an obligation to be involved in civic life, just like the “men of letters” in the past. During a meeting in the National School of Economics, one student described their position this way, “... the movement has exceeded student objectives, and is now a movement of popular demands, and because of this, the students have a duty to participate actively in the brigades that reach out to the

¹⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hoja 3-14, August, 1968.

²⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 246-265, August 8, 1968.

people.”²¹ The speaker argued that students had to break through the “pacified” nature of state politics to develop a different consciousness in the working population.²²

In many ways the students were right: they had cultural authority. During a press conference in early August, only a few short weeks into the movement, student leaders made clear that more than 150,000 students and professors had joined the cause and were on permanent strike.²³ The Rector of the UNAM aptly gave voice to the University’s identity during a demonstration in August. Addressing a crowd of fifteen thousand in University City, he stated that the student demonstrations revealed the ways in which centers of higher education could respond to the dilemmas of Mexican politics while retaining “the confidence of the people.” The Rector said:

“Never before have I had such pride in being a member of the University. The University community has demonstrated this afternoon the ways in which the advanced centers of culture deserve the support of the public in sustaining the education system and we have also demonstrated that we are capable of self-governance..

He concluded that the actions of the students had set “an example of civic participation for the people of Mexico ...”²⁴ The crowd responded with a standing ovation.

A student, however, argued that the Rector’s speech and organized protest were merely a pretext to keep students in the UNAM separate from their counterparts protesting in the city. Days later, a flier asserted:

²¹Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hoja 3-14, August, 1968.

Comrade student: While our friends from the Polytechnic were beaten by the Army and Police in front of the Monument to the Revolution, we participated in the farce ... organized by the Rector to intervene in the student movement. ... We reject those who would use the students on behalf of the President.

Recognizing the political power of a united student front, between the schools of Mexico City and the nation as a whole, the flier ended with a call for an “independent student movement.”²⁵

The idea of a student alliance was central to the movement, particularly at its outset. Students attempted to bridge the historical divide between the UNAM and the Polytechnic School by asserting the shared identity of all students. Students and professors saw such an alliance as critical to the success of the movement. Given the intense state pressure against the movement, they argued that its survival depended upon as broad a base of participants as possible. Although, eventually, this base and understanding of “student” concerns would widen, initial calls to action focused on a pan-student identity. Given the historic division between the UNAM and the Polytechnic, such an alliance was not immediate or natural, but rather, was repeatedly asserted through calls to action and meetings. Many felt that the students in the Polytechnic School were more radicalized, given its strong working class connections, and feared the UNAM with its strong ties to government. Even so, a *modus vivendi* was developed. Student organizers created a coalition between the largest schools in Mexico City. Drawing together participants from the UNAM, the Polytechnic, and the Normal School, among others, the identity of a politicized student body linked these different institutions. From

²⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hoja 116A-116I, August 2, 1968.

the earliest days of the movement, participants iterated the need for a united student front. Only one week after the start of the movement, a teacher from the UNAM took the floor during a demonstration and asserted that “the students need to remain permanently united ... they have demonstrated that with this unification, they have achieved a student force, sufficiently powerful that it can no longer be contained by bayonets.”²⁶

Along with asserting an alliance of students within Mexico City, movement organizers and participants attempted to create broader connections based on the category of student. Many divisions existed within the student body based on competing institutions, different political parties and affiliations, and ideological positions. Students repeatedly addressed the possibility of divisions and overcoming them; as one speaker during an organization meeting phrased it: “... we have to look to the causes, origins, and consequence ... and decentralize the movement ... and in order to have better representation we should name one person from each political party, because it’s necessary to have the active participation of the student base.”²⁷

Arguing for a pan-student identity that exceeded the bounds of Mexico City, and attempting to place national pressure on the state, students developed brigades to foster support in the provinces. While many students argued that their success would depend on mobilizing throughout the city, others focused on the importance of the provinces, viewing students throughout the Republic as natural allies. Their goal was to establish a national student identity. To this end, members of the National Committee of the

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 1-9, 1968.

Federacion de Estudiantes Socialista Campesino de México (Federation of Socialist Campesino Students of Mexico)²⁸ visited rural schools throughout Mexico, presenting issues and hoping to generate outside support. Schools which chose to support the movement sent delegates to Mexico City.²⁹ The possibilities seemed intoxicating. A student speaker during an early August demonstration declared: "... we have to continue the work of the brigades until we've incorporated all the students in the Federal District and all the students in provinces, so that they too can participate in the Unified National Student Movement, and deal a terrible blow to the *señores* of Government."³⁰ During a meeting in early August, another speaker wanted delegations sent throughout the country to broadcast "the state of things" and the movement's goals.³¹ On that same day in another meeting in the Faculty of Engineering, a student argued for the importance of "the participation of a unified national student body." This, he believed, was the only way to protect themselves from "the repressive forces of the government."³² Days later, during a meeting on August 9th, student organizers announced that their forays into the provinces had met with success and that in "... Oaxaca, Morelos, and San Luis Potosí students have joined the student movement and held protests." The speaker stated that

²⁸ Hereafter, FESCM.

²⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 1-8, 1968.

³⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hojas 116A-116I, August 2, 1968.

³¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 246-265, August 8, 1968.

³² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hojas 116A-116I, August 2, 1968.

students from these states would also be willing to participate in a national student strike.³³

Participants viewed the unification of students as a momentous event, one that assured them of political force. This notion appeared at the very start of the movement. As the movement grew, they would widen their message, but in the earliest days, students found power in their university identity. One student in early August summed up the situation, "... the Government is in a difficult situation, because they don't have the luxury of attacking anyone, now that they know the students are united ... and have the active participation of professors and students of the Universities and technological schools of the provinces ..."³⁴

The dream remained even after the October 2nd massacre. At a meeting of approximately 600 students in the National School of Economics, one speaker asserted that the unprecedented achievement of the movement was "... the physical and moral unification of students from the University, the Polytechnic, the Normal School, and other institutions of education throughout the country ...". He claimed that this was the "base" from which they would "win great battles because it breaks the traditional hold of the Government whose organisms intervene against the power of the student."³⁵ At a meeting in August, a student asserted that now that the students were united, it was "... time to show them that to play at politics with the students will be disastrous, because we

³³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hojas 1-15, Aug. 9, 1968.

³⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 95-105, Aug. 7, 1968.

³⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 1-9, 1968.

will in no way let them use us as instruments for their personal goals.”³⁶ Similarly, during a meeting in which students discussed a large scale demonstration that had occurred the day before, one participant said that “... it was a powerful blow to the President of the Republic, who never imagined that the students were going to rebel ... now any student who is beaten will be supported by all of those who are trying to awaken the sentiment of struggle and rebellion in the people.” He asserted that they would continue to go to streets to fight the state and to “... surprise the Government with the unification of the students ...”³⁷ At a demonstration following the October 2nd massacre, a student from the National School of Agriculture stated: “... the students have demonstrated that they can win the streets,” and because of this, must continue their work with the popular classes. He ended with cries of long live the Constitution, the student movement, and the “popular student union.”³⁸

Organizers and propagandists also turned to parents’ organizations, many of them already in existence, as well as to individual parents to gain their support on behalf of the students. While these attempts met with mixed results, parents proved to both support and oppose the movement. Movement organizers saw the need for wider support, and rapidly expanded the understanding of a “student” politics to include its many possible sources of support and alliance. Graffiti in the Preparatory School 1 demonstrated this

³⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hojas 3-14, August, 1968.

³⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 1-9, 1968.

³⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 1-8, 1968.

notion: “People you should consider your youth, here many were killed and later disappeared, these could have been your children.”³⁹

Many parents enthusiastically participated in the movement, giving the mobilization a multi-generational nature. The parent of a student participant gave voice to his reasons for supporting the protest with these words:

... the student movement represents progress for Mexico, now that the students have a greater awareness and desire for struggle than those before; the student body will not conform to what the Government wants them to voluntarily do ... all parents should support the movement, since it's not just their children who are affected but rather the people in general.⁴⁰

This is exactly the attitude movement organizers hoped parents and relatives would take.

Indeed, the CNH repeatedly broadcast the inclusive nature aspect of the mobilization, asserting to the press in August that “the force of the students of the Republic, includes Student committees in the capitol as well as throughout the country ... the Parents’ Association support their children and are with the student movement ... and consider it their own.”⁴¹ Parents asserted their “right” to involvement in terms of maintaining the “complete cleanliness of the movement” and keeping it free from outside agitators and violent provocateurs.⁴² Thus, parents served, among other purposes, as a

³⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 1-9, 1968.

⁴⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 1-6, 1968.

⁴¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 246-265, August 8, 1968

⁴² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 1-6, 1968.

form of protection.⁴³ Many felt that the alliance with broader groups, beyond the usual “student” suspects, was a natural alliance. As a flier from early August indicates, “People of Mexico: you gave us the University, now help us defend its autonomy.” The flier went on to say, “Mexico, we believe in you, now believe in us.”⁴⁴

The uniqueness of the student role lay in the relationship of the educational system, especially the UNAM, to the Mexican state. Long-standing ties between schools and the Mexican state granted students a privileged position within Mexico, and indeed, many members of the PRI leadership were alumni of the UNAM. While there is a long history of strikes at the UNAM, the degree and breadth of the 1968 mobilization heralded a change in these relations. Rather than supporting state agendas, large sectors of the student body sought to discredit the government before an international audience.

Moreover, the importance of education within the framework of the Mexican Revolution granted students a position of social privilege. Seen and touted as a symbol of the viability and success of the Revolution, the government’s need for professionals gave the students the prestige they would turn against it. At a meeting on August 7th, a student argued they were the ones charged to tell the truth and “destroy the lies” of state-intimidation.⁴⁵ Students could also draw upon the “autonomy” of the university, ironically developed by conservative students who despised the left-wing actions of President Lázaro Cárdenas – they were free of the state control imposed on unions and

⁴³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 246-265, August 8, 1968.

⁴⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hojas 1-15, Aug. 9, 1968.

⁴⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 95-105, Aug. 7, 1968.

commercial associations. As such, they perceived themselves as having a greater ability to critique the state. A student at the National School of Economy voiced the irony of contemporary developments:

... [the movement] has been a strong blow to the President of the Republic, who never would have imagined that the students were going to rebel against his designs ... [the students] try to awaken in the people a feeling of struggle and rebellion against the institutions that only serve to protect the interests of a privileged sector; that they will sustain this struggle at any price, in spite of the government and it is necessary to go out again to streets, to surprise the government with the unity of the students, ... who have been victims of the ambition for power of the viable candidates for the Presidency of the Republic ...⁴⁶

Students repeatedly argued that they would use their position to break the political withdrawal of most Mexicans who “didn’t have the ability to protest the acts of repression they suffered because of the fear that the Government will imprison them ...”⁴⁷ Students could overcome the dilemmas of ordinary people.⁴⁸

The students were mistaken: attacking the state brought more official repression. As the movement progressed and state violence increased, student participants increasingly distanced themselves from the state. Reacting to the criminalization of the student protestors, movement participants highlighted the state’s repression of the

⁴⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 1-9, 1968.

⁴⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 228-240, Aug. 20, 1968 .

⁴⁸ Ibid.

movement and of political dissidents more broadly.⁴⁹ Students repudiated the military's intervention on university campuses, arguing that such zones should be free from state force and asserted the constitutionally sanctioned autonomy of higher education.

Following the October 2nd massacre, one student leader argued that the CNH would not sanction an end to the strike but rather

... given that the situation has worsened because of the aggression and assassination that the students have experienced ... dialogue with the authorities under these conditions is no longer possible and will be only when the students are liberated as are all others detained in this movement; they must remove the forces from the schools of the IPN and guarantee the right to public demonstration.⁵⁰

The state massacre shocked even the students and led to the hope that popular condemnation would break the government. One student speaker from the National School of Agriculture explained that he and his school were involved because the movement had “demonstrated that it was able to win the streets.” He issued a call for continued collaboration with the working classes. They would, the activist hoped, form a majority that the state would not be able to ignore nor quell. The student urged his listeners to join in creating a successful “popular student union.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ In fact, recent attempts to try President Luis Echeverria, then Secretary of the Interior, have centered on this very issue and whether the identity of “student” is sufficiently similar to race to constitute state genocide. The courts have ruled that it is not.

⁵⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 1-8, 1968.

⁵¹ Ibid.

The Category of “Student”

At a demonstration on August 8th, early in the movement, a student placard read: “Peasants, workers, and people in general, join with the students, these aren’t particular interests, they’re collective.”⁵² As already mentioned, hopes for student alliances with other elements of society groups permeated the movement. While the movement centered on the category of “student” and its associations with youth, in practice, this proved to be a very flexible category, encompassing many people who were not students. Aside from broadening their numbers and bases of support, they hoped initially to confront the government with institutional power. They initially sought to incorporate their professors and instructors, many already organized into professional working associations. Professors formed the *Coalición Nacional de Profesores* (National Coalition of Professors), which included academics from all of Mexico City’s schools of higher education. They gave their support to the students, participating actively and publically in the movement. Parents also had their own associations. As will be developed later, students enthusiastically sought the affiliation of working class people, medical workers, and campesinos, targeting them through their brigades and in their propaganda, arguing that students were a “voice” that could speak for all people.

As an example of their tactics, an early flier told professors, “Do you know that the *Granaderos* and the Army earn more money than you? Those who are only an instrument of repression have a higher standard of living than you who have the youth in your hands.” It ended with a call for professors and parents to meet and discuss, certain

⁵² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 246-265, August 8, 1968.

they would support the movement that was “for all Mexicans.”⁵³ Such efforts worked to a degree. Professors and instructors were among the first to ally themselves with the movement, many easily seeing a role for themselves within it. At a meeting of professors, one from the Department of Engineering discussed the student-teacher identity in the context of the movement and the university, “the movement has had the virtue of allowing us to identify the students and professors that are anti-university and that want only to goof off, commit illegal acts, and ask for money.” The professor sought a movement for social justice.⁵⁴ In fact, the professor argued that distinctions between faculty and student should be erased and that “the Coalition of Professors has come to demonstrate that they will not remain behind in the revolutionary struggle.” The government’s attacks on students, a clear violation of the Constitution, was a cause for action, “professors should take up the same banner and support the students, if they go to the demonstrations and start a national strike and confront the police – their mentors should be with them.” It was time to end with the “false difference” between professors and students, and all should join the student movement, turning it into one of higher education as a whole.⁵⁵ Echoing these sentiments in abbreviated form, a placard at an August 27th demonstration read, “Professors, not everything is lost, the young people are

⁵³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 263-264, Aug. 8, 1968.

⁵⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 1-6, 1968.

⁵⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 246-265, August 8, 1968.

on their feet!” Another message was from the educators themselves “The presence of the people is necessary in the Dialogue. – Professors”⁵⁶

Nonetheless, both professors and students were cautious about this alliance, and professors, in particular, devoted considerable energy to examining what their role, if any, should be in the movement. At an demonstration on August 20th, one professor asserted that “conscientious mentors and revolutionaries are supporting the student movement and there is only a small minority [of us] who receive economic support from the Government for playing the part of *charro* leaders ...”⁵⁷ On that same day, a student later expressed a similar notion that “... the student movement should find support from any exploited comrade who forms the majority of people in this country ... we believe that the professors have a democratic spirit and based in this we want their support.”⁵⁸

As early as August 8th, at a meeting of professors and instructors, those present concluded that there should be a continual dialogue between students and those who taught them. They saw the relationship between the two as the basis for the future success of the movement and a key component of its strategic development. Many in the faculty were openly leftist. One teacher outlined the nature of the movement as “democratic” and “bourgeois,” and argued that they should examine the “problem in order to find the result that most promotes the movement in its unity.” The speaker

⁵⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hojas 328-355, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁵⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 228-240, Aug. 20, 1968.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

speculated that this would require overcoming departmental divisions. He further asserted that:

... now was the moment to put aside the compromises that we have with the state and dedicate ourselves completely to this struggle that focuses on a vindication of the people, while always being aware that the State has declared total war against those who oppose it and will use force if it feels threatened at any moment.⁵⁹

Thus professors, while seeking not to co-opt or control the movement, did extend their classroom role into the mobilization, discussing and strategizing with their students, and expanding the breadth of the student movement.

Although many joined the movement, there were, of course, faculty that were not leftist and voiced caution about their professional role in this setting. There were others who seemed politically insecure. At a meeting on August 15th in the UNAM, one professor spoke on behalf of the National Coalition of Professors. He argued, "... the majority of the professorship is aware that this isn't their movement, but rather, it belongs to the students and because of this carries the obligation of orienting them so that the movement meets the goals that they demand."⁶⁰ He attempted to ease the fear that professors would dominate the student movement and use it to their own ends, revealing the degree to which youth and student were privileged in the movement. The speaker also argued for a re-examination of the relation between professors and students. Many professors felt they had "learned" from their students, inverting the typical educational

⁵⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 246-265, August 8, 1968.

⁶⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 31, Hojas 1-17, Aug. 15, 1968.

hierarchy. A professor at a demonstration in Mexico City's *Zócalo*, stated that "the students have set the example for us, the teachers, and now in the classroom as well as outside of it we have the obligation to instruct them." Beyond this, he believed that joining the movement was the obligation of everyone.⁶¹ This inversion of roles must have had something to do with a broader intellectual crisis, one in which the previous generation of Mexican intellectuals, felt they had not fulfilled their roles.

After forming a coalition of professors and instructors from the UNAM, IPN, and Chapingo, Mexico's professors declared their support for the students by early August, promising to use the media to make their stand public. The professors agreed that it fell to them to lend legitimacy to the movement and to educate the general population. To that end, they determined to give lectures on "... imperialist interference in Mexico, through the different disciplines, that is to say, that the professors of Engineering can explain to their students how the construction of bridges, highways, and other works facilitate imperialist intervention in the country." Such an approach, they argued, could be employed by psychologists or sociologists who would examine and explain the effects of imperialism on the people of Mexico."⁶² The professors' comments reflected a rising distrust of the role of the U.S. – governmental and corporate – in the country as well as the traditional goal of supporting a revolution free of outside interference.

Indeed, another speaker during an August meeting argued that such a role was one of historical importance, and that this was well known by Mexico's teachers. A leader of

⁶¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 30, Hojas 1-15, Aug. 13, 1968.

⁶² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hojas 1-15, Aug. 9, 1968.

the Union of University Professors stated that it was not the first time that university professors had united “to defend their rights.”⁶³ Arguing that they should further explore the student agenda, he noted that while the student petition demanded the removal of police chiefs, the professors should encourage them “to ask who gave the orders to the police chiefs.” Asserting that the issue of state responsibility for criminal acts was key; the speaker urged those present to demand that responsibility be placed on “those whom you well know.”⁶⁴

Professors were particularly concerned with helping students expand the number of participants in the movement and in the development of their political strategies. To this end, a professor from the Faculty of Law, in discussing student deaths at the hands of the state forces, suggested that the Coalition of Professors should “invite the parents of fallen children to defend the autonomy of the university.” The professor argued that it was important to identify the students, to name them and their institutional affiliation, in order to “reclaim” the students and to refuse to allow their deaths to be ignored or made invisible.⁶⁵ Similarly, another professor encouraged the Coalition to join the students in broadening their movement, forming teachers’ brigades much as the students formed their own brigades. He asserted that, “along with the youths, we should form cells and

⁶³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 246-265, August 8, 1968.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

send ourselves into the factories, schools, markets, etc. to tell the people that the Constitution has been violated.”⁶⁶

Reaching factories and the working sectors of Mexican society was of key concern to the students, occupying the central place in their political strategizing. They considered the incorporation of unions and working class people essential to the political viability of the movement, in terms of expanding participation and strengthening their potential political threat. They also believe that they and working class people shared a similar outlook. In this way, students drew on a long history of student activism and political life outside the boundaries of the university. Furthermore, they expanded the breadth of a *student* politics, by not limiting themselves to those enrolled in classes. A student flier from early August expressed the notion of a student-worker alliance. Signed by the students of the Vocational School 7 and distributed throughout the preparatory schools, the flier illustrates the prevailing notion of the need for working class support as well as a shared ideology and political agenda:

As of now, the movement won't be decided in the schools, but rather on the streets and in the factories. All the brigades run the risk of being detained by the police, because they are afraid that the textile workers, rail and petroleum workers, will join and fight for a shared program of vindication with student movement. In every factory, on every street and in every neighborhood, we need to form Committees that will continue the struggle ... dedicated to the program of: increasing wages in accordance with the cost of living, work for all the unemployed, controls for prices, cost of living, water, and electricity. Extending the student movement to the factories is the decisive step because the bourgeoisie is **DETERMINED TO INTERVENE IN ALL CENTERS FOR EDUCATION**; only joining the workers to the movement will stop them. We call the workers to stop the repression and assassinations against the students, because the bourgeoisie is doing today what it did in 1958 with

⁶⁶Ibid.

the railway workers, whose salaries they wouldn't even raise and instead put hundreds of workers in prison and killed entire families. It is an objective of the student movement to pursue the destruction of repressive forces that impede popular demonstration and to end misery, unemployment, and other sicknesses!⁶⁷

Describing a strategy to implement such sentiments, on August 2nd, in the Faculty of Law, student Celia Soto encouraged students to join the brigades whose ultimate responsibility was “to go out in the city and exhort the people and the workers to join with the student movement.” She maintained that it was the “obligation” of all students to join the movement, even if their activities required the utmost secrecy and discretion. They should operate in independent cells to avoid infiltration by state agents.”⁶⁸ In this way, students encouraged many groups to join them knowing that the success of the movement would, partially, be determined by its mass nature. Revealing the central concerns of the movement, two placards at an August 12th demonstration read: “Pueblo, the youth need you. Awake!” and “Pueblo, Your strength lies in your children the students.”⁶⁹

As is clear, students linked their struggles to those before them, especially the railroad strike of 1958; its leader, Demetrio Vallejo, was still in prison. For many students, their movement was a continuation of earlier struggles.⁷⁰ Indeed, as one student

⁶⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 95-105, Aug. 7, 1968.

⁶⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hojas 116A-116I, August 2, 1968.

⁶⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 30, Hojas 1-15, Aug. 13, 1968.

⁷⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hojas 125-134, Aug. 9, 1968.

flier made clear, many students considered themselves the voice of the working class: “PEOPLE OF MEXICO: If the students are now fighting, it’s to vindicate the oppressed class ...”⁷¹ At the demonstration on August 12th, one student speaker asserted that “... this movement doesn’t only belong to students, but rather, to the people in general because it fights for their rights and not just those of students.” Student points of emphasis were the state controlled-press and the experience of repression. The speaker cited the former for its shortcomings, labeling it the primary culprit in failing to spread “the truth of this movement, that it is actually national in character ...”⁷² A movement leader discussed the threat the government posed to the movement and argued that it would survive because it belonged to the people. He urged all classes to join because, like him, they opposed the “gorilócrata” government.⁷³

Many students considered themselves to be the authentic representatives of the working classes. They embraced a rhetoric that sought to make them the voice and manifestation of popular, working class will. Students themselves, particularly at the technical school, felt that this alliance was a natural and straightforward one, especially as many considered worker and student alike to be identities subject to state repression. Not a few came from working-class families. They often expressed their link to the “working people,” and saw themselves as “... an instrument of working class consciousness and we must be intransigent in defense of our beliefs and tactics for

⁷¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 207-217, Sept. 25, 1968.

⁷² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 30, Hojas 1-15, Aug. 13, 1968.

⁷³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 1-8, 1968.

struggle.” The workers would be the basis of a “great success.”⁷⁴ Placards at a demonstration on July 29, read: “People and students, united!” and “People and students are on to victory!”⁷⁵

Paternalism sometimes crept into student analyses. A movement leader, during a demonstration in early August, discussed the relationship between the student movement and the working class. A representative from the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, the speaker argued for the importance of “raising consciousness among the people, because that is where the major problems lie.” In his eyes, a false consciousness – the standard Marxist line – had to be eliminated, “[the] time had come to define their position and remove the mask from those who want to betray the movement.”⁷⁶

Similarly, many adopted another Marxist-Leninist line and applied it naively: students (or leaders) would educate the masses. Such a sentiment was expressed in one of the speeches at an August 27th demonstration. Addressing the role of soldiers in the violence and their responsibility for repression of students, one student speaker singled out the guards in front of the National Palace as representative of police and military forces. Noting that the moral stain on the soldier could be “washed away forever when they decide not to use bayonets against the students.” The speaker indicated that the “...

⁷⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hojas 328-355, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁷⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 126, July 29, 1968.

⁷⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hojas 125-134, Aug. 9, 1968.

students are ready to dialogue with the soldiers and even help to prepare them and instruct them.”⁷⁷

At the same time, however, the student body was not homogenous, and differences existed within it and between students who came from widely varying backgrounds. While many students united behind the six-point petition, others decried the student mobilization. Although the preponderance of conflict and violence during the lifespan of the movement occurred between participants and state agents, there were times when conflict between students also erupted. Such bursts of violence typically occurred between movement students and opposition student groups or *porras*. Many of the *porras* received state funds for their support of state policies or were organized directly by the government.

As a result, taken as a whole, the student body did not uniformly support the movement. Indeed, some saw the movement as a disruption of career possibilities, which indeed it was, and expressed a desire to return to classes. Roughly two weeks into the movement, the issue of the strike remained a contentious one, as it had from the beginning and would until after the movement’s end. On August 7th, a brawl broke out between students on different sides of the divide, or as security forces reported that day “... groups of students, some in favor of the strike and others in favor of going to classes, came to blows ...” The result was at least one wounded student.⁷⁸ Similarly, on August 30, rumor spread that the CNH had infiltrated the offices of the Civic Culture Committee

⁷⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hojas 328-355, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁷⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 95-105, Aug. 7, 1968.

of the Faculty of Law. The leader of that organization said that offices had been robbed during the night, and speculated that it was at the command of the CNH who wanted the 1,000 credentials of the National Institute of Mexican Youth that were taken. He argued that they "... would use these to infiltrate student groups in the official sectors."⁷⁹

Overall, most of the conflict between student groups was between state-sponsored student organizations and movement participants.

Students often voiced concern over their vulnerability to outside manipulation. Among these, fears of state infiltration ranked the highest with continuous concern that government agents would infiltrate and subvert the movement. The CNH repeatedly issued warnings to movement participants to be wary of those who claimed to be students but instead worked for the government. They believed that state agents would provoke violence among the students so as to justify state repression. Students also expressed concern that their movement would be subsumed within the intricacies of Mexican politics and manipulated to different ends. Recognizing their youth and inexperience, as well as the very young nature of the movement, one student leader, Alejandro Valle, at an August demonstration, encouraged students to "demonstrate to the government that the student movement isn't something to laugh at..." He also urged those present to wary of the press and the Rector of the UNAM, who, Valle asserted, "with his presidential aspirations" could not be trusted to faithfully represent student interests, encouraging students to avoid "falling into the games of the politicians." Relying on the brigades, he argued, was the best means to protect the movement and demonstrate to the people of

⁷⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hojas 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

Mexico “what really happens in the centers of higher learning,” and he encouraged those present to learn from the examples of aggression against the students in the states of Guerrero, Michoacán, and Sonora.⁸⁰

These fears were justified and conflict did erupt between state-sponsored groups and those in favor of the movement. For instance, on August 7, students held a meeting outside the Faculty of Engineering. Midway through, students from the organization *Movimiento Universitario de Renovadora Orientación* (University Movement for Moral Regeneration),⁸¹ a Catholic, anti-Communist youth group, interrupted the meeting armed with *macanas*, sharp, sword-like weapons made of wood. The bulk of the Engineering students responded in kind and a fight broke out. This was followed up nearly five hours later when approximately forty MURO students, with sticks and *macanas*, stormed the offices of the Engineering building to fight it out with almost fifty Engineering students.⁸²

Conflict between such groups often occurred on the grounds of the schools themselves, resulting in violent struggles for control of certain buildings and space. Indeed on August 20th, the FNET took the Prevocational School 1 by force. However, they left few people to guard the building with the result that “... more than twenty members of the Strike Committee ... took the building back without resistance from the FNET.”⁸³ Two days later, 350 students from Superior School of Economy gathered near

⁸⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hojas 116A-116I, August 2, 1968.

⁸¹ Hereafter, MURO.

⁸² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 95-105, Aug. 7, 1968.

⁸³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 228-240, Aug. 20, 1968.

the doors of their school to fend off an attack from the FNET. The rumor had circulated that the “FNET thugs” would try to take the school. The rumor ultimately proved untrue and students left after twenty minutes.⁸⁴ Similarly, less than a week later, on August 28, students from the Preparatory Schools 5 and 7 heard a report that the MURO planned to take their schools. They accordingly burnt all propaganda housed within their buildings.⁸⁵ The conflict between student radicals and *porras* continued well after the October massacre. As late as March 1969, animosity between the groups remained strong. Indeed, the Director of the UNAM’s Preparatory Schools requested police intervention in March because of the vandalism caused by *porras* throughout the schools asserting “that many students are victims of the *porras*.”⁸⁶

The State and Studious Youth

As students crafted an increasingly political understanding of the term “student,” state perceptions of them changed. Students, in the eyes of the government, became criminals or subversives or both. The mere appearance of being a student was cause for suspicion as enmity grew between authorities and students. While not a stable category, “student” was generally associated with middle class, respectable youth. Thus, the shift

⁸⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hojas 54-67, Aug. 22, 1968.

⁸⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hojas 190-210, Aug. 28, 1968.

⁸⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-69, Leg. 71, Hojas 227-280, March 17, 1969.

in state attitude is a marked one. The mere appearance of being a student was enough to provoke military and police reprisals. By October 2nd, police considered “the appearance of student” to be sufficient justification for arresting youths, outlined as the reason for detentions of youthful protestors listed in their daily security reports.⁸⁷

This process began with the invasion of university campuses, classrooms, and dormitories by military and police forces, marking such zones as sites of criminal activity. On July 30th, police and *granaderos* entered the UNAM’s Preparatory School Number 1 at 1:30 am. With the Army surrounding the school, police and *granaderos* demanded, after breaking down the door, that the students within exit the building. They arrested those who stayed within the confines of the university building, despite the fact that many were wounded.⁸⁸ Eventually, law enforcement agencies arrested those even attending or being present at an educational facility. Only a few days later, the UNAM’s *Prepa* students claimed that the *granaderos* and the military had the school under continuous attack. At a demonstration on August 2nd, one student speaker said, “every student who goes near the Zócalo is detained and forced to identify himself and taken to Police vehicles where he’s interrogated by an agent.”⁸⁹ He then demanded these actions be met by more student protests.⁹⁰ By the end of the month, at a meeting on August 23rd, one student noted growing tensions between the state and the student population, indicative of

⁸⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 267-269, October, 3 1968.

⁸⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 191, July 30, 1968.

⁸⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hojas 116A-116I, August 2, 1968.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

the increased criminalization of students. The student reportedly stated "... today, because he refused to give money to a police officer who accused him of being with the students, the officer hit him with a *macana*."⁹¹ All this reflected a strong class tension between underpaid, working class police and the presumed middle class status of the students.

Students attributed the increased violence to growing state fears concerning the movement's political potential. Noting that the press, with state support, often accused student leaders of crimes "that exist only in the minds of journalists," one student speaker at an August demonstration argued that the movement was creating considerable concern amongst politicians and policy makers. He claimed that the fear of student violence caused them to "hesitate in their decisions" and hence provoked the harsh response, particularly against those students affiliated with the Polytechnic School.⁹² State security reports emphasize student criticism of the chief executive as justification for their reactions. For instance, student propaganda distributed on August 2nd on university campuses and throughout the city stated: "... the present conflict has changed from a strictly student movement to one in direct opposition to the reactionary forces of Mexico, that are allied with the international police of the United States against the democratic and progressive forces of our country." The security report for August 2nd, containing a

⁹¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hojas 54-67, August 22, 1968.

⁹² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hojas 116A-116I, August 2, 1968.

copy of the text, intended to justify police pursuit of the students through these “severe attacks” on the President.⁹³

For students, the political nature of their identity was reinforced as the state responded with violence. The fact that the state began to routinely violate the UNAM’s guarantee of autonomy gave political impetus to the protest against state repression, fueled as well by the violence directly meted out to students themselves. During a demonstration following the October 2nd massacre, one student leader argued that:

... the situation has been worsened by aggression and assassination directed against the students. The Army’s intervention only demonstrates the inability of the Government to resolve the social demands of the students and ... undermines the nobility with which the students demand individual rights.⁹⁴

The speaker concluded that the struggle would continue, the prisoners released, and their campuses would be freed.⁹⁵

Students were assaulted and arrested on a regular basis. They began to openly question the nation’s legal codes, particularly those that related to “social dissolution,” that is, insurrection, as these were often used to detain and arrest them. The state, of course, resorted to tactics it had used on other dissident movements – thinking that repression and the fear of repression would stop of the movement. Although much of the scholarship focuses on the imprisonment of student leaders following the Tlatelolco

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 1-8, 1968.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

massacre, security records reveal that this was a continuous strategy used against the students from the movement's beginning. While this too is common knowledge, less is known about how the state implemented its strategy, what kind of tactics it used and when it used them.

Legal action against the students began almost immediately. On July 28, less than one week into the movement, fourteen people were tried for crimes against public property and attacks on public lines of communication. Three of these, who were non-citizens, were also charged with the use of false documents. The security report asserts that the outcome of the judicial proceedings was that the

... leaders of the Mexican Communist Party and the National Center for Democratic Students, which is the student auxiliary of this party ... decided to protest against the Chief of Police and send fight squads into the demonstration organized by the Polytechnic students with the aim of creating student disorder and forcing the Police to intervene thus aggravating the conflict between them and the students.⁹⁶

The following day, individuals arrested in the proceedings were tried. While at least five admitted confessions taken earlier; others rejected them. Arturo Zama Escalante, a member of the CNED, was one of several people who declared himself innocent of the crimes against private property and public routes of communication of which he stood accused.⁹⁷ Within the same hearing, his classmate, Ruben Valdespino Garcia, rejected his earlier confession, alleging that it was made under duress having been held in Police Headquarters without the means of communication which "... created

⁹⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-69, Leg. 24, Hojas 84-85, July 28, 1968.

⁹⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 133-135, July, 29, 1968.

physical violence and mental pressure in that he could not obtain the legal counsel to which he had right ...” He rejected the idea that the students had caused any violence, which was the result of provocateurs, neither himself nor his friends. Another person arrested, Juan Ferrera Rico, a street vendor, said that his declaration had occurred under conditions of “moral and physical violence.” Similarly, Raul Patricio Poblete Sepulveda, a journalist, recognized the signature on his confession but disputed its legality. Rather, he argued that he “...was given no means of communication and threatened by Agents who hit him in the stomach and put a gun to his throat.” He admitted to being a sympathizer of the Cuban Revolution and the record makes clear that he was a card-carrying member of the Communist Youth of Mexico. Another accused, Roberto Romero Gonzalez, a Prevocational student and member of the Communist Youth of Mexico, claimed that when making his way to the Zócalo, the police chased and arrested him.⁹⁸

By July 30, only days into the movement, security reports show that over 800 people were detained and held within the Federal District. Authorities began to release those they considered outside the student movement, as well as minors and those the FNET asked to be released, again showing the close connection between the state and this particular student organization. Nonetheless, on July 30, the police arrested sixty more students because of “disturbances today.” Furthermore, 343 students were detained throughout the city for “having participated in the student disturbances...,” although the

⁹⁸Ibid.

majority of them were released.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, that means over 1,200 detainees, most of them students, within the first four days of the movement's lifespan – a pattern that would continue thereafter.

From the view of the state, the most disruptive students seized buses and spread graffiti in public places. On August 20, seventeen students from the UNAM were sentenced to 36 hours of prison time for graffiti on *Insurgentes* Avenue, one of the main axes of the city. They had painted the walls of businesses and banks and, according to the security report, when detained had spent fifteen minutes trying to convince two Secret Service agents that the "... student movement is authentic and inclusive and that they too thought of Mexico and that they too were hungry ...". The agents were unconvinced and in "comedic" fashion invited them to air their grievances before the authorities. The Judge declared that such behavior created "serious damage in the public thoroughfare..."¹⁰⁰ Five days later police arrested three male students for setting fire to a motorcycle that belonged to the public transit system.¹⁰¹ Days later, eleven students were tried for having seized a city bus. They were accused of the crimes of robbery, kidnapping, threat and injury to public officials as well as resisting such officials. On that same day, the police detained several groups of students. Another ninety-six were

⁹⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 231-242, July 30, 1968.

¹⁰⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 228-240, Aug. 20, 1968.

¹⁰¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 316-323, Sept. 26, 1968.

arrested for having seized three city buses.¹⁰² Later, a group of twenty-five was arrested for having illegally entered a factory.¹⁰³

Agents attempted to connect such disruptions to broader agendas of violence. Following the arrest of three students for burning a motorcycle, security reports detail the “confessions” of these participants. One, a seventeen year old mechanic without “defined ideology” claimed to have sympathized with the student movement since encountering the brigades in his neighborhood. He allegedly joined a brigade of thirty youths who received orders to “effect acts of violence, above all the burning of buses and trains.” The brigade was a neighborhood gang “that frequently met with the students and participated in their assemblies.” He, along with other members of his brigade, claimed to have burned buses using Molotov cocktails obtained from the Vocational School 7.¹⁰⁴ He said he participated because of his solidarity with the students, not because he himself was a student, nor were his fellow gang members. They received no remuneration for their activities and took orders only from the gang leader, who had ties to the students even though he himself had no formal affiliation with any school. He claimed to have participated in various confrontations between students, allied with the other members of his gang/brigade, and police or *granaderos* on both the streets and in the schools. During the burning of the motorcycle, he was accompanied by several friends who also signed confessions. One, a nineteen year old employee of the *Compañía de Corredores de*

¹⁰² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hojas 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

¹⁰³ Ibid. For another example of arrests for abduction of city buses, see AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hojas 128-143, Sept. 1968.

¹⁰⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 207-217, Sept. 25, 1968.

Seguros, stated that they planned to participate in the student demonstration that day and grabbed the motorcycle, setting fire to it when the opportunity presented itself. This was confirmed by the third detainee, a twenty year old employee of the same company, who stated that they were burning the bus when soldiers or police arrived.¹⁰⁵

At times, the accusations of criminal behavior were more serious. During September, one student was accused of "... creating a homemade dynamite bomb, from chemicals with a nitric acid base."¹⁰⁶ The police put the home of the student in question, a young woman who was a member of the CNH and lived near the UNAM, under surveillance. During this period, a "large group" of students kidnapped five Secret Service agents who were watching her home, with their guns and vehicles, and squirreled them away to the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences."¹⁰⁷

Reports of arrest and detainment were common throughout the movement, circulating in strike meetings and among the student body more broadly. Indeed, while only partial reports on detentions are available, the existing material makes clear that arrests on both a large and small scale continued throughout the movement. On August 28 at a meeting in the Faculty of Law, one speaker declared that, "... various leaders of the Faculty of Law were detained." Another said that seventeen students from the Faculty had been released.¹⁰⁸ In September, police arrested a group of twenty-one

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hojas 128-143, Sept. 1968.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hojas 190-210, Aug. 28, 1968.

students from the IPN.¹⁰⁹ On September 25, at least eleven people were detained.¹¹⁰ On October 1, police detained two Guatemalan men, a German man, and a first year student in the Faculty of Law. In the apartment where they were arrested, police found "... an M-2 rifle with 15 cartridges and two military grenades."¹¹¹ As part of the report from the day prior to the massacre, they provide some insight into the intelligence immediately preceding it, particularly with the report's emphasis on the illegal weapons held by the students and foreign participants.

While the record is markedly silent on October 2, the report for the following day describes some of the detentions. From the "events in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas*", 200 detainees were held in the Preventative Prison of the city, 969 in the Santa Martha Acatitla prison, and 368 in the Military Camp 1 making for a total of 1,555. This number is lower than the 2,000 that many participants estimate, yet it must be remembered that the detentions were carried out, not only on October 2nd, but for weeks afterward. The police released some of the women first, and within a day of the massacre, 113 had regained their freedom. The security report makes clear that the detainees of the prior day include some of the most visible organizers and leaders of the movement, clear confirmation of their intent to dismantle it by imprisoning the leadership.¹¹² On October 4, the security reports cryptically note that, "In the Military Camp #1, members of the

¹⁰⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hojas 128-143, Sept. 1968.

¹¹⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 207-217, Sept. 25, 1968.

¹¹¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 117-125, Oct. 1, 1968.

¹¹² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 267-269, Oct. 3, 1968.

Army continue their investigations related to the people detained in that place.”¹¹³ As to the numbers in Military Camp #1, their legal status, or any other information, the official record is silent.

The detentions continued well after the massacre, partly in response to much diminished efforts to carry on the movement. On December 13, 1968 students planned a fairly large demonstration that began with students from the Vocational Schools 2, 3, 5, and 6, Preparatory Schools 3, 4, 7, and 9, along with those from the Casco de Santo Tomás, Zacatenco, and the National Teachers Schools, boarding hijacked buses to get to University City for the demonstration. The various arms of the state, including the Police, Federal Transit, and Secret Service, intercepted thirty eight buses en route. The drivers were charged with robbery and 878 were individuals detained. These included men and women (117 total), and most of the students who were minors from the Vocational Schools. The leaders were charged with robbery and gang activity, while most were assessed a fine and eventually released to family member.¹¹⁴

Following the demonstration on the 13th, the state distributed 764 detainees to local prisons. While female minors were the first to be given their freedom, by that afternoon, 511 of the total arrested were freed as well, most of whom paid a 500 peso fine for their liberty. Those who remained to be tried would be accused of the crime of

¹¹³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 288-169, Oct. 4, 1968.

¹¹⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hojas 1-6, Dec. 13, 1968.

robbery and gang related activity.¹¹⁵ A day later, a group of 56 students were consigned to the courts for the crimes of robbery and damage to private property. These particular students were detained when police found them in the act of abducting city buses.¹¹⁶ The chief of police made a statement directed to the students, their parents, and professors concerning the nature of these crimes. The students could be imprisoned for robbery, or “seizing without right public service buses, aggravated by the crime of gang participation ...” The former carried up to three years in prison, the latter two, but “as a new demonstration of magnanimity, they would not be consigned to prison so as not to leave this definitive scar on their lives ...¹¹⁷ When brought before a judge, some of the students admitted their statements, others declared that they were forced aboard the seized buses, and two refused to make a statement without their lawyers.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

Given the long history of participation among intellectuals in Mexican politics, it is not surprising that students and professors were so highly politicized in the 1960s. What was different was the extent of the movement and of the state aggression against

¹¹⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hojas 326-328, Dec. 14, 1968. By the 15th, 89 more would gain their liberty by paying a fine. The rest would be released after serving 36 hours.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hoja 1-6, Dec. 13, 1968.

¹¹⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hoja 326-328, Dec. 15, 1968.

them. The movement was broad enough and the demands of its participants sufficiently appealing, that the state responded by criminalizing students, much as they had done with other mid-century dissidents from railway workers to doctors. This marks a rupture in the relationship between the state and Mexico's systems of higher education as university leaders were no longer able to limit student protest to the confines of the educational system. The state aggression against students, violence in the streets, mass detainments and arrests, attempts to link students to gangs and foreign agitators, demonstrates the daily workings of this process and the ways in which the state sought to suppress the student movement.

The categories of youth and student were especially important to the movement in that the mobilization first coalesced around these groups. Students believed that they were uniquely positioned, sufficiently free of state support within a system of corporate politics, to argue on behalf of the general population. Many felt that their very youth provided them with an uncorrupted approach to politics in a system mired in corruption. In practice, "student" included teenagers and much older graduate students, making the category, even in its most limited sense, a broad one. While students held differing views and politics, and many groups participated, the category of "student" remained a powerful one during the mobilization. Students considered themselves a separate group, as did state officials who increasingly viewed their behavior as criminal. That both groups continued to hold this view long after the October massacre speaks to their mutually reinforcing nature and the resiliency of the category. The fact that the violence continued outside the prisons long after October 2nd demonstrates the political

consequences of such an identity and illuminates the aftermath of the movement. All this moves beyond the existing scholarly emphasis on imprisoned leaders.

When one considers both the participants and the agenda of the movement, it cannot simply be understood as a “student movement.” To do so would be to write out large numbers of participants who did not fit this role. Movement participants sought to make their agenda attractive to a variety of groups from professors, parents, workers, housewives, and campesinos. That they did so effectively is evidenced by the massive numbers present during the demonstrations and the wide range of people represented there. For this reason, it must be said that the “student movement” spoke to much larger historical, economic, and social issues affecting Mexican society. Especially significant was their critique of the policies of the PRI, and although the PRI won a short-term victory through the repression of the movement, the credibility of the PRI, and the political system as a whole, was undermined by the events of 1968.

Chapter 2

“To the Streets and Factories ...”

Students, Workers, and Campesinos in 1968 Mexico

The idea of “class” was central to the movement critique of state legitimacy as well as to those who sought to discredit the mobilization. Students saw the incorporation of working-class people and campesinos as a natural extension of their movement, indeed, the protestors from the Polytechnic and its associated high schools, the vocational schools, came largely from working class families. This ran counter to state claims to represent laborers and campesinos since the party of the Revolution cast itself as the legitimate voice for these groups. Outside labor was violently repressed and officialdom regularly appointed union leaders or *líderes charros* to head unions, thus rendering labor dependent on the government. During the movement, the PRI’s *Confederación de Trabajadores de México* (Confederation of Mexican Workers)¹ supported the state, meaning the vast majority of workers and unions did not officially back the movement. Any workers who did so would have to break with union leadership, exposing themselves to intimidation and threats. Students challenged this practice, arguing that no independent labor movement existed and that the government’s claim to represent working people because of the Revolution of 1910 no longer had validity.

¹ Hereafter, CTM.

Positioning themselves within a historic line of political activism, it seemed plausible to student activists that workers and campesinos would join with them, identifying with goals that went beyond change in the educational system. The state, as will be elaborated below, painted the students as privileged and ungrateful, as spoiled and ignorant of real life.

Thus, for both practical and ideological reasons, students were vitally interested in securing broader support for their cause. The already unionized workers had the potential to radically transform the movement, taking it from a group, albeit a very large group, of disenchanted students, to a protest with a much bigger and formidably organized base, and providing the students with serious leftist legitimacy. Given the widespread unionization of workers into the CTM, students hoped to harness much of their organizational apparatus while creating a voice for dissent within the state-sponsored union. This, however, required convincing members to break with union leadership. Throughout the movement, CTM leaders consistently came down against the students. Attempting to outmaneuver CTM officials, students targeted individual factories throughout the mobilization, seeking the support of individual unions and union members.

Along with the practical strategy of expanding the numbers of their participant base, students were determined to bring workers into their movement for ideological reasons as well. Many of the students were members of the *Partido Comunista de México* (Mexican Communist Party) or the *Juventud Comunista* (Communist Youth). They were raised on stories of the Revolution as well as more recent mobilizations such as that of Rubén Jaramillo, of the railway workers strikes, and the medical workers and

teachers' strikes. While the majority of student participants were not communists, indeed hard data on the political affiliations of the movement participants is scarce given the fluid and decentralized nature of the protest, these past social mobilizations nonetheless permeated the political climate. The student strikers considered themselves the political inheritors of these earlier movements and, given that inheritance, the inclusion of working people seemed a natural extension of their movement. Further, the incorporation of workers into the student movement would appeal to Mexico's history of the revolutionary pursuit of social justice. Similarly, the students recognized the latent power inherent in the medical workers strikes earlier in the decade. They hoped to exploit ties between the UNAM and the hospitals, and organized informational meetings at the latter throughout the movement, encouraging hospital workers to join their strike and support the popular protest.

Little attention has been paid to the types of interaction that regularly took place between students and workers. To date, accounts of such contact have been limited and partial at best, usually restricted to descriptions by individuals involved, or based on the rumors that circulated in the schools, most of them focused on the limited nature of such relations. Alternately, state accounts, widely circulated in newspapers at the time, worried about a student-worker-campesino alliance bent on ushering in a communist regime or, alternately, cast the movement as comprised exclusively of middle class "kids" gone awry. While these accounts were largely exaggerated, it will be argued here that there were significant links between students, workers, and campesinos. Federal security reports reveal that, taken in their totality, these groups had real connections. Indeed, as

the movement developed, secret police devoted considerable time and energy to detailing and curtailing student ties with workers and campesinos, especially the factory workers.

Student hopes of forging links between campesinos, factory workers, and medical personnel were not realized, a result of the short time span the movement existed. Much of the post-Sixty-Eight discussions concerning the “failure” of the movement centered on the claim that it was comprised of middle class students deluded about their social position and unable to attract wide support. This critique is strikingly similar to that leveled against the students by the state during the confrontation. However, sources demonstrate that there were clear moments of communication and cooperation. Student leaders and participants repeatedly stressed the need to forge alliances with workers and unions, and to this end, student participants frequented factories and working class neighborhoods. They also gained access to medical centers and hospitals where they organized and held informational meetings. These interactions were frequently small, “lighting strike” meetings, coordinated by the political brigades. The brigades would go to factories, make speeches, distribute fliers, and invite those present to a demonstration. There is some evidence that groups of workers responded, presenting themselves at the subsequent demonstrations, and furthermore, that numerous hospital workers and doctors agreed to short strikes in support of the students and their demands.

Any sustained contact between workers and students brought on state repression. State security reports reveal a rising alarm among security officials over the effectiveness of the political brigades in their quest to reach the broader populace. In fact, as the movement developed, the reports would often include a separate section on the lightning

strike meetings, assessing their actions and effectiveness. Furthermore, police were more likely to respond immediately when students arrived at factories in order to disperse them and prevent sustained engagement between students and workers. While some factory managers played an intervening role, more often than not, police forces arrived quickly at the scene, making lightening strike meetings the only effective strategy for engagement near factory doors. Members of the brigades were well aware of the dangers posed by their work. Despite the threat of violence, *brigadistas* began as soon as the movement exploded to reach out to labor as a means of persuading Mexicans in general that the movement was not only for students, but also for the country in its entirety.

Ideology: Class Rhetoric in 1968 Mexico

In reaching out to laborers and campesinos, student leaders conducted media and propaganda campaigns, asserting that they did have working class support. In the August 15 issue of the “*Gaceta*,” the informative paper of UNAM’s Coordinating Strike Committee, student writers declared that they were not alone, but rather, were joined by workers, campesinos, teachers, and doctors. The students asserted, “we are aligned with you until all final goals are reached, ones that now seem difficult to imagine... We must understand all the risks that laborers are taking and offer the prospect of victory, because we need to demonstrate the organized strength of our movement in its powerful non-

violent demonstrations”² Hyperbole aside, students pursued an established dream of the international left, the worker-student alliance, with a history as revered as that of the worker-peasant one.

The brigades focused labor recruitment on working class concerns. Students knew they had little chance if they limited themselves to scholastic issues. They launched a free-wheeling media campaign. They distributed fliers, made speeches, and gave press interviews. An early August flier read: “... the movement isn’t decided in the schools, but rather in the working class neighborhoods and factories ... [the government] is afraid that the textile, railroad, and petroleum workers, will unite and struggle for a program shared by the student movement ... for: increased wages, in accordance with the cost of living, work for all the unemployed, prices controls, a living wage, water, and light.”³ The campaign often hit its mark. A student from the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters encapsulated their feelings, “... throughout the country there is a general feeling of discontent with the Government ... the workers are exploited by the capitalist system and the campesinos by the bureaucratic banks that exploit them through credit; more than 50% of the population is unemployed.”⁴ While the estimate of unemployment was exaggerated, the speaker evoked the serious problem of low wages and high levels of underemployment in the country and the fact that the official party hacks had long since lost any real feelings for small farmers and rural laborers.

² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hoja 126, August 1968.

³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 95-107, August 8, 1968.

⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 133, Aug. 10, 1968.

Both movement participants and the government linked students to workers, one to broaden their base, the other to discredit the students. While officialdom denigrated students for failing to assume the norms of their class position, students felt that escaping such norms was a key move for their cause. A student speaker at a demonstration on August 26nd addressed this contrasting view of the students' proper role. He noted the government used the same rhetoric about labor mobilizers as they did about student ones, calling both, "... vulgar agitators and conspirators" and compared to sanitation workers, a comparison the student welcomed as, far from being a source of shame, "is an honor for [us], in that [we] use a scrub brush on the Constitution."⁵

The students knew the government wanted to cut off any discussion of labor rights or democratic development. Indeed, they knew that the state would portray them as middle class, separate from the mass of the working poor and other sectors. At a demonstration in August, one student made clear that "the Government was trying to resolve the problem with violence and by pitting campesinos and workers against students." He argued that the state pretended the movement was a clash between sectors (middle class "kids" and everyone else) that could only be resolved through violence.⁶

As the students sought to ally themselves with various groups, they recalled earlier state repression, likening the repression of students to that visited on other social dissidents, particularly the railway workers. This became a point of shared identification for the 1968 protestors. The danger was palpable with police arriving at any moment

⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 328-355, August, 27 1968.

⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hoja 210, Aug. 28, 1968.

when laborers became involved. On one occasion, a student leader noticed the low numbers in attendance at an organizational meeting in the UNAM. She noted that she could not go to the factory floor to organize because her name was on an official list but urged others to do so. She exhorted her companions to join the organizing brigades for recruiting, but keep their names secret in order to avoid repression.⁷ Students were keenly aware of the danger of proselytizing workers at factory doors.

At the same time, they saw an alliance with labor as a way to forestall violence. In August, a demonstration speaker said, "... we are isolated and subject to repression, because no student movement can achieve much on its own."⁸ Given the leftist background of many participants, particularly among the leadership, some felt that this was the decisive step for the movement. At a meeting in August, a representative from the Strike Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters argued for reaching the general public because, "... this is the first step toward the total independence of the proletariat that is trampled by the bourgeoisie and their Government servants who are sure to fall before the pressure of the masses."⁹

Drawing on a shared history of state violence and repression, students especially invoked the memory of earlier railway workers strikes led by Demetrio Vallejo who was still imprisoned and demanded his release. In accentuating this earlier history of state repression, students asserted a link between these precursors and their demands and

⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hoja 3-14, August, 1968.

⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hoja 190-210, August, 28 1968.

⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 31, Hoja 8, Aug. 15, 1968.

experiences. A student flier from the CNH, addressed to “Comrade Railroader,” asked him to remember the events of 1959, arguing that, if he did, he would “come to the conclusion that this movement is yours as well, not just a movement of students.”¹⁰ Similarly, the students of the Strike Committee of Vocational School 7 argued that the extension of the movement to the factories was the “decisive step” in that the “bourgeoisie” had already invaded the schools. They compared themselves directly to the 1959 railroad workers strike, and argued that the two movements were united by the primary goal of dismantling the “the repressive elements that impede popular demonstration and try to silence misery, unemployment, sickness, etc.”¹¹

Although a portion of the students were children of the working class, and a number were enrolled in technical schools, the public perceived the students as privileged members of the middle to upper-class. For instance, a piece of propaganda distributed on Aug. 8, addressed to the people of Mexico, asserted, “Citizen: you pay for our education with the taxes they unfairly make you pay ...”¹² Given this “debt,” the flier explained the focus of the movement, arguing for its liberal democratic nature and outlining the six points of the central petition. Similarly, another piece of propaganda distributed that same day asserted, “We struggle for democracy in Mexico, for the respect of the Constitution and the vindication of students in this movement.” It then outlined goals

¹⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 246-265, August 8, 1968.

¹¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 95-107, August 8, 1968.

¹² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 246-265, August 8, 1968.

that could be shared by all regardless of social class.¹³ In much the same way, a placard at a September demonstration read, “People, you produce the wealth yet, without fail, you always die of hunger.”¹⁴ Nearing the end, the government’s intransigence became clear; a student during a meeting in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences summarized the obvious, “The Government has responded to the dialogue with repression, and rather than seeking dialogue, we should reorganize the students, workers, campesinos, and pueblo in general to orient them to the immediate need to pressure the Mexican State ...”¹⁵

After the massacre, at a demonstration of approximately 5,000 people in University City, one student speaker claimed,

... the “pinche” government ... did not try to transcend the discontent that exists because of the lack of democracy in the country, but we will not give up and we’re going to hit them where it hurts most, each time we’ll be more and more with the workers, we’re going to politicize them whatever the costs; we will also continue the movement regardless of the consequences, if the government uses violence we’ll respond with violence ... we will not be massacred.¹⁶

These words then had a different significance than similar assertions before it.

The government resorted to violence and to a cultural war about class consciousness. It painted the students as ungrateful, spoiled, middle class children who failed to appreciate the privileges given to them by their parents and the state, both made

¹³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 246-265, August 8, 1968.

¹⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 39, Hoja 158-169, September, 13 1968.

¹⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hoja 206, Aug. 28, 1968.

¹⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hoja 1-6, December, 13 1968.

possible through earlier revolutionary struggles and reforms. They lacked the graces of their class, its gentility, and were roundly criticized for it. The connections students felt between themselves, workers, and campesinos appeared to outside viewers as tenuous and unnatural. The state both condemned students for their sympathy to workers and campesinos, and also accused them of emulating these groups. Indeed, while students were a heterogeneous group, the government and those opposed to the movement saw them through one rhetorical lens.

To criticize the state when students derived privileges from their programs and largesse seemed almost blasphemous. A letter to the editor signed, "A Young Campesino," stated, "I think it's unfair that the students attack him [President Díaz Ordaz] when they receive so many government benefits such as their great schools of the capital for which the people pay."¹⁷ Student sensitivity about using tax monies for their schools has already been mentioned. In another instance, a letter to the newspaper *Tiempo*, by a writer identified as an 18 year old campesino, condemned the student activists, "...the government invests hundreds of thousands that come from our sweat, they [the students] look for any pretext to disrupt the city, because they feel themselves to be first class citizens in Mexico only because they have the luck, the opportunity, that the government and the Revolution have given them ..."¹⁸

¹⁷ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 48, Folder 247, Page 1, Newspaper article. Sept. 4, 1968.

¹⁸ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 48, Folder 274, Page 21, Newspaper article. Sept. 9, 1968.

A letter to the editor of the newspaper, *Siempre!*, a nationally circulated, rightist paper, expressed such sentiments and appealed to the special sense of pride the nation should feel at that moment,

The students are asking things of the government as though asking for gifts from heaven and they have developed a harassing campaign against Mexico, an offensive campaign against Mexico, denigrating Mexico, hiding not only behind the cowardly lie but also the insult of all well-born people. To declare, as a means of propaganda that a few students have died without recourse to the truth, when enemies of the state gave them the means to spread this revolting lie throughout the world on the eve of the Olympics. If you had time to go by the Academy of San Carlos, I am sure your stomach would turn over to read the permanent graffiti there without respect for the most basic principles of human decency. Is this the youth that struggles for higher causes? Is this the generation that can save Mexico? For me, it makes me sick. And you all, you who defend them, that's your problem!¹⁹

Confrontations between students and *granaderos*, or other police forces, highlighted the class nature of the conflict, pitting students against working class law enforcement agents who, in the eyes of a significant number of Mexicans, represented an authentic *Mexicanidad*. Politicians were quick to point this out, attempting to discredit the students. In his annual Congressional Address on September 1, Díaz Ordaz emphasized the class privilege of the students, contrasting their behavior with that of the soldiers and *granaderos*, terming one unseemly and the other noble. This was his only public statement concerning the movement, and the reference is only oblique, thus his choices for criticism and dismissal of the students were particularly important. He stated, "... I publically recognize our soldiers. Modest, heroic '*juanes*'. Without the economic

¹⁹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53 Folder 272, Page 45, Newspaper article. Aug. 21, 1968.

advantages or the privileges of education that others enjoy, who work silently, quietly completing their work of risking their lives so that the rest of us can live in peace.”²⁰

Elaborating this theme, the Federation of Tlaxcaltecan Students, in a letter to the editor of *Excelsior*, on September 10, urged the president to continue his attempts to support the “true” students of Mexico City. The true students, those “who studied” were in need of protection from those who would open Mexico to foreign agitation.²¹ The idea that students who protested were class traitors, and thus open to foreign influence and agitation, was central to the government’s rhetoric.

These attitudes also found voice within the University itself, indicating the importance of class distinctions and different attitudes at all levels of the opposition. Such was the case at a meeting in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of the UNAM’s Association of Administrators, during which one member asserted that the students posed the real threat to university autonomy, not the state whose presence was strongly felt on a campus that was, in part, occupied by the Army. He argued that workers would have little relationship to the movement since they “and their families live from their work, while the students are birds of change and easy to manipulate.”²²

²⁰ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 48, Folder 248, Page 1-12, Newspaper article. Sept. 9, 1968.

²¹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 268, Page 16, Newspaper article. Sept. 10, 1968.

²² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 125-124, August 8, 1968.

Criticisms of student activity went well beyond the borders of Mexico City. In a letter to the editor of *Excelsior*, the writers urged the President to refuse funds to the National Autonomous University of Sinaloa while it continued on strike, arguing that to do so would be to fund “anarchy.” Signed by a plurality of state-sponsored worker and campesino organizations, they also urged all federal funds to be cancelled, including scholarships. Of course, many of the unions and campesino leagues were run by official hacks but, at this point, they still had some public legitimacy. Thus, student efforts to reach laborers had to cut through established laboring organizations. In any event, in the words of the Sinoloan representatives, “It is criminal the waste of time and money occasioned by the university students and professors on strike.”²³ They asserted the importance of spending Mexican funds on those who promoted the agenda of the country, and indeed, statements such as these can be found throughout the rhetoric of 1968.

In short, the class struggle in 1968 raised the stakes for all involved. Both sides considered the support of factory and rural workers essential to the success or failure of the movement, hence cross-class alliances were a crucial area of focus. Yet, rhetoric and discourse aside, what was the nature of these interactions and did students have much contact with workers or campesinos?

Protest Tactics – the development of a student-worker-peasant alliance

²³ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 266, Page 6, Newspaper article. Sept. 19, 1968.

The earliest orders of the CNH focused on going to working class neighborhoods and factories and was almost certainly influenced by the earlier experiences of several CNH members in the Mexican Communist Party and the Communist Youth. The strategy of reaching laborers started with factories near the IPN. As early as July 29th, one Strike Committee instructed students to go to the factories, telling the workers that “... five students from the IPN had died in the movement but that the press has hidden these deeds.”²⁴ Leaders of the CNH and the Strike Committees of the schools ordered the *brigadistas* to go to the workers throughout the movement’s life-span.²⁵ These instructions were repeated by leftist groups within the movement such as the CNED, *Union Nacional de Estudiantes Revolucionarios* (National Union of Revolutionary Students), and the *Liga Comunista Espartaco* (Spartacus Communist League) who instructed workers and students to go to the “... streets, factories and other centers of work.”²⁶ The political brigades were directed to take their message to working class neighborhoods, markets, parks, and factories.²⁷ In the UNAM’s Preparatory Schools 1, 2 and 3, students formed groups of nine whose goals were to “... organize meetings outside different work zones and distribute propaganda among the workers ...”²⁸ These tactics, mostly peaceful and non-violent, were to counter press reports of wild student behavior --

²⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hoja 126, July 29, 1968.

²⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hoja 316-323, Sept. 26, 1968.

²⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hoja 169-181, Aug. 5, 1968.

²⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 246-265, Aug. 8, 1968.

²⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hoja 119, 1968.

typically accusations of violence, communism (although this political identity was an accurate characterization for at least some participants), or moral depravity. As representatives of the movement, students were encouraged to “tell the truth” of the movement. As such, they presented an image of broad social concern, dedication, and respectability. The risks they took added to their apparent commitment and earnestness. A flier from August outlined that the “movement [is] against the high cost of living and in support of the workers in their struggles. It’s necessary to call the student body to participate more energetically, and the brigades need to go to all the centers of work and begin to agitate among the working masses, and help them in their organizations. Do not permit the return to classes without achieving our objectives.”²⁹

By August 9th, only a few weeks into the movement, there were approximately 500 brigades organized in the UNAM alone, all with instructions to reach working people in their neighborhoods and factories.³⁰ The political brigades, usually comprised of about 30 students, would carry out their orders, going to factory doors as well as neighborhoods and markets. They would tell workers and their family members about the movement and that it was for all Mexicans. At times, students would stage debates or some type of street drama designed to gather a crowd. For the most part, however, these “lightening strike” meetings followed a consistent formula. For instance, in late August a group of twenty five students hijacked a public bus and arrived at Mexico City’s Office of Ground Transportation. They proceeded to hold a “lightening strike” meeting in which they

²⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 31, Hoja 12, Aug. 15, 1968.

³⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 1-15, Aug. 9, 1968.

distributed fliers and encouraged the workers there to join their struggle, asserting that with their help they would "...rock the Regime."³¹ The meeting lasted only fifteen minutes, fairly typical for its kind. Students followed the "lightening strike" meeting with plans for a similar one on the subsequent day.³² Such meetings were typically brief, minimizing the risk of intervention by the police or factory management. In general, these actions were peaceful and rapid unless state authorities arrived to disperse them.

The activities of the brigades typically preceded large scale demonstrations. Brigade tactics was part of the overall outreach effort. As one professor expressed at a meeting in early August, "... we should plan this demonstration for a few days later, after we have had more time to increase our support among workers and campesinos, so that they participate as well. I'm sure they will happily do so as they're victims of the regime as well."³³ For many participants, the alliance was natural and the large demonstrations were an opportunity to follow on the brigades' work. At an enormous demonstration in September, one student speaker concluded his remarks by addressing workers. He stated, "Finally, I call all the unionized workers in the country, and ask them to organize themselves in solidarity with the student movement, because the situation demands it and because the union forces of the government, supported by their ancient leaders, have organized themselves in order to attack the movement."³⁴

³¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

³² Ibid.

³³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 131, Aug. 10, 1968.

³⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 39, Hoja 160, Sept. 13, 1968.

While more has been said about student desire to reach the working class, less is known about the results of their strategies. Throughout the month of August, the movement's first full month of existence, reports of the brigades' activities began to filter back to the Strike Committees of individual schools and departments as well as to the CNH. Rumors concerning worker response circulated wildly throughout the movement, becoming a topic for speculation, enthusiasm, and frequently exaggerated claims. In spite of embellishments, it is certain that students went to the factory doors, as well as into the factories themselves. These reports of student efforts to gain access to factories and their reception there generated significant interest among movement participants and led to widespread speculation as to possible alliances between students and unions. These activities had a snowball effect: once students went to factories, they were more willing to step up their actions at these sites and to become more demanding in their strategies and goals. While much of the mobilization tactics focused on working class neighborhoods, markets, and parks, students also attempted to mobilize sectors of the working class in a way that went to the locus of production, the factories themselves.

The first sign of unionized support for the movement came, not surprisingly, from the University itself. On August 10, the Association of Administrative Workers of the UNAM was among the first to throw their support to the movement. The 200 worker delegates from the forty schools of the UNAM reached an agreement to back the students. At that moment, the mobilization had its first official union support.³⁵ By the third week of that month, scattered groups of workers promised their participation in an upcoming

³⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 125-134, Aug. 10, 1968.

large-scale demonstration. The first among these was a small group of telephone operators. The DFS report concerning this occurrence dismissed their support of the movement by claiming that those who led the phone operators had been expelled from the official union the year before and "... are using the student movement as an occasion to agitate among telephone operators."³⁶ While that assessment may be true, and even if the motivations for worker participation or sympathy are unclear or multifaceted, it seems certain the worker participation in the movement, while limited, did exist. Along with the telephone operators, employees of the Goodrich Euzkadi and El Anfora factories, both privately owned companies, promised to join parents and students at a huge protest in August.³⁷ Indeed, on August 19th at a small demonstration, representatives of the union, Telesistema Mexicano, made a public appearance in support of the movement.³⁸

These successes were the result of student organizing at the factory doors. By August, students became increasingly bold. They began by waiting at the doors of the factories, initially hoping to catch employees as they changed shift, and later, a few attempted to penetrate the factories themselves. On August 22nd, a group of sixty students commandeered a city bus, driving it to the worksite of the Power and Electric Company in the historic center of the city. They timed their arrival for 4pm, the moment

³⁶ AGN , DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hoja 54-67, Aug. 22, 1968.

³⁷ Ibid. Goodrich- Euzkadi, a U.S. owned corporation, operated three plants in Mexico City and in 1985 employed 4,000 workers. They manufactured brakes and tires and items made of rubber. El Anfora was originally a German company, sold to Mexican investors by President Cárdenas. It produced, and continues to make, ceramics and porcelain as well as sanitary ware for the construction market.

³⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hoja 228-244, August, 20 1968.

the workers left the factory after the afternoon shift. In the following fifteen minutes, students held a “lightning strike” meeting in which they outlined the conflict, invited the workers present to visit their school, the IPN, and encouraged them to learn “the truth” given that the “... press, the radio, and the television, don’t inform the public of the reality...”³⁹

This strategy seemed successful in that only five days later, at a large-scale demonstration on August 27th, a contingent from Power and Electric joined the protest.⁴⁰ They were not alone, and one student speaker noted that there were groups of both students and workers present at the demonstration.⁴¹ While placards littered the crowd, one demanded justice against the *charro* union leaders, Fidel Velazquez and Jesus Yuren.⁴² Another declared, “The workers will take from the weak hands of the students the banner of the Revolution.”⁴³ During the demonstration, a representative from the Workers Front of San Bartolo Nuacalpan, Mexico, took the floor. He asserted that the workers were “defending the ideals of the Constitution, and that he [the worker] follows the students because the movement is honest and just ... that they [should] lift their voices to support the movement in all aspects and are tired of being accused only because they protest.” He finished by condemning the CTM, declaring that the “people of

³⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hoja 54-67, Aug. 22, 1968.

⁴⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 328-355, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁴¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 332, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁴² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 339, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁴³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 344, Aug. 27, 1968.

Mexico” were well aware that the *charro* leadership of the unions only “enrich themselves through the labor of the working class.”⁴⁴

Many noted the variety of people present that day. Indeed, a representative of the Coalition of Professors took the microphone to declare that one of the greatest triumphs “is the incorporation of large sectors of the public into the student struggle; it is without doubt the greatest triumph of the movement ... those who enrich Mexico with their labor, in the factories as well as the countryside, have seen how the popular force organized by students in this case, is capable of exposing the false representatives who freely enrich themselves in the climate of corruption that pervades the Republic.” The speaker went on to claim that, because of the movement and its successful incorporation of workers, no longer could “false organizations and *charro* leaders” deny the rights of those they claim to represent. Asserting that student demands were the people’s demands, the professor concluded that “We all understand ... that it is indispensable that the working people of Mexico make these demands their own ... in order for us to triumph. We need an immediate victory to survive...”⁴⁵ In outlining the importance of Constitutional rights as the crux of the movement, one speaker made clear the relationship of these to working people, emphasizing “the right of the worker to reject involuntary work and that sovereignty resides in the people who have the ability to change the government when they need to and this directly impacts worker-employer relations.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 331, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁴⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 334-135, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁴⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 39, Hoja 162, Sept. 13, 1968.

Several days later, students continued their actions directed at unions and the working class, this time seeking the support of oil workers. An unusually large group of students, numbering approximately one hundred, waited at the doors of the oil refinery Atzacapotzalco. When workers left the factory doors, students handed out their fliers. They spoke to almost two hundred workers and encouraged them to join their scheduled protests.⁴⁷

Students believed that they were gaining ground in working class neighborhoods. They made a strong effort in such areas. During a meeting in late August, one student *brigadista* said, “many of the proletarian neighborhoods of the Federal District support the movement and brigades should make sure that they are willing to protect the movement leaders if the moment arises. ... the gangs in these areas have pronounced themselves in favor and are willing to directly confront police forces and that workers, campesinos, independents and other people have gone to the CNH to declare their support.”⁴⁸ While such claims are vague and may have been little more than talk, they demonstrate that there was a student belief that the movement was growing beyond the bounds of educational issues and into a general public protest.

By the end of August, students were discussing a national workers strike and planned an initial two-hour strike. The discussion of this plan centered on the UNAM where some hoped a working class and campesino effort would be joined by a national

⁴⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

⁴⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hoja 207, Aug. 28, 1968.

medical strike.⁴⁹ Whether the students were drawing a great deal of labor support is hard to say. Hopes may have outrun reality. Even so, scattered workers groups undoubtedly did become involved and the *brigadistas* were bringing results.⁵⁰ These student-labor alliances seemed even more possible given the support of Section 37 of *Petroleros* to the movement and the student infiltration of a Coca-Cola factory.⁵¹ At the end of the month, student political brigades spread the word that 95 percent of the workers at the Coca-Cola bottling plant supported the movement.⁵² On August 25, students met with almost sixty union representatives and members from the Electrical Workers Union with whom they claimed solidarity because of a shared “opposition to the bourgeois movement.”⁵³ Indeed, by August 31st, students circulated fliers in factories that urged a two-hour strike, intended for all Mexico City factories, on the fourth of September.⁵⁴ In light of such activities, the notion of an alliance between students and workers began to seem, at least to some student participants, within the realm of possibility.

These efforts were not limited to the early, optimistic days of the movement. Rather, as it developed, hopes for a strong alliance grew. By September, Mexico’s CTM had roundly condemned the student movement, rejecting any possibility of an alliance

⁴⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hoja 190-210, Aug. 28, 1968.

⁵⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hoja 54-67, Aug. 22, 1968.

⁵¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 145-146, August 26, 1968.

⁵⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 209-220, Aug. 31, 1968.

between the students and the party's union. However, students hoped to ally themselves with those workers who were disenchanted by the state-sponsored union.⁵⁵ Throughout September, students held meetings in which they discussed the need to encourage workers to break with their union leadership. One student even proposed to siphon water from the UNAM, forming a "social brigade" to turn the water from the UNAM's pipes to working class neighborhoods. Such a plan was "... sure to win them much sympathy."⁵⁶ The dilemmas that union members faced in breaking with the CTM line is clear in a declaration by union members of *El Anfora*, "Fidel Velásquez, ... leader of the Confederation of Mexican Workers, declared, in his customary manner, against independent and democratic unions, especially ours. For Fidel Velásquez, an independent union is a crime that he identifies with 'communism,' ... as if it was a crime."⁵⁷

Along with unions centered in manufacturing, students attempted to incorporate doctors and medical workers into the movement. Given the links between Mexico City's hospitals and the UNAM's Faculty of Medicine, many movement participants hoped to find allies within the medical system and to gain an organized base of support within the hospitals. Furthermore, they planned to draw on memories of earlier protests by doctors

⁵⁵ Students designed the movement's defining agenda, the six-point petition, as a broad to cover the myriad grievances. It in fact makes no specific reference to the concerns of a particular group whether students or otherwise focusing instead on civil liberties.

⁵⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hoja 128-143, Sept. 1968.

⁵⁷ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 51, Folder 262, Newspaper article. Sept. 14, 1968.

and thus position themselves as sharing the medical workers' past concerns. By the end of August, movement activists began to organize among this sector, with students from the Faculties of Nursing and Medicine going to talk to hospital workers. A flier from early August asked, "Do you remember May 1955? Remember that you too were silenced and beaten in your own hospitals, therefore, this isn't just a Student Movement but also your Movement."⁵⁸ Meetings were held in at least seven hospitals with some voting to strike.⁵⁹

By late August, students lobbied heavily among the hospital workers. They organized informational meetings and sent delegates to the regular meetings of hospital workers to speak in support of the student mobilization. Like the two hour workers strike, students proposed that the hospital staff join them in limited-term strikes, excepting emergency room care, to lend greater weight to the student demands. Following a democratic model of participation, the hospital workers and doctors then voted on whether or not to join with the students and offer their support either by public declarations in favor of the movement or by going on strike. While meetings were held in most of the city's major hospitals, not all medical personnel agreed to strike or even to verbally support the movement, refusing to make public statements to reinforce student goals. Indeed, a meeting of medical workers at the hospital, "20 de Noviembre," dashed

⁵⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 263-264, Aug. 8, 1968.

⁵⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968. The seven hospitals were Centro Hospitalario "20 de Noviembre," Hospital Juárez, Hospital General, Hospital Colonial de las FF.NN. de México, Hospital de La Raza, Hospital de Huipulco, Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social.

student hopes when two hundred and fifty medical workers unanimously voted not to support the movement. Many feared the consequences and the reprisals that they were sure would follow should they join with the students.⁶⁰

Nonetheless, the students persisted. On August 30, they held meetings in several city hospitals. At Juárez Hospital, a group of approximately sixty hospital employees agreed to begin a strike effective immediately in support of the student demands, exempting only those who worked in the emergency room. Alternately, a meeting at the General Hospital of medical residents and interns opted not to strike for the student demands, but rather to have daily meetings in which they would "... make decisions as events developed..." This general agreement did not, however, stop approximately 180 residents from deciding to independently strike, excepting once again, those in the emergency room. Students from the UNAM's Faculty of Medicine visited the residents and interns of the Huipulco Hospital, urging them to support the student protestors. The residents of Huipulco declined to throw their weight behind the students, arguing instead that many of them had only four months of their residency remaining. They were unwilling to jeopardize their futures at the eleventh hour. Finally, the National Medical Center was among the most active of the hospital workers, passing a resolution to form brigades who would visit medical centers and arrange for a large-scale meeting between medical workers and students at the Hospital.⁶¹ By late September, there was increased movement activity within the hospitals. Capping off several days of disruption following

⁶⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 209-220, August, 31 1968.

⁶¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

a major demonstration, hospital officials blocked the access of a group of twenty students to the Trauma Unit of the National Medical Center, revealing frustration among hospital administrators with student behavior and their presence in the medical centers.⁶² In the National Medical Center and the General Hospital, doctors met behind closed doors to discuss their role in the movement. At the Central Hospital of the Secretary of Communications and Transportation, medical workers decided to join the strike already planned by their colleagues at other hospitals.⁶³

While less effort went into organizing campesinos than factory and medical workers, students expressed hope that they too would join the movement. Unlike calls to organize urban factory workers, which began in the early days of the movement, the first attempt to organize among campesinos occurred on August 20, 1968, roughly one month into the movement. The Schools of the IPN circulated a letter from Ruben Rocha, President of the FESCM that expressed the organization's support for the movement.⁶⁴ Only a week later, the CNH held a meeting of 450 people in IPN's School of Physics and Mathematics where they discussed the plight of rural people in the state of Chihuahua. In addition to considering possible alliances with groups already organized and in protest, they discussed the possibility of hunger strikes of campesinos in that state, believing that they could become strong allies of the students. Furthermore, they received a delegation of campesinos from the southern region of the country at the meeting. This delegation

⁶² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hoja 207-217, Sept. 25, 1968.

⁶³ Ibid. These included the Hospitales General Juárez, De la Mujer, Isidro Espinosa de los Reyes, Nutrición y Centro de Investigaciones Universitarias.

⁶⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hoja 228-240, Aug. 20, 1968.

aimed to garner support from the students and the CNH for their local demands.⁶⁵ In the meeting, CNH members noted the presence of “... this group of campesinos, who participated in today’s demonstration, just like the Power and Electric workers, the mothers of political prisoners ... and 200 people from the Federation of the Blind of the Republic.”⁶⁶ Similarly, the security reports for that day noted the presence of “... people with the appearance of workers or campesinos, who arrived in city buses hijacked by students.” By the end of that day, students “of both sexes” left the school intending to distribute propaganda throughout the city and looking to target “campesinos” among others.⁶⁷ That same week, students in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences noted that they had gained support among campesinos, as well as workers, and that representatives of both groups had been in contact with the CNH. The students at the meeting hoped that the incorporation of these groups would afford some protection for the participants by expanding their base and making state repression more reprehensible to a larger segment of society.⁶⁸

Although the effects of such organizing are difficult to gauge, by September of 1968 state security reports began to note the attendance of campesinos from Mexico’s provinces at the schools and the student-organized demonstrations. Three provincial buses arrived at UNAM’s University City with over 150 campesinos aboard who

⁶⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 328-355, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hoja 190-210, Aug. 28, 1968.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

declared themselves willing to fight “beside the students.” Coming from the nearby state of Tlaxcala, the campesinos asked to meet with the CNH. They were rapidly put in touch with the political brigades “... whose members took them on different routes throughout the capital.”⁶⁹ In that same month, the Chiefs of Brigades met and resolved to continue their efforts to incorporate workers and campesinos into their movement.⁷⁰

Students made good on their promise of sending political brigades into Mexico’s provinces. Members of the FESCM visited normal rural schools throughout the country. Their goal was to spread information about the student movement in the capital and to ask the students from these schools to support them. After holding a vote, if the result was affirmative, the Committee encouraged the school to designate a delegate. This delegate would represent the school at a National Assembly in the state of Jalisco during which the Committee hoped to “determine the path to pursue.”⁷¹ At the start of the next month, on October 1, members of the Executive Committee of the FESCM left the city en route to Jalisco for the National Assembly. At the meeting, the Normal Rural Schools in session voted to begin partial strikes on the 3rd of the month and move to a full strike on the 12th.⁷² The strike was, of course, never realized as state agents massacred students the following day in Tlatelolco in the capitol. Nonetheless, the joining of the Normal Rural schools in the movement represented a major coup for student organizers, one that

⁶⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hoja 128-143, Sept. 1968.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 1-8, 1968.

⁷² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 117-125, Oct. 1, 1968.

would have expanded the breadth of the movement outside of Mexico City and drew on the historic role of Normal teachers in radical politics.

By late September, rumors concerning the participation of rural workers in the student movement were at the boiling point. At a meeting of 300 students in UNAM's Faculty of Sciences, *brigadistas* reported on their successes in their efforts to recruit support from rural students. They brought news of their activities in the states of Jalisco, Michoacán, Colima, Nayarit and Guerrero. They had little to report on their contacts with rural students, rather, they focused specifically on campesinos from those regions. The *brigadistas* asserted that the rural workers were disposed to help the students. They were ready to organize and stand behind the students, not only verbally with public statements of support, but physically as well. One student reported that the campesinos were "... ready to take up arms to defend the students who are now fighting to vindicate the rights of citizens." Another *brigadista*, who returned from the state of Morelos, reported contact with campesinos who had been organized by Rubén Jaramillo. Jaramillo was a legendary revolutionary soldier and rural labor organizer who, with the support of the Mexican Communist Party in the 1950s, led a large resistance in the state of Morelos. In 1958 he, along with his family, were imprisoned and ultimately assassinated by the government of President Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964).⁷³ Associations with Jaramillo not only carried emotional resonance, but also considerable leftist credibility.

⁷³ In *Rural resistance in the land of Zapata : the Jaramillista Movement and the myth of the Pax Priísta, 1940-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), Tanalís Padilla examines the Jaramillista movement, using it to question the notion of a "Golden Age" of Priísta rule. Students in 1968 were well aware of the organizing of Jaramilla and hoped to draw on his legacy.

Claiming to have met with campesinos who “participated at the side of Rubén Jaramillo” the student naively asserted that the rural workers had given their support to the movement offering “... in the moment that the students think best, the participation of 35,000 armed men to confront the Government.” The student also reported that this group of campesinos had visited the Vocational School 7, a fact that was confirmed by state security forces.⁷⁴ Security reports are clear that contacts between activists and campesinos were developing.

Despite all the obstacles they faced, students produced some results. In late August, the Union of Mexican Electricians made a public declaration for the students that they circulated among the newspapers of the capital. Defining themselves as a “revolutionary organization,” union members proclaimed their support for the students and their patriotic concern for their country. Citing their history of support for popular causes, including “... the decision of the government to expropriate the oil which we supported with passion; we fought against the foreign companies in favor of the nationalization of the electrical industry; we maintain our enthusiasm for campaigns to nationalize industries and employ Mexican technicians; we support agrarian reform and the dismantling of latifundios.” They proclaimed that their link to students was part of their defense of the principles of “national sovereignty and self-determination of the people.” They condemned any violation of democratic rule and depicted the struggle as one against state repression. The union urged the government “and the true representatives of the students ... to begin a conversation immediately as the only way to

⁷⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hoja 128-143, Sept. 1968.

understand the student demands and reach a solution that is for the good of the country.”⁷⁵

The following month, the union, *El Anfora*, made a public statement in support of the movement. They also depicted repression as a central concern. “We, too, have suffered physical repression. On different occasions we were beaten by *granaderos* and the authorities have rolled over our union. We also know that many of our working brothers are forced to support *charros* ... because of the threat of repression ... independence is the only path left us that allows us to live with dignity and struggle honestly in defense of our legitimate interests ...” They met and resolved to support the students’ six demands.⁷⁶

In similar fashion, some hospitals threw in their lot with the students, making public declarations of support. On September 12, the interns from five of Mexico City’s hospitals drafted a manifesto in which they outlined their perspective. They decried the “brutal repression” and disruption of “constitutional order” that brought wounded, damaged, and dead citizens to the doors of their hospitals. They called witnesses to official violence and said, “... in light of this, we cannot remain on the margin.” They began a strike program to “show our repudiation of the violence that goes against our profession ... We denounce the intervention of ‘secret’ police in our hospitals who hope

⁷⁵ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 266, Page 9, Newspaper article. Aug. 28, 1968.

⁷⁶ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 51, Folder 262, Newspaper article. Sept. 14, 1968.

to intimidate our friends, violating individual rights as do the threats we have received since we began the strike.” They supported the six points and asked for dialogue between students and officials.⁷⁷ A week and a half later, hospital interns issued a similar declaration, publishing it in the newspaper, *Excelsior*, demanding the removal of armed forces from University City, respect for individual rights, liberty for detained students, and an end to the repression. Until their demands were met they would remain on “TOTAL AND INDEFINITE STRIKE” in support of the Central Strike Committee.⁷⁸

By the end of August, the CNH had confirmed that workers from at least one factory would join in the proposed short strike.⁷⁹ While it is unclear if such moments of worker-student contact were frequent, or as seems more likely, irregular, there were arranged meetings between the two groups and instances of worker support for the movement. During a demonstration on September 12, one orator noted the presence of railroad workers, campesinos, *taxistas*, *petroleros*, *padres de familia*, and teachers.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 50, Folder 356, Page 8, Newspaper article. Sept. 11, 1968. Interns from the following hospitals signed the declaration: Hospital General S.S.A.; Hospital Juárez; Hospital de la Mujer, S.S.A.; Maternidad Isidro Espinoza y de los Reyes, S.S.A.; Hospital Siquiátrico “Fray Bernardino Alvarez.”

⁷⁸ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 51, Folder 259, Page 37, Newspaper article. Sept. 24, 1968. Reading much like the declaration on September 11, with the small changes, interns from the following hospitals signed the declaration: Hospital General S.S.A.; Hospital Juárez; Hospital de la Mujer, S.S.A.; Maternidad Isidro Espinoza y de los Reyes, S.S.A.; Hospital de la S.C.O.P.

⁷⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

⁸⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 39, Hoja 158-169, September, 13 1968.

Similarly, a September 13th demonstration included placard-wielding groups of Light and Power employees along with those from oil tankers.⁸¹ By mid-September, workers were signing petitions and taking part in the demonstrations. Students also met in UNAM's Economics building with workers from the Assembly of Workers and Oil Tankers in which some workers proposed the idea of forming worker brigades to distribute information among other union members. They did this despite the threat of losing three days pay for not supporting the president during his annual address. One student leader seconded the idea by saying that both electricians and railway workers had already formed brigades.⁸² Later that month, students from UNAM's Preparatory School 8 described how four workers from Light and Power had presented themselves at the school stating that, if the conflict was not resolved in two weeks time, they would go on strike in support. The rationale behind this was that they "... don't support attacks on students since many of them are our children."⁸³ As the end of the movement approached, rumors flew that members of the Light and Power union planned to break with union leadership, along with railway workers of the *Valle de México* terminal. They, with railway workers, planned to attend the October 2nd demonstration having formed their

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 209-220, Aug. 31, 1968.

⁸³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hoja 316-323, Sept. 26, 1968.

own Strike Committee.⁸⁴ This had been the goal of several UNAM schools since September.⁸⁵ Such rumors strikingly predate the state-led massacre by only one day.

As the movement progressed, government officials and state security agents became alarmed that a student-worker alliance would develop. The list of factories and groups targeted by students is a fairly lengthy one given how little time they had. Participants went to the doors of telephone workers and Power and Electric, met with the Association of Administrative Workers of the UNAM, the Street Cleaners organizations, and those at the Offices of Ground Transportation. Students spoke with gas workers, Coca-Cola workers, Avon employees, packing workers, automobile, and health or medical workers. As the movement neared its final month, students started to enter the factories. On August 31st, a group of fourteen youths entered the Terminal *Valle de México*, manufacturers of railroad-related materials, gaining access to the factory floor. The students ran throughout the factory. They exhorted the workers to join the movement, eluding security and disrupting work on the floor.⁸⁶ The day before, August 30th, a group of fifteen UNAM students entered the Avon factory in Mexico City. The students hoped to convince the Avon workers to launch an hour-long strike in support of the movement. As they distributed propaganda in the factory, twenty more students arrived. The head of the factory's Industrial Relations told them they had committed

⁸⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 117-125, Oct. 1, 1968.

⁸⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hoja 128-143, Sept. 1968. Throughout this month, students from the Preparatory Schools 1, 2 and 3 campaigned amongst workers with the goal of convincing them to reject their union leaders.

⁸⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 209-220, Aug. 31, 1968.

criminal trespass and to leave. It became clear he had called the police. The *granaderos* soon arrived and dispersed the protestors who threatened to return the following day with 600 students.⁸⁷

The importance of these actions was widely discussed by participants and movement leadership alike. The threats made at the Avon factory, the return of a substantial bloc of students, were echoed at a school meeting when one student suggested that they inflate the number of students per brigade to two hundred in order to protect themselves from the police, thus making it safer for them to enter high risk areas such as factories.⁸⁸ In a more extreme example, students entered the *Auto-Mex* car factory. They tore down the factory door in an effort to talk to the workers and exhort factory employees to join the movement. This encounter was brief, however, and the police rapidly arrived, detaining twenty five youths that day.⁸⁹ While such actions were quite dangerous, posing a greater threat of interaction with state security forces, students, fired by some successes, ran the risks. They remained active in the factories throughout the final month.

By the end of August, state security reports often included a section on “lightening strike” meetings with particular attention to those near factories or prisons. The rapidity with which police or *granaderos* arrived at such demonstrations indicates state concern and an increasing mobilization of resources against the movement. The

⁸⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

⁸⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hoja 190-210, Aug. 28, 1968.

⁸⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

police actions had the support of business owners. This physical repression was compounded by the orchestrated state black propaganda to depict students, in a state-controlled media environment, as lawless and amoral, fostering a sense of moral panic and linking the students to communism and leftist organizers.

By late August, conflict between students and police forces became even more frequent. For instance, when a group of students skirted security at the packing company, *Clemente Jacque y Compañía*, a foreign owned corporation, a skirmish quickly ensued.⁹⁰ The police rapidly arrived at the factory and forced the students to leave.⁹¹ Similarly, a group of students distributing fliers to workers in the offices of Ground Transportation were met by fifty *granaderos*. Fifteen minutes later, soldiers of the Second Battalion arrived in jeeps and armored cars. Within a half hour, the military had the site firmly in control and left the *granadero* forces to patrol it.⁹² The use of *granaderos* and infantry for the infraction of disseminating propaganda shows the lengths to which the state was willing to go in order to prevent interactions between students and workers. Furthermore, rumors as to state manipulation of workers abounded, especially those in the state-controlled unions. In late August, a story that the unionized street-sweepers were

⁹⁰ Originally a Mexican company, it was sold in 1968, although it was later bought by the Mexican corporation Sabormex in 2002 and produces salsa and other processed vegetables.

⁹¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

⁹² *Ibid.*

forcefully recruited to cause chaos and disorientation during a student protest circulated in the schools. Those who refused to participate were thought to have been arrested.⁹³

The Aftermath

Following the October 2nd massacre, the imprisonment of the mobilization's leadership, and the widespread fear that effectively stalled the movement, participants and observers alike re-evaluated the mobilization and its trajectory, attempting to identify where it "went wrong." Above all, they sought to understand its sudden end and their inability to command widespread public protest following the Tlatelolco massacre. Indeed, contrary to some student expectations, the state's violent repression of the student movement did not lead to public indignation, nor did it add fuel to the fires of rebellion. Rather, the public response was a deep and paralyzing fear – a fear that permeated both the student body and the broader populace. The movement stalled, terror and panic foreclosing the possibility of a further, broader protest. Following the movement's end, conversations and analysis of the mobilization throughout 1968 and during much of the aftermath, centered on the reasons for this "failure" (so termed by many participants).

While many ideas emerged in reference to the end of the movement, the two most frequently cited explanations for its demise were the perceived unwillingness of the students to engage in dialogue with state officials, as well as their inability to mobilize

⁹³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hoja 313-323, Aug. 25, 1968.

union members. The first instance centered on the student occupation of the Zócalo during which participants demanded a public dialogue on the morning Díaz Ordaz was scheduled to give the Presidential Address on September 1st. This was compounded by CNH unwillingness to negotiate with lower level state representatives. Upon later reflection, many participants felt that this foreclosed the possibility of any real dialogue with the state. The second reason was the presumed inability of the students to mobilize the working class. Of these two reasons, the most cited is the lack of a strong and deep connection between students and workers.⁹⁴

Following the Tlatelolco massacre, student organizing among workers and *campesinos* drew to a close. There were scattered attempts to rally support among workers, but these were scarce. On October 4th, they gathered on the street in front of the Power and Electric Factory in the historic center of the city. Students made speeches, and one student demanded that “the working class organize into fight committees, in order to repel the intervention of government forces who will try at all costs to prevent the workers from defending their Constitutional rights.” Given the events of that week, the speakers declared the need for better organization among workers so that they would not be prevented by *charro* leaders from organizing in defense of their rights. To the

⁹⁴ Raúl Álvarez Garín succinctly describes these positions in the aftermath of the movement in *La estela de Tlatelolco: Una reconstrucción histórica del Movimiento estudiantil del 68*. For his discussion, see page 132. Roberto Escudero outlines the first explanation in his introduction to the book, see page 18.

orator, such organizing took on greater meaning as it was in defense of “the fallen in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* who will become heroes of the Country.”⁹⁵

While organizing among workers, campesinos, and doctors diminished, the mobilization continued to derive support from these groups. Workers organizations were among the first to decry the violence on October 2nd. Indeed, the UNAM’s Union of Administrative Workers met on October 3rd to discuss forming a group in support of the students. The meeting was divisive, with those in favor of the movement arguing that they should seize the moment “... to obtain better benefits for the administrative employees.”⁹⁶ On October 4th, just two days after the massacre, *petroleros* gathered to condemn the treatment of the students in a brief twenty minute “lightening strike” meeting. Standing on the front part of a truck, various speakers energetically protested the violence against the students that had “... affected the homes of many *petroleros*” and decried the public declarations of their union leader.⁹⁷ Similarly, the workers of the Light and Power in the Historic Center held a half-hour meeting during which speakers encouraged those workers who were leaving their shift to “... join the manifestation of working class dissent.” The one hundred and fifty people present were rapidly dispersed by the police.⁹⁸ While these are only two occurrences of working class support, given the pervasive silence and fear of the post-massacre climate, they were important.

⁹⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 283, Oct. 4, 1968.

⁹⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 267-269, Oct. 3, 1968.

⁹⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 288-169, Oct. 4, 1968.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Interns from nine of Mexico City's hospitals also went on record after the October 2nd massacre, condemning the violence that occurred and which they witnessed in the hospitals. The interns asserted that the repression of the day was in no way justified by any provocation on the part of the students and people assembled in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas*. Rather, plain clothed policemen mixed with students "opened fire on the speakers after a flare went off, that was the signal to the Army to attack the people there: students, women, children, and the people in general." They called particular attention to fellow interns who had attended the demonstration in order to lend their medical expertise to any wounded, and who had disappeared after the demonstration. The interns reaffirmed their commitment to strike stating that they would "... continue on a total and indefinite strike in support of the Central Strike Committee until the complete resolution of the conflict."⁹⁹

Among students and workers, the connections between students and workers remained a key topic after the movement was smashed. One year following the start of the student movement, on July 26th 1969, the Fight Committee of the Union of Mexican Workers distributed a flier reflecting on the past year and future challenges. They believed that the workers' movement had grown stronger in the previous year. In their

⁹⁹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 50, Folder 256, Page 10, Newspaper article. Oct. 4, 1968. Interns from the following hospitals signed the declaration: the organizational group, Bloque de Pasantes en Paro de los Hospitales, and the individual hospitals Hospital General, S.S.A.; Hospital de la Mujer, S.S.A.; Hospital Colonia de F.F. C.C.N. de M.; Hospital San Fernando de F.F. C.C. N. de M.; Maternidad Isidro Espinosa de los Reyes; Hospital de la Nutrición; Hospital Cruz Roja Mexicana, A.C; Hospital Central de la Secretaria de Comunicaciones y Transportes.

view such strengthening was historically inevitable, and this was, in part, due to the student movement. They claimed that the movement "... opened great perspectives for us and left us new lessons on organization and struggle ..."¹⁰⁰ In many ways their demands and grievances resonated with those of the students in 1968. They called for an independent leadership, responsive to the concerns of working people. They also noted the ever-increasing prices of basic necessities, and the "miserable" salaries that barely kept "their families from dying of hunger." They closed the letter on a hopeful note that the "experiences of earlier worker's struggles, the struggle of the students and those that liberate Latin America along with the entire world, will show us the correct path to pursue. If we want the student, campesino and popular sector to recognize us, we must join in combat and assume the role that falls to us, there is no middle path ..."¹⁰¹ Thus student characterizations of the ties between them and workers were echoed one year after the end of the student mobilization.

As shown elsewhere in this dissertation, student attempts to speak on behalf of working people were complicated at best – a mixture of respect, admiration, appropriation, and patronization. Nonetheless, students understood that widespread working class support would legitimate their movement and worked toward that goal. Their presence at factories became more impassioned as the movement progressed, with the result that scattered groups of workers came to the demonstrations and made public their support. Given the dramatic foreclosing of the movement after the Tlatelolco

¹⁰⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-69, Leg. 86, Hoja 110-112, July 26, 1969.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

massacre, it is only a matter for speculation what the results of a more sustained strategy might have been. What is certainly true is that the state watched these activities with growing trepidation. As the opening of the Olympic Games approached, Mexico stood poised for a moment of international recognition. Wanting to project an image of successful development and political stability, state authorities were sure to view disquiet in factories and rumors of the impending arrival of armed campesinos with considerable unease. With tourists, journalists, and athletes ready to descend *en masse* to the city, they considered the disruption of hospitals and medical services more than inopportune. Thus, student inroads into factories and hospitals shed some light, not only on student mobilization strategies, but also on the logic of the state repression.

The “failure” of movement participants to successfully mobilize workers haunts the memories of CNH leaders and is one of the dominant paradigms for understanding the movement’s demise. Yet given the array of forces against them: a state controlled press, co-opted union leaders, and extensive state violence, student inroads among factories, doctors and campesinos are striking. They point to the dedication of a large swath of participants to the idea of a student-worker alliance. To achieve this goal, students mobilized among these sectors at great risk to themselves. Casting the mobilization as limited to middle class “kids” comes too close to state narratives that attempted to circumscribe the broad appeal of the movement. While civil liberties were certainly at the heart of the movement, so too was class struggle.

Chapter 3

“The Route to Liberty”

Violence and Disorder on the Streets:

Students, State Agents, and City Space

The growth of the movement was marked by increasing aggressiveness on the part of students, particularly in their attempts to recruit workers and campesinos into their ranks. Brigades descended on Mexico’s provinces, kicked down factory doors, and held “lightning strike” meetings in working class neighborhoods. Over time, the notion of a “student” movement became problematic based on the increasingly heterogeneous backgrounds of its participants. Likewise, the scope of the movement itself began to extend outward from schools and into the city. Based on state sources which chronicle the day-to-day activities of protestors, this chapter highlights the range of participant behaviors as well as backgrounds. In the process, it demonstrates that state arguments for violence were based in part on the perception – not unfounded – that disruptions were beginning to undermine civil order insofar as they were gaining in geographic scope, and mass support.

Because of their direct connection to the Mexican state security apparatus, reports on student activity and the support which it garnered must be read critically. Nonetheless, the alarm which they convey must also be understood as important evidence for the threat which state agents believed, or were pressured to report that they believed, the protests posed to the city’s upcoming Olympic ceremonies. Students spilled from the campuses of the UNAM and IPN to seize streets, public space, and buses from the government.

Conversely, *granaderos*, the police, and the military worked in concert to threaten protest participants with violence and detention, both real and implied. The internal reports of the state have rarely been studied. What they reveal is a sense of collusion between students and other sectors of society which, in turn, served to justify increasingly harsh and repressive tactics as the protest gained scope and speed.

Despite the participation of non-student actors, violence within the movement began with students and served as a highly performative, as well as disruptive, element of protest repertoire. On August 22, various political brigades from the UNAM and IPN helped themselves to a pick-up truck from the School of Geology, five trucks from the School of Conservation, two from the Faculty of Medicine, one from the National School of Dentistry, and one bus from the Veterinary and Zoology School. These were equipped with sound systems and the students labeled them “Route to Liberty,” painting the slogan on the sides of the buses.¹ They perused the city, painting walls, transporting students from one place to another, and talking to passersby to convince them of the popular nature and importance of their movement. The seizing of buses, along with bus burning and vandalism, created considerable disorder in the city prior to the Olympics. Together with the violence generated by state agents, Mexico City itself can be viewed as a site of turmoil and contestation during the events of summer and fall in 1968.

The student movement found its most vital expression in Mexico City and, during the course of its life, the city itself played a critical role in the mobilization. Students and state agents, usually police, soldiers, or *granaderos*, battled for control of key areas of the

¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hojas 54-67, Aug. 22, 1968.

city. It is well known that there was constant violence throughout the period of the movement. Indeed, the massacre on October 2nd looms large in the literature on 1968. Yet, within that literature, the daily interactions between state forces and movement participants remain obscure. Recent security reports reveal the extensive nature of state violence before October.

Students and state came into conflict predominately over two areas. First, the students sought to bring the movement to the very heart of the city, the Constitutional Plaza. Second, soldiers and police attempted to occupy the educational buildings of the city, located near the Olympic Stadium, as well as sites of historic interest which were then defended by the students. These conflicts were not short-lived, but rather, continuous with heightened periods of confrontation centering on larger demonstrations. The sheer number of students involved posed a threat to security forces. They often outnumbered state agents, and given that they were simultaneously active throughout the city, stretched state agents to the limit. Agents, on the other hand, had access to weapons which they frequently employed. Most student participants stressed a message of non-violence or self-defense, while, at times, more radical or frustrated students voiced their desire for armed struggle. Throughout the movement, students dealt with the constant threat of state provocateurs who hoped to steer student actions in a more violent and extreme direction, thus justifying state actions against participants.

Students generated considerable activity around the major thoroughfares of the city -- seizing buses, intercepting drivers, stopping traffic, and breaking store windows. They tried, literally, to take the streets. Large groups of students would often

commandeer public buses (both educational and city) to arrive at their destinations, such as their schools, demonstrations, or meetings. At times, these seizures would entail taking buses of unsuspecting passengers to new destinations. Students would jump aboard buses and detain them as they painted slogans and images on their sides – turning the vehicles into rolling propaganda. Buses served as movement platforms, providing those making speeches with the height needed to make their ideas heard over large crowds. Students also turned to the more innocuous goal of fundraising on the roads, stopping drivers to explain their cause and asking for financial support.

While these activities were disruptive, they were, for the most part, harmless and posed little physical threat. They nonetheless impeded the lives of people in the city – shutting down transportation routes, preventing city dwellers from getting to work, and stopping traffic more generally. At times, however, the use of the streets and public transportation became more serious. Students used these as leverage in their negotiations with authorities, blocking access to educational buildings and major city thoroughfares or, in a rare instance, kidnapping state agents. Bus burning was also common, particularly for establishing barricades. Federal security reports began to note student activity on the streets and city thoroughfares in late July, at the very start of the movement itself. Despite these more extreme examples, much of the daily activity concerning the city streets was not highly violent, although, with the impending Olympics, it became a major concern in the eyes of the state. The bulk of the literature on the student movement highlights its peaceful, democratic nature, depicting the protestors as middle class students advocating for their rights. While such depictions are

generally apt, they nonetheless fail to account for the movement's broadly disruptive nature and for the wide range of behaviors exhibited by the participants. The presence of large groups of students, cruising Mexico's capital in hijacked buses, disrupted work and daily schedules.

These activities also point to differences within the movement itself. High school students from the UNAM's associated preparatory schools and the IPN's vocational schools were most likely to engage in such disruptive behavior. While, at times, older participants gave voice to more radical strategies, it was the younger elements within the movement who most often disrupted the city streets. Along with this generational difference, young men were more likely than women to participate in such activities. While women could be found at all levels of the movement and in a range of activities, men were far more likely to be detained for bus burning and related crimes than were their female counterparts.

An "on the ground" perspective reveals the strategies adopted by both the state and movement participants. The protest was a decentralized affair with brigades and large groups of roving students canvassing the city, usually with only loose directives from the CNH to spread "the truth" of the movement to the city's residents. They hoped to garner sufficient public support to force the state to concede to their demands but, beyond this, there was little overarching strategy. The CNH approach was largely hands off and students adopted a variety of tactics in a fairly spontaneous way. This allowed for the inclusion of differing agendas and ideologies – some advocated violence, others peaceful protest. In other words, the movement's "strategy" was mainly comprised of

spontaneous action, in which the tactics themselves became the strategy and varied considerably among the groups involved. The state, on the other hand, pursued a consistent strategy throughout: to contain the movement without conceding any student demands. Their daily use of violence, deployed by police and soldiers, conveyed their determination to silence the movement at all costs. The Tlatelolco massacre was the most visible instance of this strategy, yet students confronted state repression from the movement's beginning until its end.

Violence in the Movement: Conflict between Students and State Agents

The student movement began because of excessive police force when police assaulted students following a soccer game and an approved demonstration in support of the Cuban Revolution. This set the stage for the entirety of the movement in which students and state authorities would interact on school grounds and on the streets of Mexico City in confrontations that would continue for days. On July 26, during the first organized demonstration of the movement, students marching toward the Zócalo encountered *granaderos*. A conflict ensued during which the *granaderos* beat as many students as they could. The students responded by throwing stones at the riot corps. When a police convoy arrived, most of the 2,000 students dispersed. A few, however, “sat on the pavement since they considered this a way to avoid attack,” as stated by the

security report for that day.² Police chief Raul Mendiola Cerecero, a figure much maligned by the students, attempted to talk to the demonstrators but was rebuffed. Then he and his six body guards were targeted by students throwing stones. As the day's security report made clear, the stoning "... logically enraged the said military, who signaled the police to attack the students who immediately fled." The police and *granaderos* gave chase in the hope of arresting some of the demonstrators, and succeeded in keeping them from regrouping in the Alameda.³

The conflict begun that day continued well into the next. That morning, at 9:00am, a police patrol on its routine beat in Mixcoac encountered a large group of students from the Preparatory School 4 and the Vocational School 4. The students successfully kept the police from their beat and only surrendered the area at the behest of the Director of the Preparatory 4.⁴ Later that day, students would claim that their comrades from the Social Science Vocational school were attacked by *granaderos* in their school buildings. They asserted that the *granaderos* "... not only beat our comrades but also attacked professors and employees who were in their way, damaging the honor of the National Polytechnic Institute."⁵ Given that the demonstration had received prior state approval, students felt the state response was unwarranted and singled out the "extremist groups" whose presence they believed was intended to "...systematically sabotage the demonstration, but who were luckily rejected by the students and expelled

² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 1-6, July, 26, 1968.

³ Ibid.

⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 60-67, July, 27, 1968.

⁵ Ibid.

from the demonstration.”⁶ At the end of the episode, the students stated that a group of professional agitators “steered them [the students] to a confrontation with the Police, resulting in grave harm to these comrades ...”⁷ This would set a precedent for many state-student confrontations throughout the movement. Students believed and alleged that state-sponsored groups, student or otherwise, instigated violence during their demonstrations in order to justify a crackdown of government forces.

The Social Science Vocational School was not the only educational facility occupied by state forces in July, despite the fact that the movement began in the last week of that month. Indeed, during late July in the Preparatory School 1, both police forces and heavy machinery were in evidence, and the school door was forced open with a bazooka, later earning the event the title of *el bazucazo*. Beginning at 1 am and lasting little over an hour, troops entered the building, forcing the students to leave and posting soldiers around the building’s exterior. Once inside, the soldiers “... began apprehending the students they found, noting that many of them were wounded.”⁸ The school was taken by an assault team that was later reinforced by the 44th Infantry Battalion.

Students hotly contested the occupation of their school buildings, often at a physical cost to themselves. On July 29, immediately after the military occupied the Preparatory School 3, students attempted to expel them from the school grounds. A group of 200 students armed themselves with sticks and rocks, intending to confront the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-69, Leg. 24, Hoja 191, July 28, 1968.

granaderos who occupied the educational buildings.⁹ Indeed, that night, at about 9:45, a group of sixty IPN students returned to the school from the Zócalo with a wounded student. They refused to let the Red Cross treat the student for fear that he would be arrested.¹⁰ Only a day later in the National School of Odontology, a group of twenty students made plans to defend the autonomy of the University by “... arming themselves with sticks, rocks, chemical materials, and anything that can be used to defend the autonomy ...”¹¹ They argued that such a defense was necessary given that “... approximately ten deaths occurred last night when the Army took the Preparatory Schools.”¹² A demonstration on July 30 followed a similar pattern. After a period of disorder and conflict throughout the city, the Army was reinforced by 450 soldiers from the Parachute Rifle Brigade who helped them to disperse the students. In the process, they arrested two hundred students.¹³

Teachers also expressed concern for the autonomy of schools. On August 30, at a teachers’ meeting, the primary subject was the military occupation of Vocational School 7. The teachers discussed how “... at dawn yesterday about twenty cars and a bus brought various hooded people. Forcing open the doors to the Vocational, they went in and broke the auditorium windows and those of the offices ...” The teachers formed a

⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hoja 109, July 29, 1968.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 231-242, July 30, 1968.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

commission to investigate the extent of the wounded and dead from this event.¹⁴ The group reconvened in September to discuss its findings. Thirty teachers were present and the members of the Commission reported that "... they were kidnapped by members of the Army who ... made them drink alcoholic beverages and then freed them." They determined to send a telegram to the President asking him to intervene and determine who was responsible for the attacks on Vocational School 7.¹⁵

While students came into contact with state agents daily, the most violent confrontations occurred during the course of student demonstrations. During a demonstration on August 13 in the Zócalo, the speakers were interrupted by the arrival of four army vehicles which passed by the Cathedral. The students confronted them, thinking that they intended to break up the demonstration. At the same time, the speakers encouraged students to stay where they were and continue the demonstration as planned. The students let the vehicles pass and, as one speaker put it, "... they were afraid and fled down *5 de Mayo*."¹⁶ That evening, protestors, mostly students and teachers, returned to the *Bosque de Chapultepec* where the march had begun and many had left their cars. They found that their cars had been vandalized with windows broken, tires punctured, and antennas destroyed. They speculated "...that this was done by those working for the government."¹⁷

¹⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hojas 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

¹⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hojas 128-143, Sept. 1968.

¹⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 30, Hojas 1-15, Aug. 13, 1968.

¹⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 39, Hojas 158-169, Sept. 13, 1968.

Military and federal security agencies were well prepared for such large-scale protests. On August 27, prior to a demonstration scheduled for that day, they established security around the Russian and United States' embassies, using army soldiers and metropolitan police. They deployed a contingent from the 19th Police Company to the United States Embassy, along with two platoons of *granaderos* and soldiers from the 24th Infantry Battalion. Near the Russian embassy, military forces stationed eight combat tanks, an armored jeep, and three military transports, along with members of the riot corps.¹⁸ Of course, other forces were strategically deployed around the city, as evidenced by the fighting between them and the protestors during that demonstration and those of subsequent days.

During the demonstrations, the Zócalo and much of the surrounding area turned into a battleground. On the evening of a demonstration on August 27, a group of 200 students attempted to enter the Zócalo and were rebuffed by Army soldiers. Later a group of 250 students attempted to seize a city bus and were met by the police. The students "... began to throw all manner of things at them..."¹⁹ The police in kind threw a tear gas grenade which dispersed the students from the area. Neighbors observing the interaction shouted "Assassins" at the police.²⁰ By 8:25 that evening, another group of 200 students gathered at the intersection of the streets *Guatemala* and *Brasil*. While taking up donations for their movement, the students encountered the *granaderos*. A

¹⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hojas 328-355, Aug. 27, 1968.

¹⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hojas 190-210, Aug. 28, 1968.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

police transport was sent to the intersection as the students attempted to reorganize on the nearby streets, *Argentina* and *Donceles*, with the hope of blocking military and police access to the Constitutional Plaza.²¹

Given this conflict, students attempted to control not only their educational buildings but also certain public spaces, most notably the Zócalo which remained a zone of conflict throughout the movement. By September 24, state forces controlled the Casco de Santo Tomás, the Vocational Schools 2, 5, and 7, and Zacatenco.²² That same day, students from the Vocational School 4 noted "... widespread destruction to the school, furniture, and equipment."²³ At a CNH meeting on August 27, those present agreed that "...during today's demonstration there will be state repression, and that families and students shouldn't stay indefinitely in the Plaza of the Constitution." Concerning the school campuses, they agreed to "... leave guards of thirty students in each of the schools."²⁴ When the demonstration ended, at close to 10 that evening, students organized themselves to stay in the Zócalo. That morning, the 28th, at 1 in the morning, an action coordinated by the Army and Preventative Police began. In the words of security forces:

... they evacuated the Constitutional Plaza, and police elements began to burn fliers and take down campaign tents and buses that were in Zócalo's *plazaleta*. The students were dispersed down the streets *Madero* and *5 de Mayo* ... They later formed two groups on the streets *San Juan de Létran*

²¹ Ibid.

²² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 49-56, Sept. 24, 1968.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hojas 328-355, Aug. 27, 1968.

and near the statue of the *Caballito*, where they tried to impede the passage of vehicles and were finally and decisively dispersed on the *Paseo de la Reforma* at 2:30am. The Constitutional Plaza remained under the custody of the Preventative Police of the DF who immediately began to clean it.²⁵

Following the large-scale demonstration on August 28, a little over a month into the movement's life, students adopted new strategies to secure the educational buildings of the UNAM from state occupation. In every building of University City, students named commissions to block access to the interior of the CU, in the hope of preventing military and police access to the campus. Rumor had it that in the Faculty of Sciences, "... they created a nitroglycerin-based bomb, and on the roof of the building, they had brought up a gas tank to sprinkle the bombs with gas and throw them on the army's armored cars." Students also organized brigades to patrol the facilities and nearby streets of the school in university vehicles. They used "walkie-talkies" to remain in constant communication with those at the center of CU, especially the Faculty of Medicine. DFS agents noted "that they were provided with blankets with the intention of spending the night there."²⁶

By late September, the struggle to control territory within the schools and the city center became particularly heated. During a September 24 demonstration, the protestors planned to end their march by heading to the Zócalo. These plans were disrupted, due to the extensive military presence. The protestors were deterred by "... the shooting off of

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hojas 190-210, Aug. 28, 1968.

tear gas bombs and the detainment of sixty students.”²⁷ At the same time, approximately 300 students near the Vocational School tried to reclaim the buildings. When a group of 500 had gathered in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas*, they had an hour-long meeting.²⁸ Then they headed toward the Palace of Fine Arts where they split into several groups in order to enter the Alameda Park. By the time the *granaderos* arrived, their numbers had swelled to 2,000.²⁹

On that same day, September 24, students from the Vocational School 5 gathered, about 250 people in all, to attempt to seize control of the school building which was occupied by the police. They arrested two students, taking them into the building, which angered their comrades. The remaining students fled to the surrounding streets where they detained a trolley bus which they planned to burn. They were stopped by the arrival of a vehicle filled with *granaderos*. While the skirmish was not atypical, the consequences were serious, as one 22 year old student died in the conflict.³⁰ At the same time, a group of 150 students from the Vocational School also sought to regain control of their school buildings. They “... attempted to provoke the force of the police who possessed the buildings and who fired a few shots in the air to scare them.”³¹

²⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 49-56, Sept. 24, 1968.

²⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 207-217, Sept. 25, 1968.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 49-56, Sept. 24, 1968.

³¹ Ibid.

These events occurred several days before the enormous demonstration on August 28 and the flurry of activity continued well after that day. Once the military had the Zócalo firmly in hand, they organized its occupation. On August 28, after a heated and violent exchange with the students, the *granaderos* and police successfully evacuated the Plaza. That evening, word spread among the CNH that the army and police had dispersed the “permanent guards in the Zócalo.”³² During the demonstration of the prior day, the demonstrators had decided to leave 3,000 students in the Plaza, arguing that they would remain until the government met the student demands. At 12:30am, the army and riot corps arrived at the Plaza, gave the students two minutes to leave, and then proceeded to evacuate those remaining and remove any vehicles from the square. After this, they established control, dividing the Plaza into quadrants. Students gathered in the nearby streets and determined to march around the Plaza and to try to gain access to the National Palace although its doors were firmly closed to avoid their entrance. The army was called in to augment the police, and together they dispersed the students who reorganized yet again into small groups on the nearby streets. Approximately 1,500 students confronted the army and police, throwing stones, sticks, and bottles. From a window on *Madero Avenue*, someone fired shots from a third story balcony at the military. While no one was hit, “... because the army responded in kind, the result was seventy wounded.”³³ Security agents arrested the person suspected of firing the weapon, as well as two others who had “thrown gasoline” on the state forces. The army and police

³² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hojas 190-210, Aug. 28, 1968.

³³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hojas 190-210, Aug. 28, 1968.

continued to try to evacuate the students from the area while yet another group reorganized to fight the nearby *granaderos* on Avenue 20 de Noviembre. Students continued to attack the police and military with sticks, stones, and bottles, yet the state forces prevailed and eventually succeeded in dispersing the students from the area. Students later reported that “while they reacted with much courage and tried to confront the soldiers, the military force overwhelmed them ...”³⁴ Students in the Preparatory School 7 broadcast the removal of students from the Zócalo with megaphones. Reports of detained or missing students were rampant as was speculation concerning their safety.³⁵

Simultaneously, on August 27, students held a demonstration in front of a Mexico City prison. Fifty students used sticks and stones to block the passage of two security guards stationed in front of the prison.³⁶ Later that day, students protested Russia’s invasion of Czechoslovakia. They gathered in front of the Russian Embassy in Mexico City where the military promptly arrived and “... invited them in a cordial manner to remove themselves...” The students left, yelling slogans such as “Long live Mexico!” and “Long live liberty!”³⁷

The effects of such intense and violent interactions were felt for days. By August 30, three days after the demonstration occurred, students asserted that there was “... a

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hojas 328-355, Aug. 27, 1968.

³⁷ Ibid.

large number of tanks and troops [in CU and near the IPN] and it was the same in the center of the city and other patrolled schools.”³⁸ The CNH also informed strike committees that there were reported to be 50,000 soldiers in the city. By that day, the CNH had reports that the soldiers had blocked one entrance to CU, and they feared that they would block others, effectively sealing the students within. Many expressed particular concern that the troops would intervene in the CU, detaining student leaders. If this were to be the case, the CNH urged non-resistance in order to avoid both arrests and being wounded. That same day rumors of twenty-three disappeared students circulated among the schools. Furthermore, Professor Herberito Castillo was rumored to have been brutally beaten and bed-ridden in the Faculty of Medicine. A recording and photos of the attack were purported to exist.³⁹

Amidst these fears and losses, the fighting between students and *granaderos* continued. On August 30, in response to a group of fifty students distributing fliers around the Offices of Ground Transportation, fifty *granaderos* and the 2nd Battalion of Combat Engineers arrived in jeeps and armored cars arrived to disperse the students. Within forty-five minutes, they had control of the area, leaving *granaderos* to patrol it.⁴⁰ Indeed, throughout the day, troops in military transport patrolled the city, “... especially near the educational centers that are on strike.”⁴¹

³⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hojas 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

During a CNH meeting at the UNAM on August 30, following the violent encounter on August 27, members discussed the widely circulating rumors of violence in the Vocational School 7. Students related that “groups of unknown persons, dressed in white, with tennis shoes and helmets, machine-gunned the school and took the body of a student into an automobile. Why and where they took it was unknown. The fight committee gathered the shells which demonstrate that the shots were fired by ‘official weapons.’”⁴²

In light of the continual conflict between students and state agents, some students decided to arm themselves. On August 30, it was rumored that students in University City and Zacatenco had placed containers of gasoline in the corners of their buildings with the idea that “... if the Army wants to intervene in this place, they will threaten to burn the buildings.”⁴³ In September, it was alleged that one student leader proposed to spread bundles of dynamite throughout CU “... in case the Army intervenes in this house of study, it would destroy much of the UNAM’s facilities ...”⁴⁴ This action was roundly condemned by movement participants. That month, students in the Superior School of Economics of the IPN encouraged their *brigadistas* to “... go about armed to combat any aggression.”⁴⁵ On September 20 state officials found a cache of arms in UNAM’s Faculty of Medicine. The arms and cartridges were stored in a drawer “... usually used

⁴² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hojas 104-119, August, 30 1968.

⁴³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hojas 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

⁴⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hojas 128-143, Sept. 1968.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

to hold cadavers.”⁴⁶ Five days later, on September 25, the CNH gave instructions to students concerning the upcoming demonstration. They urged students to “... go armed with sticks, stones, and helmets if possible in order to face the public if they try to repress us and, if they notice police or military, to disperse in groups of no larger than 10 people, walking from one spot to the other, to disorient the police.”⁴⁷ By October 1, a speaker at a demonstration claimed that “... the Government has responded with bayonets and *macanas*, they have even reached the point of sending 10,000 soldiers to occupy CU.”⁴⁸ Given, the large police presence, many felt that arming themselves was the only reasonable option.

Alternately, other schools opted out of the movement for fear of state reprisals. While some students were planning to set fire to their educational buildings in self-defense, others had a very different reaction. In the Superior School of Mathematics and Physics, students opted not to hold their CNH meeting for fear that “... they would be apprehended and because of poor attendance [at the meeting].”⁴⁹ State presence effectively shut down plans for protest on September 26. This scheduled demonstration did not occur because police arrived early in order to secure the area.⁵⁰ Similarly, a march planned for the afternoon of September 25 from the Museum of Anthropology to

⁴⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 51, Hoja 202, Sept. 20, 1968.

⁴⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 207-217, Sept. 25, 1968.

⁴⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 117-125, Oct. 1, 1968.

⁴⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hojas 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

⁵⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 316-323, Sept. 26, 1968.

the Zócalo failed to take place when soldiers, police and *granaderos* surrounded the streets near these sites. When protestors arrived, these forces immediately dispersed them.⁵¹

The Tlatelolco massacre is the most widely known moment of violence during the student movement. Yet little is known about the dynamics of its violence. While the archival sources that pertain to October 2nd remain in the hands of the state, those sources from after the massacre show that the violence continued well into the coming year. Indeed, this is corroborated by memorials and later testimony. On October 3, state security forces reported that the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* was under army control. They further reported the explosion of a small-scale bomb in the Miguel Alemán Viaduct that damaged its structure. The Secret Service Commanders arrested five young men believed to be responsible, noting that "... they had the appearance of students."⁵²

The violence of October 2nd had its intended effect. On October 3, most the administrative workers of the UNAM were afraid to go to work "... thinking that the school would be assaulted again by the Army."⁵³ Student attendance at the CU was minimal.⁵⁴ Scheduled meetings in the Faculty of Sciences, Law, and Political and Social Sciences were cancelled for poor attendance. The Chiefs of Brigades of the Faculties of Philosophy and Letters as well as Political and Social Sciences received instructions to

⁵¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 207-217, Sept. 25, 1968.

⁵² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 267-269, Oct. 3, 1968.

⁵³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 267-269, Oct. 3, 1968.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

“... continue clandestine work in groups of three to avoid detainment.”⁵⁵ For those who were on campus, rumors as to the fate of those in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* the day before were widespread, mostly expressing fears that they were detained or dead. Meanwhile, federal security agents continued their work of sorting out students and “... restoring liberty to those it does not consider responsible for the crimes while Forensics examined the bodies.”⁵⁶

Despite the terror of October 2nd, participants, for several months thereafter, continued their activities in smaller degree but with greater caution. On December 12, attendance in the CU was nearly back to normal. In the Faculties of Engineering, Law, Political and Social Sciences, Philosophy and Letters, among others schools, students determined to suspend classes in order to attend a demonstration scheduled for that day. They did so “... knowing that in different areas throughout the City there are police.” They decided that they would have the demonstration in any case. Students of other faculties and schools held provisional meetings to discuss whether or not to attend the demonstration.⁵⁷

The demonstration on December 12th continued as planned, and the military forces made themselves felt. As the security report for that day made clear, “... near CU as well as in the streets around the Casco de Santo Tomás and Zacatenco, army groups

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 288-169, Oct. 4, 1968. For Forensics, which reported a total of 26 victims, AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 58, Hoja 277, Sept. 17, 1968.

⁵⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hojas 1-6, Dec. 13, 1968.

with transport cars and tanks made themselves present, causing many students to flee.”⁵⁸ The students spent the day attempting to circumvent groups of soldiers, police, and pro-government student groups. The day ended with tear gas and gun fire.⁵⁹ By 9pm, the state forces on the streets *Madreselva* and *Carpio* alone consisted of fifteen troop transports and on *Plan de Ayala* there were sixteen jeeps and ten lightweight transports. As one student put it: “... the demonstration can’t go on because the repressive government forces have acted again. The army has penetrated CU returning again to violate its autonomy. Moreover, over 1,000 students on a bus coming here were arrested and accused of robbery ...”⁶⁰

Student Tactics on the Streets: Disorder, Bus Burning, Political Vandalism, and Kidnapping

The daily activities of the students make clear that the seizure and burning of buses was one of a series of protest tactics employed by protestors, one that generated considerable disorder within the city. The practices of seizing buses, boarding buses, and even burning buses, as well as stopping automobiles, did not pass without intense discussion from those involved in 1968. Indeed, while some movement participants

⁵⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hojas 1-6, Dec. 13, 1968.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

advocated such practices, overall they caused consternation both within and outside the movement. While these activities may be attributed to youthful exuberance or mob psychology, they were often consciously directed toward certain ends. Students attempted to manipulate traffic and to disrupt bus lines in order to exert greater pressure on authorities. Others, particularly the CNH leadership, were concerned that such calls to violence, especially the burning of buses, were perpetrated by outside agitators hoping to delegitimize the movement in order to justify a repressive state response. Indeed, in the wake of the Tlatelolco massacre, participants speculated that it was this sort of disruptive activity that led to the repression. The variety of these opinions points to the diverse character of the movement, comprised as it was of different groups and organizations that often acted independently of each other. Thus different opinions concerning the legitimacy of bus hijackings, burnings, and disruption of the streets could exist within the movement, without individual participants being aware of the full extent of activity. Indeed, news sources reveal the breadth and scope of such activities.

The student-led seizure of buses exerted pressure on transportation officials and the state. This was particularly true in light of the impending Olympics, during which government officials hoped to present an image of an orderly and modern Mexico. Infrastructure and city space were essential, a visual representation of Mexico's position within the pantheon of modern nations. Among other endeavors, Mexico's subway system was created in the years prior to the Games. One of the most immediate concerns of the state after the start of the student movement was the disruptive effects that students had on the city streets. Security agents took careful note of student interactions with

buses, cars, and other public transportation, observing their effects on traffic, passengers, pedestrians, and businesses. Indeed, such actions may have been seen by the state as part of a broader strategy in which students “hoped the *granaderos* would come and confront them.”⁶¹ At least this was what a late July security report claimed.

Students had several reasons for manipulating public space. They wanted to control key urban areas during their demonstrations. Yet there were also instances of less visible contestations of city space. For instance, on August 22nd, students made plans for a demonstration during which they were to gather at the intersection of the Avenues *Insurgentes*, *Oaxaca*, and *Chapultepec*, a major zone of traffic in Mexico City. The idea was “to sit there four or five hours in order to interrupt traffic in the hope that stores will lose business and in this way create discontent ...”⁶² The students hoped that the end result would be a quicker solution to the student-state conflict if sales were affected. While those at the meeting did not seem to consider that the “quicker solution” might not promote their cause, nonetheless, the manipulation of traffic was central to this action. In a more extreme form, a speaker at a late September demonstration, only days before the massacre, argued that burning buses could help the movement. He maintained that it was the “... best manner of putting pressure on the authorities so that they would respond to the petition.” Noting the danger this posed to students, he asserted that the risk was

⁶¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 115-119, July 29, 1968.

⁶² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hojas 54-67, Aug. 22, 1968.

irrelevant in light of “reaching the end,” and that participants “should continue to burn buses.”⁶³

More common, however, were condemnations of such activities, particularly the more violent behaviors. Many participants and student leaders routinely made pleas to end the burning and seizing of buses, terming such actions detrimental to the success of the movement. In late August, the CNH asked students to stop seizing buses because “they are arresting students” and, given that transportation authorities had suspended bus service to University City, the “student population who comes to meetings is diminished.” They further encouraged the brigades to remain small so that, if needed, students could escape the police in cars without “the need to capture buses.”⁶⁴ Similarly, at a meeting only two days later, also in the *Plaza*, one student speaker addressed the issue of widespread bus burning, exhorting students to stop burning buses despite the state violence directed against them.⁶⁵

Others worried that seizing and burning buses were the activities of state agents meant to create disruption.⁶⁶ Such disruption, they feared, would be used to justify a violent state response. Finally, others argued against interfering with the public transportation system because “it is the public that suffers the consequences.”⁶⁷ Given

⁶³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 316-323, Sept. 26, 1968.

⁶⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hojas 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

⁶⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 207-217, September, 25 1968.

⁶⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hojas 128-143, Sept. 1968.

⁶⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 316-323, Sept. 26, 1968.

this, the burning of buses was considered by some students to be “the efforts of pseudo-students who aren’t more than terrorists and professional agitators who take advantage of the student movement so that the people will reject them ...”⁶⁸

Calls to stop this activity were not wholly effective, and the hijacking and burning of buses continued for the duration of the movement. Given that the hijackings continued, some wondered what role they might have played in the demise of the mobilization. During a meeting in mid-December, more than two months after the Tlatelolco massacre, students from the Vocational School criticized leftist groups for burning buses and thereby “provoking public forces.”⁶⁹ By making this claim, they attributed the “failure” of the movement to its more radical wing and assumed that such disruptive activities were part of a larger “revolutionary” strategy. Although these criticisms took on a different meaning after the widespread violence of October 2nd, dissenting opinions were present long before the massacre.

Student use of public transportation and the streets had considerable range: from capturing buses in order to attend demonstrations or escape the police, to burning buses and using them as barricades, to stopping motorists to ask for money to support the movement. All of these strategies were widely employed throughout the movement. For instance, students seized buses in order to go from one school to another or to arrive in large groups at a demonstration. These practices often involved large groups of students,

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hojas 326-328, Dec. 14, 1968.

and typically entailed boarding a bus, rerouting it, taking up collections, painting slogans on its sides, and the like. Only rarely were people injured by these activities.

Disruptions began from the very beginning of the movement. On the evening of July 27, a group of forty students boarded a bus and made their way to the Vocational School 5 where they took "... an empty bottle and extracted gasoline from the vehicle, possibly with the intent to make Molotov cocktails."⁷⁰ Only a few days later, on July 30, following a demonstration, groups of students from the Preparatory School 1 detained three buses, resulting in a skirmish with the police who then took control of the buses. After regrouping, the students "... returned to seize buses in the same zone, with the same results ...," meaning the police again secured the buses. Later that day, students from the Vocational Schools 2 and 5 detained four city buses, "... stoning them and breaking most of their windows."⁷¹ Three weeks later, students from the same schools boarded a police jeep in front of the State Secretary's office, forcing the police to drive them "... without knowing their final destination."⁷² Five minutes later, on the corner of *Atenas* and *Abraham Gonzalez*, twenty students attacked a soda truck, stealing six boxes of 'Squert'."⁷³ Similarly, only two days later, *brigadistas* not only seized several vehicles, but also "attacked" a bread van, demanding that the driver distribute the bread among them. The driver "refused saying that he was only an employee so the students took the

⁷⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 60-67, July, 27, 1968.

⁷¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 231-242, July 30, 1968

⁷² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 228-240, Aug. 20, 1968.

⁷³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 228-240, Aug. 20, 1968.

merchandise.”⁷⁴ Following this, the students stopped a distributor of the water “Electropura,” seized several bottles of water, placed them in their cars, and took flight.⁷⁵

Student commandeering of public buses was widespread. For example, on August 2, a large group of “leftist” students from the Faculties of Philosophy and Letters, Sciences, the National School of Political and Social Sciences, and the National School of Economy, numbering approximately 150, took to the streets to detain buses and paint them. These buses were, of course, filled with passengers, and the students let them leave as soon as the painting was done.⁷⁶ A week later, on August 9th, fifty students from the Vocational Schools 2 and 5 commandeered public buses.⁷⁷ Less than a week later, university students arrived at a demonstration in Zacatenco aboard seized buses.⁷⁸ Only two days thereafter, a group of students planned to visit the various neighborhoods of the city to distribute propaganda by “seizing a public bus.”⁷⁹ Five days later, a group of twenty-five students commandeered two UNAM buses, taking them to the University’s Faculty of Law. Shortly thereafter, a group of seventeen university students drove down *Avenida Insurgentes* in hijacked buses, stopping only to paint “slogans on walls,

⁷⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hojas 54-67, Aug. 22, 1968.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hojas 116A-116I, Aug. 2, 1968.

⁷⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hojas 1-15, Aug. 9, 1968.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 31, Hojas 1-17, Aug. 15, 1968.

businesses, and banks.”⁸⁰ On August 22, over one hundred students from the Preparatory School 7 commandeered four buses from different city lines and redirected them to UNAM’s University City. Later that day, a group of sixty students hijacked a bus to take them to the factory doors of the Light and Power Company.⁸¹ At a meeting on that day, four speakers claimed popular support for the movement, given that they and their friends arrived on three public buses. The proof of this support was that the buses were not captured, but rather, given “by the goodwill of the owners themselves.”⁸² Later that evening, a group of students from the Superior School of Economy found a group of city buses that authorities were hoping to keep away from them. They took all but the three that needed repairs to their school buildings in Zacatenco, keeping them within the grounds of the school.⁸³ Collectively, these student actions disrupted the city’s public transportation to a significant extent.

Among all the student hijackings of public vehicles, the preparatory and vocational students were represented in much higher numbers, indicating a greater willingness to commandeer buses and put them to their own purposes. During the August 27th protest, these students were responsible for seizing fifteen buses, taking them to the Humanities Building.⁸⁴ Indeed, following a late meeting at the Preparatory School,

⁸⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 228-240, Aug. 20, 1968.

⁸¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hojas 54-67, Aug. 22, 1968.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hojas 190-210, Aug. 28, 1968.

7,300 students left the school to board city buses with the aim of “raising the consciousness” of the passengers.⁸⁵

Many students preferred to arrive at demonstrations in commandeered buses, and on days of large-scale protests, seized buses were put into heavy rotation, picking up protestors and dropping them off at the demonstration sites. On August 27th, at a fairly large demonstration, more than twenty-two buses were seized to take students to the protest. By one in the afternoon, activists from both the UNAM and the IPN were driving commandeered buses in order to drop demonstrators at the starting point, the Museum of History and Anthropology. They would then be used to take latecomers directly to their destination, the National Palace. Students from the Preparatory School 7 seized a bus filled with passengers, redirected it, and took them to the University in order to pick up protestors. In the mayhem of the day, one city bus ran over a secondary student, Roberto Cruz Santos.⁸⁶ On this same day, a group of university students hijacked six buses, already filled with passengers and took them to the University City. A student on one bus called to his *compañeros* to “meet at the Zócalo.”⁸⁷

The activity surrounding city buses on one day alone was often considerable if a protest was planned. This was the case on July 27th, one of the first demonstrations of the movement. State security records for that day note that students from the IPN’s Vocational School 7 seized city buses in order to pick up students from other IPN schools.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hojas 328-355, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁸⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hojas 190-210, Aug. 28, 1968.

Once they had a mass grouping of “approximately 500 students, they began to seize more buses.”⁸⁸ Similarly, on that day, students from UNAM’s Preparatory Schools 1 and 3 also seized buses passing by, as well as detaining “vehicles that passed by their school, asking the drivers for money, and when they were refused, they broke their windshields.”⁸⁹ Later that day, the Preparatory students determined to keep everyone but students out of the area by using seized buses to block the surrounding streets, augmenting these barriers with “students standing arm in arm.”⁹⁰ The security report noted that such tactics were possible for the students given the “large numbers of provisions of food and soda” in the school.⁹¹ One of the effects of this was that all nearby businesses closed their doors. By that afternoon, students from Preparatory School 7 were seizing buses as well, eleven in all, which they used to block the flow of traffic near their school buildings. The drivers of the buses removed the tires to keep the students from taking them and by ten that evening transportation authorities managed to regain the eleven buses, which were missing only their tires and one motor head.⁹²

The most serious disruptions occurred on days of large demonstrations. On August 10, students from the Vocational Schools 2 and 5 partially burned the car of an elementary school teacher who had happened to park it near the school. Firemen arrived

⁸⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 60-67, July, 27, 1968.

⁸⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 60-67, July, 27, 1968.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

in order to contain the blaze.⁹³ Following a demonstration on September 25, a group of students burned a motorcycle that belonged to a transit official on the *Paseo de la Reforma*, near the buildings of the Olympic Committee. Later, a group of 300 students near the Vocational School 7, which the army occupied, moved the burned carcass of a trolleybus to the school, attempting to block outside access to the building. Then they launched an attack to regain the building.⁹⁴

While large-scale demonstrations were examples of intense activity, the movement maintained an ongoing and consistent manipulation of public access to space and transit lines. An example of fairly typical behavior included the seizure of a bus, relocating it to the Vocational Schools 3 and 6 of the IPN, from which agents of the Transportation Department later removed it.⁹⁵ Again, on the 30th of August, a brigade of twenty five students seized a city bus to take them to a “lightening strike” meeting.⁹⁶ The next day, students from both the IPN and the UNAM used two buses to reach the offices of the Secretary of Industry and Commerce, which they tried to enter. The police arrived and they boarded the buses to flee the scene. Later that day, students used buses to block the entrance to the UNAM. Security officials removed the buses which, they noted, was a “consequence of detaining those who seize buses.”⁹⁷ In September, students detained a

⁹³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hojas 3-14, Aug. 10, 1968.

⁹⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 207-217, Sept. 25, 1968.

⁹⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hojas 22-24, 1968.

⁹⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hojas 104-109, Aug. 30, 1968.

⁹⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hojas 209-220, Aug. 31, 1968.

Mexican Olympic Committee vehicle filled with employees for the Games.⁹⁸ Even as late as December 14th, months after the massacre, students detained three city buses in order to facilitate a march on behalf of the political prisoners, resulting in several detentions by police.⁹⁹

Student behavior ultimately resulted in more inconvenience than menace. However, at times, it became dangerous, posing a greater threat to individual citizens. On July 29, students from the Vocational School 5 attempted to detain a convoy from the Department of Transportation. They were unsuccessful, despite the fact that they numbered almost 300. Instead, they kidnapped a transportation agent on duty in the nearby Ciudadela, taking him back to their school buildings. He was held temporarily, and upon release claimed the students had roughed him up and stolen his motorcycle. At the same time, 500 students from the Vocational School 2 seized a Red Cross ambulance. They held the ambulance for ten minutes, preventing its movement and stopping traffic for several blocks. By that evening, students held five public buses. A group of 700 students that night planned to seize even more in order to secure the area surrounding their school.¹⁰⁰ While much of this action involved students from the high schools, that same day students from the IPN's School of Economics seized eight city buses, with the aim of taking them to the Vocational School 5 and joining the fray."¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hojas 128-143, Sept. 1968.

⁹⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hojas 326-328, Dec. 14, 1968.

¹⁰⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 115-119, July 29, 1968.

¹⁰¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hoja 126, July 29, 1968.

In light of student interference with bus lines and transit lines, it is no surprise that these public services were sometimes discontinued. Among the first to be interrupted were the bus lines to University City, home to UNAM as well as the Olympic Stadium. This disruption of transportation services doubtless was of concern to state officials as they contemplated the masses of tourists preparing to descend on Mexico City for the Olympic Games. The first reports of suspended bus lines began in late July. On July 27th, Department of Transportation Authorities suspended the San-Rafael-Roma-Nueva Santa María line. The rationale for this was that students were “using the buses of this route to take them to the different schools of the IPN.”¹⁰² Moreover, all routes to the University were suspended in light of the numbers of seized and vandalized buses in University City and the surrounding area. From that day forward, bus service to University City would be sporadic until after the Tlatelolco massacre. On July 29th, along with the bus lines, authorities suspended trolley bus services.¹⁰³ Bus access to UNAM was again suspended on August 20th. This was because “the political brigades of students were writing graffiti on the buses with the now well-known messages.”¹⁰⁴ On October 1, buses and trolley buses to University City were again suspended.¹⁰⁵ Two days later, following the Tlatelolco massacre, bus and trolley services were again suspended.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 60-67, July, 27, 1968.

¹⁰³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 115-119, July 29, 1968.

¹⁰⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 228-240, Aug. 20, 1968.

¹⁰⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 117-125, Oct. 1, 1968.

¹⁰⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 267-269, Oct. 3, 1968.

While much of the student activity on the streets focused on intercepting buses and using them to transport students, at times such activities became more extreme. Students used buses as barricades, sometimes setting fire to them in order to prevent police or military access to their educational buildings. Such politically motivated vandalism was intended to protect the autonomy of the schools and to protect students from interactions with military and police. Nonetheless, given the concern generated by fires and the state's aim to control the schools, such activities often led to confrontations with Mexico City's police and riot corps. Indeed, the crimes of robbery and vandalism were among the chief justifications for the arrest of student participants.

State security reports recorded the first bus burning on July 26th, at the very start of the movement. Following a demonstration on that day, at least nineteen buses were seized by preparatory students.¹⁰⁷ A group of 150 students from the Preparatory Schools 2 and 3 left their school buildings and filled the surrounding streets. They seized city buses, parking them at the intersections near the schools where they burned two buses from the Tacuba-Atzeapotzalco lines. At the same time, students from the Preparatory School 3 burned a city bus, destroying the interior completely. When firemen arrived, the students repelled them with "rocks while they took refuge in the Preparatory Schools from which they continued throwing projectiles so as to keep the authorities from approaching."¹⁰⁸ Eventually, officials from the Department of Transportation removed the buses. On that same day, students from the Preparatory School 1 claimed that they

¹⁰⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 60-67, July, 27, 1968.

¹⁰⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 1-6, July, 26, 1968.

had dismantled and burned at least two buses in their entirety.¹⁰⁹ Only a few days later, a group of secondary students seized a city bus and set it on fire. Not surprisingly, security agents reported that this “resulted in burned seats and broken windows.”¹¹⁰ The police found their way to the scene, along with officials from the Department of Transportation. They detained four students, all young men ranging from fifteen to twenty-one years of age. Thus, politically motivated vandalism, particularly bus burning, was part of the movement from its beginning and was a major cause of student arrests.

While much of the violence on the streets was fairly spontaneous, at times student interference in public transportation was planned and directed toward redressing clearly defined grievances. For example, on the 27th of July, the security report from the Federal Security Department noted that students from UNAM’s Faculty of Law held four public buses in their school buildings. A young student of law, named Manuel Pereyra Rodríguez, was killed in a bus accident two days earlier in the midst of a conflict. His fellow students captured and held the four buses for ransom. They refused to release the four buses until their demand, indemnities for Pereyra’s family, was met. The students released the buses after agreeing to the sum of \$60,000.00¹¹¹

In a similar manner, students resolved a grievance with a driver of the “Herradura de Plata” bus line. The students had attempted to board the bus but the driver refused their entrance, claiming that they had declined to pay their fares. An altercation ensued

¹⁰⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 60-67, July, 27, 1968.

¹¹⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 231-242, July 30, 1968.

¹¹¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 60-67, July, 27, 1968.

and the driver came to blows with two students, wounding them in the groin so severely that the students were forced to seek medical care from the Red Cross. Their comrades at the Vocational School 4, in turn, seized four buses from the line as hostages. They intended to use them as leverage in their negotiations for compensation. On the afternoon of July 29, the issue was resolved by an agreement between students and the bus line that the buses would be returned in exchange for payment of hospital and all related medical bills.¹¹²

Similarly, students from the UNAM's Preparatory School 1 manipulated access to space through vehicles and transportation, using them as negotiating chips in their struggles with authorities. On July 27th, they blocked the school by using public buses that they had captured. The students contacted Mexico's City's Chief of Police, offering to remove the blockade if he would release detained students.¹¹³ Thus the buses and their occupation of city space were used as leverage for negotiations with the state. What ensued was chaotic. One bus was partly burned, and police officials leveled charges of drunkenness against the students. Later, the students returned the buses to the Transportation Department, and allowed access to the areas near the school.¹¹⁴

Late September 1968 saw an increase in bus burning and vandalism related to the city's public transportation system. On September 24, a day of a large-scale demonstration, Preparatory 4 students detained a state bus and burned it. Students from

¹¹² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 115-119, July 29, 1968.

¹¹³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 60-67, July, 27, 1968.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

the Preparatory School 7 hijacked a soda bus and brought cases of the beverage into the school. Immediately thereafter, they overturned a police jeep and set fire to it. Then they burned a city bus and used other buses to block the intersections surrounding the school.”¹¹⁵ During the tumult of the bus hijacking, one passenger, a 58 year old married gardener, was injured as he tried to flee the bus, while several policemen were hurt by rocks thrown by students.¹¹⁶ Later that night, once the demonstration had ended, students burned two buses in the Nonoalco housing complex.”¹¹⁷ Having realized that the police were determined to end the demonstration, the students from Preparatory 7 decided “to burn city buses.”¹¹⁸ They seized seven of these vehicles and set fire to two of them. Eventually, the fire was put out by the firemen and the buses rescued by the police.”¹¹⁹ On that same evening, groups of students from the Vocational School 5 joined others attempting to burn a bus. Once they escorted passengers off the bus, they threw Molotov cocktails into the vehicle. Two cars of firemen were able to partially rescue the bus. Only minutes later, a group of fifty students from the Preparatory School 9 burned a trolleybus; it required two firemen to put out the fire.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 49-56, Sept. 24, 1968.

¹¹⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 207-217, Sept. 25, 1968.

¹¹⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 49-56, Sept. 24, 1968.

¹¹⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 207-217, Sept. 25, 1968.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 207-217, Sept. 25, 1968.

The activity generated by this demonstration continued into the evening and following day. That evening, students burned two more buses.¹²¹ The following afternoon, a group of ten students burned a trolleybus in the Coyoacán neighborhood, which drew the attention of the *granaderos*.¹²² In the Preparatory School 7, a group of students came into conflict with the nearby police when they tried to seize a motorcycle and burn it. All but about sixty of the students were dispersed. Those who remained began to stop buses, “asking the passengers to get off, with the intent to burn them.”¹²³ This was the last large-scale demonstration prior to the October 2nd massacre.¹²⁴

Following the massacre, there was a marked decrease in student activity. Nonetheless, there were sporadic demonstrations. On December 13, at a march in University City, students rode around the city in four seized buses, using every stop in traffic to step down and paint graffiti slogans in favor of their movement. Once the demonstration began, one of the speakers encouraged the crowd to seize five buses and burn them. This suggestion was met with considerable dismay by students from the

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 316-323, Sept. 26, 1968.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ A later security report documented the “confession” of one of the participants. While the circumstances surrounding the information remain murky, the student reportedly expressed that the “Chief of brigades is a student of the Vocational School 7 of the IPN ... who uses the pseudo-name ‘Number 8’ to hide his identity ... he let them [a group of students] know that the National Strike Committee had authorized acts of violence and sabotage, at which they immediately took to the streets and through the use of ‘Molotov’ bombs on the 25th, burnt a trolleybus, a tram and a pickup truck belonging to the Mexico City Department of Transportation ...” See, AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 1-8, 1968.

“Faculties of Law and Engineering who faced off with them [the bus-burning students] and made them stop.”¹²⁵ On that day, rumors that *granaderos* were rerouting buses of students on their way to the demonstration to the Military Camp #1 were numerous, and students were deeply concerned about their missing *compañeros* and leaders. A speaker at the demonstration, who proclaimed himself a student from the IPN, asserted that “if they detain another student, five buses will be burned for each school and in this way we’ll keep searching for ways to repel the continual aggression to which the student body has been subject.”¹²⁶

In addition to stopping traffic, movement participants often committed small acts of politically motivated vandalism. Given the intensity of the movement, the degree of violence seems somewhat minor. Nonetheless, there was a noticeable increase in police reports of student aggression toward the end of September, and this was certainly viewed with concern as the Olympics approached. Throughout the movement, security agents reported violent behavior, such as the breaking of windows, looting of stores, and accumulation of weapons and arms.

On July 26, in one of the first demonstrations of the movement, *granaderos* gave chase to a group of students heading toward the Zócalo. On the Avenue *5 de Mayo*, the students responded by throwing rocks at the *granaderos*, who responded in kind, “... chasing them and beating various students ...” In response to the chase, “... the students destroyed telephone booths on *5 de Mayo* and broke cabinets within the business

¹²⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hojas 1-6, Dec. 13, 1968.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

‘Casteles’ from which they took various articles of women’s clothing.”¹²⁷ Meanwhile, a group of students smashed the windows of businesses downtown, including those of the Pemex building. The *granaderos* and police gave chase and detained some of them, while the majority left to regroup elsewhere.¹²⁸

In a similar event, during a demonstration on August 10, a group of eighty students from the vocational schools broke the windows of three doors to the offices of the newspaper *Novedades* on *Balderas* Street. Meanwhile, army officials attempted to disperse students near the Monument to the Revolution, filling the square and surrounding streets with soldiers and firemen. As the students left, a small group headed up *Insurgentes* Avenue, “... stoning the national PRI building, breaking various windows.”¹²⁹ Similarly, on September 26, one of a small group of students threw a stone at the buildings of a branch of the Superior of Justice, D.F., breaking a window.¹³⁰

The seizing of buildings was fairly common in Mexico, as it was in many of the widespread student movements of the 1960s. On August 20, a group of students took the Central Library Coffee Shop in University City by force. At midnight that same day, a group of seventeen university students drove down *Insurgentes* Avenue, from north to south, traveling the length of this major thoroughfare aboard seized buses. As they did so, they paused periodically to create “drawings on walls, businesses and banks, with slogans

¹²⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 1-6, July, 26, 1968.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hojas 3-14, Aug. 10, 1968.

¹³⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 316-323, Sept. 26, 1968.

such as ‘Down with the bourgeoisie,’ ‘Liberty for Political Prisoners,’ ‘Revolting bourgeois,’ and ‘Exploiter,’ etc.’¹³¹ Similarly, students from the IPN took the buildings of the Hospital Ruben Leñero where they asked for assistance for comrades with bayonet wounds.¹³²

At times, student behavior veered toward the more destructive activities as featured prominently in security reports. On September 24, DFS agents asserted that “In the Preparatory School 8, another group of students siphoned a PEMEX pipe from which they took the gas which they removed ...,” using this gas to burn a bus. Later a “... foursome from the Mexican Petrol removed what remained of this vehicle.”¹³³ Later, on that same day, authorities found a cache of arms, Molotov cocktails, and other incendiary materials in the University, which they transported to the Chief of Police, “... where a press conference demonstrated to the public the arsenal with which students attacked the army and police.”¹³⁴ The following day, police found another hoard of weapons in the buildings of the Institute for Security and Social Services of State Workers. In all, reports stated that the students had thirty five bottles of muriatic acid, gasoline, and sugar with which, security officials speculated, “... they thought to attack the forces that

¹³¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 228-240, Aug. 20, 1968.

¹³² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hojas 190-210, Aug. 28, 1968.

¹³³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 49-56, Sept. 24, 1968.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* Images of this stash of small arms were widely circulated in the mainstream news media.

occupy the Vocational School 7 in Santiago Tlatelolco.”¹³⁵ In the early hours of the following day, a homemade bomb was detonated in the buildings of the National Bank of Mexico. The damage incurred included “... the destruction of a window and part of its interior metal structure.”¹³⁶

While some of the vandalism seems politically motivated, other acts appear to have been rooted in thrills or apolitical motives. The movement was an opportunity for all kinds of behavior, with the CNH unable to enforce rules of conduct on the ground. For instance, on August 10, the proprietor of the restaurant “Olímpico” complained to the Public Ministry that, on the day before, a group of approximately twenty students had dined in his restaurant. The students, he said, refused to pay, and moreover “... broke a gas-neon sign with an estimated value of 1,000 pesos.” He further declared that the students “... tried to kidnap his wife, which they were not able to do.” His aim in coming to the agents was to find justice and ask for the “punishment” of those responsible.¹³⁷

While reports of such violence figure prominently in the security reports, other reports, particularly those of school officials, disputed their accuracy. On July 30, in the early days of the movement, one IPN official categorically denied that IPN students were involved in the incidents of agitation and disturbances, “... such as acts of looting and

¹³⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 207-217, Sept. 25, 1968.

¹³⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 316-323, Sept. 26, 1968.

¹³⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hojas 125-134, Aug. 10, 1968.

vandalism...”¹³⁸ Rather, he asserted that such acts were the responsibility of “... groups and political organizations of the UNAM and other organizations that incited the students of the Polytechnic, taking advantage of their protest against police aggression.”¹³⁹ On August 25, a student would deny charges of vandalism and looting, declaring “... in regard to the rumors that students have looted jewels and caused disruptions, this is false, in that there exists a film in which one can see members of the army attacking jewelry stores and whoever doubts this may find the film in the school ...”¹⁴⁰

While the opposition often raised the issue of the wild and inappropriate behavior by participants, students also accused state forces of such practices. A letter to the newspaper *Por Que?* said that soldiers and *granaderos* used the confusion caused by the October 2nd massacre to loot stores in the Tlatelolco area. Inverting accusations of petty crime, vandalism, and looting, Arturo Solis Gómez, a DF resident and witness to the massacre, argued instead that the “heroes and self-sacrificing *juanes*” were responsible for looting “... jewelry that can be found in the *Plaza de las Sepulturas*, in the same way that these self-sacrificing defenders of the public behaved in the University, which was sacked, stealing projectors, microphones, and typewriters, and many other valuable

¹³⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 231-242, July 30, 1968.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hojas 313-323, Aug. 25, 1968.

objects they found in their way.” He concluded by saying that if these were the defenders of the country, he would respond, “Don’t defend me, brother.”¹⁴¹

Given the numbers of people involved in the movement, and the minimal control exercised by the CNH, the participants were fairly well behaved. Nonetheless, there was some discussion of politically motivated kidnappings, and two instances of student-led hostage taking. During a meeting on August 22, one student outlined a kidnapping strategy. The speaker who held the floor sketched out a plan to resolve the violence directed against them. They would “send a student commission to investigate the case and, if possible, detain several police in order to make them reveal who is responsible for the disturbances ...” The students would then begin a letter writing campaign, seeking an end to the violence and consequences for those responsible.¹⁴²

Whether the same group of students was involved in a subsequent kidnapping is unclear. However, less than a month later, in September of 1968, a group of students kidnapped five police officers, and held them hostage in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences.¹⁴³ Upon learning of this development, the Chiefs of Brigades declared that they “need extreme vigilance at all moments to take many precautions given the danger the crime posed to the students.”¹⁴⁴ Word of the kidnappings spread through the

¹⁴¹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 4, Newspaper article. Oct. 30, 1968.

¹⁴² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hojas 54-67, Aug. 22, 1968.

¹⁴³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hojas 128-143, Sept. 1968.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

organizational apparatus of the movement. It was claimed that the detained officers had confessed to “pretending to be a brigade and committing excesses in order to subvert the movement.”¹⁴⁵ While the security report concerning this occurrence implied that the “confession” was questionable, students nonetheless considered it confirmation that the government was indeed employing provocateurs in order to harm their movement. They called a press conference in order to make this more widely known. The conference was attended by at least 1,000 people including many notable journalists as well as students. The conference organizers made clear that movement participants had abducted five agents who had confessed to inciting violence in the movement. Furthermore, student leader Gilberto Guevara Niebla indicated that more agents were being held in the Faculty of Medicine.¹⁴⁶

The record remains silent on how long the agents were held or the nature of their release. What is clear is that such practices were not widespread. The last mention they receive is on September 26th, only days before the massacre, when a rumor ran among students of “the highest levels, with the idea that in order to pressure the government, they should begin to kidnap people in order to exchange them ...”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hojas 128-143, Sept. 1968.

¹⁴⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 316-323, Sept. 26, 1968.

Student Responses to State Violence

The use of violence was a key factor in 1968. Students feared that state agents would infiltrate the movement, creating violence and disorder, to justify state repression of the mobilization. Because of this, the CNH repeatedly stressed the need for non-violent protest, as did many student participants. Yet given the ideological range of the movement, some students argued for aggressive behavior in retaliation for official violence. They felt the need to protect themselves and wanted to end official impunity. They also believed that violence was the only way to bring about radical change. Student leaders and participants alike were forced to gauge the limits of their actions, attempting to determine how far they could push the state, and to what degree they were protected by their position as students. They also assessed the possible public response, gauging the protection it might afford them should the state respond with violence. Thus, students voiced different currents of thought on the relationship between violence and politics.

Throughout the movement, concern over the role of outside agitators was central. The government and opposition were concerned by the possibility that people outside the university system would use the movement to foment broader dissatisfaction with Mexican politics and government. Most notably, they feared communist infiltrators, and repeatedly attempted to locate these within the movement as a means to discredit it. Conversely, movement participants feared the infiltration of their movement by state agents. They repeatedly urged caution in response to the suggestion of more extreme strategies, arguing that these would prompt and justify a violent state response. They feared that such agents, through words and actions, would attempt to create chaos and

subvert the movement. Given the extensiveness of state security reports, their concerns over the presence of outside forces seem apt. There were certainly agents and informants present at all levels of the movement.

As early as July 30, only a week into the movement, student organizers began to consider the effects of possible state infiltration of their movement. On that day, in the Superior School of Economy at a meeting of 300 students, one leader expressed the need to "...avoid the possibility of being steered wrong by agitating elements who hope to increase the violence."¹⁴⁸ Another argued that, given the death of a young woman at the hands of *granaderos*, the students of the school should take "more radical measures in order to exert pressure."¹⁴⁹ He was immediately reprimanded by his fellow students, one of whom asserted that "We need to be careful of the infiltration of people like this one, who might be sent by the government ... especially as this man smells very strongly of alcohol."¹⁵⁰ In this instance, his attitudes and questionable morality or discipline marked him as a possible agent provocateur.

Movement participants expressed concern that outside agents would use the loose organization of the mobilization as an opportunity to create even greater disorder, and in the process, discredit the students. Following such a demonstration on August 25, a student said he had seen "... the government infiltrate the demonstration with gangsters, fight squads, who would create disorder in it and later justify the aggression, much like

¹⁴⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 231-242, July 30, 1968.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 231-242, July 30, 1968.

they did with the problem of Vallejo, or like the problem of the doctors.”¹⁵¹ Several days later, a jailed student, Ruben Valdespino Garcia, declared that he was arrested in a melee caused by “... youths and students who were not original participants, but were clearly provocateurs who hoped to convert the meeting into an anarchist demonstration without goals, and who initiated the violence.” He stated that these groups were clearly “anti-communist and reactionary, there to provoke great disorder.”¹⁵² In the following month, similar allegations again surfaced. At a meeting on university grounds, one student claimed that at the last large-scale demonstration, “... soldiers dressed in civilian clothes but carrying weapons in collaboration with the pseudo-leaders of the FNET tried to disrupt the movement by carrying out attempts on the different schools of the IPN.”¹⁵³

The students publically responded to state accusations of violence within the movement. They avowed that any person who used violence or supported its use was a government agent who intended to discredit the movement. The Confederation of Mexican Youth responded to charges of violence during an early demonstration. They argued that the whole of the movement and of Mexican youth more broadly should not be judged by the actions of a few who were outside the movement: “... we condemn the participation of provocateurs and vandals of extremist groups without any responsibility to ... the studious youth and workers of our country. Convinced of our own responsibilities we energetically condemn the participation of police and *granaderos* ...

¹⁵¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hojas 313-323, Aug. 25, 1968.

¹⁵² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hojas 133-135, July, 29, 1968.

¹⁵³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hojas 128-143, Sept. 1968.

who create confusion, disorientation, and deal a blow to the movement ...”¹⁵⁴ A letter to the editor of the paper, *Sucesos*, made a similar argument. Written by a student of Political Science at the UNAM, Luis F. Chavez, he discussed the confession of a student leader,¹⁵⁵ Amado Campus Lemus, who admitted that the movement involved foreign support:

Even the most ignorant student can’t escape that these declarations have been formulated by his captors and that Sócrates has been made to sign and later repeat them in front of the press. According to him, everything became clear and he realized ‘what was happening in the movement, where foreign people were mixing with the students’ (it seems that the Military Camp No. 1 is an excellent place to see everything with clarity, a place where soldiers treat everyone as brothers).”¹⁵⁶

The state focused on student rhetoric that endorsed violence or hinted at communism, and on the threat that student dissent posed to the nation. Some feared that the students might ultimately be an uncontrollable force unleashed prior to the Olympic Games. The government highlighted any threat of violence, including student attacks on them and politically driven vandalism and looting. Furthermore, the state stressed the need for a firm governmental response, arguing that state use of the means of violence fell within constitutional limits, even though the massacre on October 2nd belied this claim.

¹⁵⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hoja 62, July, 27 1968.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarios, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 277, Page 8, Newspaper article. Nov. 2, 1968.

The critique of state violence by movement participants was one of the central messages of the mobilization, and a key category by which students hoped to garner support for their political agenda. Statements concerning official aggression were essential to movement propaganda, and depicted the students as innocent victims confronted by a deranged state apparatus. The propaganda was intended to inform and influence public opinion, since the news media tended not to report any heated exchange between students and the authorities. By generating greater awareness of the violence they faced, students hoped to afford themselves some protection. They began to canvass neighborhoods in early August, especially the *colonias populares*, distributing fliers door-to-door and asking for support, while outlining incidents of official violence. A flier from the Coordinating Committee of Chapingo is illustrative. It asserted that “today the aggression is against the student body; tomorrow it might be against you ... at no time have we thought that the solution is violence ... our forms of protest have always been peaceful. Don’t let the state fool you.”¹⁵⁷ An early student flier from August 1968 accused the government of intimidating the students and resorting to violence. Referencing the *bazukazo*, one of the incidents that marked the start of the movement in June when government troops broke down school doors armed with bazookas: “... the impact of the bazooka in the door of the Preparatory school killed various students and wounded others who, when trying to flee, were attacked with bayonets, leaving them bloodied on the floor of their school and [it is] certain that the Army carried away and

¹⁵⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hojas 125-124, August 8, 1968.

burned the bodies.” The flier ended by demanding the removal of the National Secretary of Defense.¹⁵⁸

Given the somewhat spontaneous nature of the movement, the enormous numbers of people involved in the demonstrations, and their disparate views, the movement itself became engulfed with debates over the efficacy of violence. Yet the CNH repeatedly stressed the need for non-violent approaches in the protest, making statements to that effect to the press and state officials, and sending similar messages to the strike committees of the schools involved. As the organizing committee, statements from the CNH were the official stance of the movement. On the ground, some students urged protestors to bring sticks and rocks to demonstrations to use in self-defense. One such instance occurred on the 10th of August when more radical students from the National School of Economy, the Faculty of Philosophy, the Faculty of Letters, and the Faculty of Law “... gave instructions to ignore university authorities and go to the Zócalo carrying hidden ‘Molotov’ bombs or any weapon that they can find to defend against any Police or Army aggression.” Accordingly, in the Faculty of Law and the Preparatory School 6, students gathered bottles, cans, gasoline and acid.¹⁵⁹

Aware of the government’s concern over the movement’s potential to disrupt the Olympics, the student message, as early as August, emphasized the importance of peaceful tactics as the Games approached. During an August 15 meeting, one student insisted on the need for “... absolute calm and political and social tranquility, and a break

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hojas 3-14, Aug. 10, 1968.

of no more than sixty days before the celebration of the Games, because any altercation or agitation will be a sufficient motive for them to be suspended...¹⁶⁰ While underestimating the severity of government reprisals, students understood that the Olympics would heighten tensions. At an August 24 demonstration, one speaker warned participants that the Olympics would increase state willingness to jail students and cause the military to occupy the campuses.¹⁶¹

As the Olympics approached and the movement developed, the degree of state violence gradually increased. Participants had a range of reactions to the violence directed against them, but many still argued that they should attempt to maintain a peaceful approach. Such a position was espoused by one activist who thought that the government was attempting to force a confrontation and "... that they [meaning the students] shouldn't give them [the government] the opportunity, because at this moment they don't need more bloodshed, but rather to avoid a violent confrontation with the authorities, it is necessary to be like Mahatma Ghandi, in other words, to allow them to detain you, to take you to the prisons, and to do so with total passivity, and sit immobile" He claimed that this path would avoid more deaths and was the only way to "triumph."¹⁶²

Similarly, a letter to the editor, written by IPN Professor Fausto Trejo Fuentes, encouraged participants to remain peaceful in response to the violence against them.

¹⁶⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 31, Hojas 1-17, August 13, 1968.

¹⁶¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hojas 313-323, August, 25 1968.

¹⁶² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hojas 190-210, August, 28 1968.

Trejo asked all Mexican students to continue demonstrating to the people of Mexico that “... the student movement is a democratic struggle and, as they have done in their demonstrations and meetings, to never opt for violence, nor massacre, much less terrorism, and instead, insist on being heard and inviting dialogue.”¹⁶³ Trejo took the opportunity to elaborate this message at a demonstration on August 13. When passed the microphone, he expressed great satisfaction at the fact that four military vehicles found no way through the protestors “... since they had sent in provocateurs with the intention of creating panic and confusion among those present, but they were afraid and retreated down the street *5 de Mayo*. We had them beat, and that’s why I called to everyone to be calm and collected and to stay seated.”¹⁶⁴

Even following a wave of detainments and violence in late September, many student protestors continued to call for non-violent tactics. At a demonstration in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas*, on September 23, a group of approximately 1,000 gathered. One student speaker urged those present not to resort to violence: “... it isn’t absolutely necessary to resort to arms to win the struggle, and we shouldn’t kill *granaderos* in vengeance, because they live by their work and have families. The brigades should continue with their work of distributing propaganda ...”¹⁶⁵ Despite the message of peaceful protest, the march ended in violence as the demonstrators attempted to march to

¹⁶³ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 25, Newspaper article. Jan. 10, 1969.

¹⁶⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hojas 1-15, August 13, 1968.

¹⁶⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hojas 49-56, September, 24 1968.

the *Centro* and were met by state forces with “guns and tear gas” and sixty protesters were detained.¹⁶⁶

While the dominant message was one of peaceful protest, both the CNH and individual participants at times qualified or rejected this principle. In August, the CNH began to discuss the possibility of incorporating workers into the movement and, in doing so articulated a theoretical leap from non-violent protest to more aggressive action. After asserting the importance of workers to the movement, particularly in terms of their protest strategies, the CNH urged students to understand the limitations of non-violent protest. They argued that the participants must understand that “at the same time legal and peaceful means have very precise limits, above all when the enemy doesn’t respect their own laws.”¹⁶⁷ In late August, the strike committee of the UNAM’s Faculty of Philosophy and Letters signed a proposition that defined such limits. It stated that “... given that the struggle is no longer enclosed within the bounds of bourgeois legality ... it is logical to think that the demands cannot be resolved constitutionally ...”¹⁶⁸ A speaker during a demonstration on October 1 expressed a similar idea, “... dialogue with the authorities under these conditions isn’t possible and can only occur when the students and other participants are released, when the forces are removed from the IPN, and the right to gather is publically respected.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hojas 126, August 1968.

¹⁶⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hojas 54-67, Aug. 22, 1968.

¹⁶⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 118, Oct. 1, 1968.

Noting the breakdown of democracy and the disregard for civil liberties, some began to argue for a more radical approach. While most participants stressed the democratic nature of their movement, some expressed a willingness to take up arms in an attempt to force the state to change its policies. A student ultimatum circulated in *El Figaro*, a leftist paper, expressed such a sentiment. Dated the 7th of August, the paper gave the government three days to satisfy student demands before resorting to violence. The demands, more ample than the six-point petition, called for the removal of Secretary Echeverría. In a meeting of “close to 150,000 participants” at the IPN, the students present formulated the ultimatum as a response to the “... depravities of authorities responsible for the police brutalities of the last week and for the intervention of the Army in the internal affairs of the Autonomous University.”¹⁷⁰ In contrast to the “perfect order” by which they conducted the meeting, the students argued that they had no choice but to demonstrate a willingness to take up arms. Furthermore, they expressed the need for caution in terms of “Mexican or foreign provocateurs.”¹⁷¹ Concerns about infiltration would become even more significant were the participants to go in a more violent, radical direction. This edition of *El Figaro* was picked up by a French newspaper.¹⁷² A clipping from the newspaper was included in the government security report, indicating state concern with the international ramifications, both in terms of publicity and the call to violence. Yet the ultimatum and call to arms remain largely in the realm of rhetoric, and

¹⁷⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 266-271, August 8, 1968.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

there is no evidence to indicate that students carried through on such threats during the month of August.

Similarly, a letter to the editor, signed by “A Worker” and dated Dec. 6, 1968, argued for the importance of labor to the movement, stating that they could provide armed support if needed. The letter asserted, “Now we know that not only [police chiefs] Mendioleas and Cueto control Mexico; but also we [students and workers] are ready to support and defend it even with weapons in hand should that day arrive.” The letter concluded by informing the CNH that in Tlalnepantla, in the State of Mexico, they were supported by a large group of workers that included him.¹⁷³ Similarly, an unidentified student at a CNH meeting on August 8 said that “the only solution to the popular demands is to take up arms.”¹⁷⁴ Such statements were certainly noted by the DFS agents who were present, and featured in their reports to the director. One student slogan read, “If we had had weapons, they wouldn’t have violated the autonomy of the University.”¹⁷⁵

As rumors of government violence became rampant, the frequency of opinions promoting violence increased. At an open IPN demonstration, one unidentified student took the floor, expressing the need for action particularly in light of the fact that “... thirty two disappeared comrades were incinerated in the bowels of Military Camp No.

¹⁷³ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 12, Newspaper article. Dec. 6, 1968.

¹⁷⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 246-265, August 8, 1968.

¹⁷⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hojas 1-9, August 8, 1968.

1.”¹⁷⁶ At the same demonstration, speakers put the violence in context by arguing that it resulted from the “... capitalist regime with its bourgeois and neo-capitalist characteristics that supports violence to contend with popular demands.”¹⁷⁷ In fact, many students were fearful of the DFS and its tactics. Rumors circulated that leaders feared going to their homes as the DFS knew where they lived.¹⁷⁸ In light of such pervasive terror, armed response seemed to some to be the only viable solution, or at least, incited students to give voice to such opinions. Following the violence of the August 27th demonstration, one participant, a professor of Physiology in the Department of Medicine, argued for the need to meet violence with violence. He said that the moment has arrived to “... take up arms and go out onto the streets. We should look for economic support from the people so that the next phase of the revolution can begin. It is necessary to politicize the workers and *campesinos* so that they will come to the front lines of the movement.”¹⁷⁹

Participants had to carefully gauge the limits of their actions against the probable response of the state. At a meeting in the Faculty of Science of the UNAM on September 3rd, in front of approximately three hundred people, one student said that they had little to fear from the state: “... don’t be afraid of the threats of repression made by the President of the Republic, because in any case he can’t kill all the students or imprison them either.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ For an example, see AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 104-119, August, 30 1968.

¹⁷⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hojas 190-210, August, 28 1968.

The struggle can rely on the support of the masses ...”¹⁸⁰ Despite this statement, however, he then said that the brigades should operate in smaller numbers in order to avoid altercations with the police and military. Another speaker expressed the idea that the government would be unwilling to jail the large numbers required to end the movement. “...surely the Government will tire of us before jailing so many students. If the Army intervenes in the UNAM and the IPN, it doesn’t mean that the struggle is over, because the movement won’t be resolved by violence but by political responses ...”¹⁸¹

Such speculations were largely mistaken, and a month later, the police and military massacred and imprisoned a large number of protestors. The slaughter on October 2nd radically heightened the rhetoric against state violence, as many grieving Mexicans sought to comprehend the violence and its implications. During a December meeting in front of an audience of approximately 5,000 people, following the October massacre, several participants expressed a willingness to resort to violence. One student from the IPN argued that if the government continued its repression, students must respond with violence. “... if another student is detained, five buses for each school will be burned ...” He said that students must respond with violence to the presence of tanks and military on the university campuses. At the end of the meeting one student shouted that for every student fallen in the struggle they should kill one soldier, *granadero*,

¹⁸⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 37, Hojas 128-143, September, 3 1968.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

policeman, or agent.¹⁸² Such statements must be understood in the context of repression that permeated the end of the movement.

Nevertheless, the majority of statements from participants concerning the October massacre were less about vengeance or even generating support for the movement, and more about sharing a national grief. Depictions of October 2nd often contrasted a depraved state with a heroic body of protestors, casting the event as a sacrifice of the nation's youth and attempting to find greater meaning in their deaths. One letter to the editor of the paper, *Por Que?*, juxtaposed state violence with student patriotism. The writer began by stating that he was present on the day of the massacre in the plaza. He recalled that "... it fell to me to be present for the horrendous massacre perpetrated by the army. I remember a group of students that, seeing the advance of the assassins dressed as soldiers who killed without compassion, began to sing the National Anthem, thinking this would stop these beast-like humans. Useless effort, a burst of gunshots silenced them forever."¹⁸³

In the same vein, a letter to the editor highlights the terror of the event and the deep grief it generated. In a letter to the newspaper, *Sucesos*, one student described his profound confusion and fear. Complicating this was his inability to determine the allegiances of the people around him. Signed by *A Preparatory Student*, the letter states, "I saw the blood run. The bullets flew past. And I ran. But many were unable to run.

¹⁸² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hojas 1-6, December, 13 1968.

¹⁸³ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 71, Newspaper article. Feb. 14, 1969.

Before me they were burning a bus. Who were they? They were dressed in blue and said that they were students.”¹⁸⁴ He wanted to scream to the city what was happening in Tlatelolco but was silenced by the fear that “... a Secret Serviceman could be at my side and would take me to the Military Camp No. 1 and grind me to dust. And I’m a coward, such a coward that I can’t even give my name. And now when I study, between the formulas and the lectures, these scenes run through my mind.”¹⁸⁵

Conclusion

Given the large number of participants and their youthful exuberance, it is not surprising that there was chaos on the streets of Mexico City. Disorder was part and parcel of the movement, present from its beginning until its end. When compared to other student disturbances, the Weatherman in the United States or the Red Army Faction in Germany, the Mexican student movement seems relatively mild. While some argued for greater disruption, these calls for more violent action were often met with voices making a case for the opposite tactic. Nonetheless, students were well aware of their collective power and put this to use, inundating the streets and using their very presence to exert pressure on the government to meet their demands. The disorder and violence,

¹⁸⁴ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 277, Page 9, Newspaper article. Nov. 2, 1968.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

whether hijacking buses, breaking windows, or burning buses complicates the image of peaceful protest. Unlike state forces, however, the students did not set out to kill anyone. Rather, their activities posed considerable danger to themselves, but little to those they fought and the state's own records make no mention of student killings of police or soldiers.

They also reveal the loose and highly decentralized organization of the movement. The CNH issued orders to participants to influence public opinion in order to gain more adherents to the movement and pressure the government. To this end, they encouraged the development of brigades and called for large-scale demonstrations. There is a sense of inevitability to CHN directives, the feeling that the movement would succeed because it was in the right and because the moment was right given the outbreaks of protest around the world and the impending Olympics. Beyond this, however, the day-to-day tactics of the mobilization were left to participants. What may have begun as fundraising could easily develop into bus burning as groups of students numbering in the hundreds roamed the city.

The focus of state security agents on these disruptions is illuminating. Given that much of the literature depicts the state as irrationally fearing the popular protest, new sources provide insight into the logic of the state response. The interruption of public transportation to key parts of the city certainly alarmed officials as they looked forward to a flood of tourists aiming to make their way around the city. Mexico City itself was perhaps the country's greatest symbol of its modernity and economic progress, emblematic of the success of Mexico's economic miracle. The student behavior

endangered the visual representation of these achievements, threatening to impede tourists and show a much different face to the international community. To state leaders, such disruptions were in part sufficient cause to justify the violent response of the police and military. The sole strategy of the state was to contain the movement and they did so through violence, refusing to negotiate or make any concession to the protestors.

Students and state were involved in a guerrilla/counter-insurgency confrontation on the streets of Mexico City. Police and soldiers used violence with impunity and clear state backing, resorting to torture and killing to underline their determination to end the movement.

State violence was essential to the mobilization as students claimed that they fought against the state's violation of basic civil liberties. As outlined elsewhere in this dissertation, there were multiple reasons for the development of the protest, yet civil rights was the dominant way in which participants articulated a vision for social change, despite the fact that many participants wanted more radical change. They did so from the movement's beginning, responding to the violence of *granaderos* on the city's streets and, as such ideas found broader traction, continued to do so. Yet student activity went far beyond pleas for civil rights and, as they burnt buses and kidnapped security agents, they gave the state fuel with which to depict them as degenerate subversives. City residents who were prevented from going to work or elsewhere may have found these claims credible. While civil rights were an important way of framing the movement, participant behavior also sought to pressure the state by disrupting the city prior to the Olympics. In short, the movement incorporated a variety of agendas and tactics, at times competing

ones, within it. The bulk of the tactics were aimed at creating popular support for the movement, yet others exceeded this stated aim, creating considerable chaos in the city streets.

Chapter 4

Radical Mothers and Deviant Sons:

Gender Consciousness in the Mexican Student Movement of 1968

Gender shaped the experience of the student movement and gender norms in Mexico during 1968 and long thereafter. By drawing on the language and behaviors of participants, it is possible to reconstruct the ways in which normative patterns were both reinforced and altered by confrontations between participants and the state, and among participants themselves. It is important to look at this moment of cultural transformation, particularly with respect to politics and women.

An example of what was happening to protestors, their families, and the state reveals how gender roles were sometimes transformed and, at other times, reaffirmed by movement politics. On August 27th 1968, the Central Strike Committee called for a march in support of the six-point petition. Their effort was now in its sixth week. That day would prove eventful and create a flurry in the press. Although unknown to the participants, the movement was at its peak and passing its midpoint. Fear of violent government reprisals permeated the movement along with rumors of an immediate crackdown. Such fears had been present from the beginning and gradually escalated as the Olympics drew closer. Despite this, more than four hundred thousand protestors joined the demonstration that day.¹

¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 329, Aug. 27, 1968.

For over a week student brigades had canvassed the city, inviting people to the march and to speeches in the Zócalo on August 27th. They solicited fellow students, mothers, parents, and the general public; they canvassed a variety of neighborhoods throughout the city. Above all, they reached out to unions and factories. Numerous unions from both the capital and the provinces sent official representatives and their members as protestors. Students from the IPN and the UNAM began seizing public buses at one in the afternoon to take protestors from the schools to the starting location of the demonstration.²

The day of the protest, a Tuesday, students and other protestors began to gather outside the Museum of History and Anthropology on the major thoroughfare of the *Paseo de la Reforma*. Located in the swanky Chapultapec region of the city, this was one of the first mass demonstrations to begin at this spot, a high point for tourists and the foreign press who were in town for the 1968 Olympic Games. In fact, later security reports would note the great degree of contact between students, foreign press and tourists at this location.³

Protestors began arriving at three. The mood was exuberant, despite persistent rumors of a violent government intervention. By five, the protestors began the march, walking down the *Paseo de la Reforma*, occupying the streets from the museum to the Zócalo in the historic center of the city. En route, they passed the United States and Russian embassies, both heavily protected by tanks and soldiers. The streets were filled

² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 328, Aug. 27, 1968. Students seized a total of 22 buses that day.

³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 39, Hojas 158-169, Sept. 13, 1968.

with vendors, workers, mothers, students, and curious passersby, many of them heaving placards into the air with slogans such as “Pueblo, open your eyes!” “Books, yes! Bayonets, no!” Groups of mothers hoisted signs saying, “We are at the sides of our children!”⁴ A buzz permeated the crowd, urging them on: “... to the Zócalo, to talk to Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.”⁵ Along with the Olympics, they hoped to use the publicity surrounding the presidential address to Congress on September 1, only a few days away.

When they arrived, a movement leader delivered a speech, one of many given that day, on the matter of “public dialogue,” that is, the ongoing exchanges between students and government over student demands. The speaker asked where such a dialogue should take place and the crowd responded: “In the Zócalo.” He used this call and response to demand that the protestors occupy the public square until the government met their six demands. Years later, many CNH leaders remembered this as one of the key events that provoked the government, making it seem that the students did not really want to negotiate.⁶

Once in the Zócalo, two medical students entered the Cathedral and requested permission to ring the cathedral bells. Father Jesús Pérez joined the two young men, climbing to the bells with them and giving the Santa María a ring himself. Protestors

⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 330, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁵ Mercedes Padrés, *El diario de una periodista: una luz de Bengala* (Mexico, D.F.: La Idea Dorada, 1998), 61-70.

⁶ This is a current running throughout published memoirs of the movement. For an excellent example see, Esteban Ascencio, ed. *1968: más allá del mito* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones del Milenio, 1998). Amado Campos Lemos, the speaker that day, was later accused of being a provocateur and “selling out” the movement. Among other reasons, this particular speech is frequently cited.

marched into the Zócalo to the sound of pealing Cathedral bells and the sight of the chapel lights blazing. To many, it was one of the high points of the movement. Reporter Mercedes Padrés recalled walking into the Zócalo, “We had arrived at the very center of the city. And we are many, we are thousands. Now, President of the Republic, here we are in all our strength and we are in the right. Here are the people.”⁷ It was an emotionally charged moment.

That evening, the police and military arrived on the scene and cleared the Zócalo. They burnt fliers and chased students down the streets of *Madero* and *5 de Mayo* with protestors hurling insults of “assassins” at them as they ran. The students boarded buses, seized control of them, and attempted to flee with the police and military in pursuit. By 2:30 am, the Zócalo was firmly in the hands of the state with the students cleared from the center of the city and its surrounding thoroughfares.⁸

There were many who were appalled rather than empowered. The next day a storm of criticism erupted in the press, centering on what many considered one of the most sacred centers in the city, the Cathedral Santa María. For days, a debate raged among Catholics, parents, and students as to whether or not the Cathedral had been profaned. There was the further question of whether or not the Church had thrown its support to the students. For many, such support would give religious sanction to deviancy: to drug abuse, the inversion of gender norms, promiscuity, and violence. For others, it would be a statement from the Church regarding the need to redress social and

⁷ Padrés, 70.

⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 355, Sept. 7, 1968.

political inequalities. At its core, it was a debate about the morality of the students, what kind of people they were, and the relationship between politics, morality, sexuality, and religion.

The groups involved in the debate were largely women's or parents' groups. The *Women of the Mexican Catholic Action* immediately began to right the perceived wrong. They wrote numerous letters to the editor protesting the violation of the holy Cathedral by radical students, and planned pilgrimages on their knees as penance. They distributed fliers and wrote letters to the editor, inviting people to a massive demonstration to protest the students and their actions.⁹ In fact, the opposition to the students in the Cathedral was considerable, with protests beyond the bounds of Mexico City.¹⁰

Similarly, an article in *Últimas Noticias* condemned the students and their behavior, arguing that they had provoked the police, disrupted the city, and profaned the Cathedral. They defined the student problem as: "Tequila, rum, and vodka," depicting them as young men run amuck.¹¹ The student movement was portrayed in moral, not political terms, with the core concern being the behavior of the students rather than political reform. This emphasis, of course, sought to discredit student criticisms of the state, turning the "problem" away from politics and onto the students themselves.

⁹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantiles, Esther Montero, Box 1, Folder 4, Page 156, Flier, 1968.

¹⁰ For instance, there were protests in León. See, CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 48, Folder 245, Page 5, newspaper article. Sept, 4, 1968.

¹¹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 269, Page 28, Newspaper article. Aug. 31, 1968.

Parental Associations published articles in which church sacristans claimed that the doors were locked and no student could have entered without the express permission of one of the priests. Others spread the word through letters to the editors, fliers, and speeches at demonstrations or meetings, that while the doors were open, students had asked church authorities for permission before ringing the bells. A flier, printed with the text of an article from the paper, *Ovaciones*, asserted that the cathedral doors were completely open, that students asked the permission of Father Pérez, sacristan of the Metropolitan Cathedral, and that while they had rung the bells during a *quinceñera* mass, they in no way interrupted the tranquility of the event.¹² The flier contained statements by Father Pérez who was present during the protest, asserting that the students did not profane the temple. He also denied rumors that women from the *Women of the Mexican Catholic Action* had entered the church. The women were alleged to have performed public acts of penance in the Cathedral. The priest denied that they had even been in the Church since the doors were locked during the days after the demonstration. The flier also condemned the bias of the press against the students. The same flier contained statements by the Parents Association of the Preparatory School 4, asking that the people of Mexico to decide for themselves.¹³ Similar fliers were distributed throughout the city, particularly by the *Union Nacional de Mujeres Mexicana* (National Union of Mexican

¹² CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantiles, Esther Montero, Box 1, Folder 4, Page 156, flier, 1968.

¹³ Ibid.

Women)¹⁴, who handed out fliers concerning the non-profanation of the Cathedral and attacking the presidential address of September 1, 1968.¹⁵

The consensus among church authorities was that the students had consistently shown proper respect for the sacred space.¹⁶ Furthermore, most Catholic organizations as well as church officials rejected the efforts directed against the students, stating that the Cathedral had not been desecrated. They asserted that the Coalition of Organizations for the Defense of National Values, organizer of the demonstrations protesting the “desecration,” was made up of opposition groups sponsored by the Mexican government in an attempt to delegitimize the students and their protests.¹⁷

Going beyond this, the Latin American Episcopate at the subsequently famous meeting on September 6, 1968, in Medellín, Colombia, proclaimed that students should participate in the development of their countries. Mexican priests brought this message home and made it public. They argued that “education is the key to liberate the people from servitude and make them ascend from less humane living conditions to the most

¹⁴ Hereafter, UNMM.

¹⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 100-15-1-68, Leg. 9, Hoja 67, Sept. 8, 1968.

¹⁶ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarios, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 48, Folder 245, Page 17 and 19, newspaper article, Aug, 29, 1968.

¹⁷ They claimed that this group did not in fact exist. That rather it was based on the ghost written letters to the editor of a few individuals. CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarios, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 48, Folder 245, Page 5, newspaper article, Sept, 7, 1968.

humane.”¹⁸ In turn, Mexican priests asserted that the student movement was a “vibrant” expression of socio-political change and that this was a social responsibility in accord with their role in society.¹⁹

The debate over the Cathedral demonstrates that the events of 1968 were also a fight over issues of morality and “proper” behavior. At bottom, 1968 was as much a struggle for personal and familial meanings as well as one for democracy and social justice. In fact, these were deeply intertwined. Ideas of political and economic justice were closely linked with understandings of “personal” behavior, morality, relations between men and women, and the family. How these were understood played out daily in the propaganda and press surrounding the students, the family (both in terms of the private family and the broad, abstract family of Mexico), the opposition, and the government.²⁰

The movement was a multi-generational one that mobilized women as mothers and wives who played the roles of caretakers and activists. It was not feminist; nevertheless, it was an important moment in gender relations. As women in the movement challenged the patriarchy of the state, they reformulated their conceptions of

¹⁸ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 48, Folder 245, Page 9, newspaper article, Oct, 19, 1968.

¹⁹ CESU, UNAM, Sept, 16, 1968, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 48, Folder 245, Page 16, newspaper article, Sept. 16, 1968.

²⁰ This chapter contributes to a small but growing body of work on gender in Sixty-Eight. Elaine Carey has written on the languages and symbolism of gender in the movement while Deborah Cohen and Lessie Jo Frazier have looked to the role of masculinity in the protest.

gender, challenging their own and their male companions' perceptions of women's roles and possibilities. Although the movement expressed itself through normative patterns of gender behavior, this was, nonetheless, a time in which new political, social, and sexual practices coalesced for women. Though responsible for feminine tasks, considered "women's work" by their male associates, women's identity took on a dual nature, breaking down barriers between the political and domestic worlds and calling into question aspects of each realm. Further, men in the movement, much like their female counterparts, drew on the language of family and the home to legitimate political action. In doing so, they blurred the division between "men" and "women's" politicization.

The family and the body, particularly the female body, were among the critical categories by which the state, the popular opposition to the movement, and the students attempted to garner support for their causes. All three drew on understandings of the home and gender norms to make very different claims and to express varied world-views. As a whole, those involved in the conflict, represented a wide range of beliefs including notions of family and love, honor, responsibility, work, and proper sex. For both men and women, the home was a metaphor for the state and "politics" often referred to providing for the family. The movement was as much about the future prospects of individual members and their loved ones as it was formal politics and, indeed, the two could not be separated.

Women and the Family: Participation in 1968

Women became involved at all levels of the movement but mostly as part of the rank and file. In her reflections on the student movement, journalist Elena Poniatowska recalled hundreds of "girls in mini-skirts with their tanned young legs, teachers with no neckties, boys with sweaters knotted around their waists or necks ... laughing ... full of the crazy joy of walking together."²¹ There is little doubt that women participated in considerable numbers. Further, the "joy" of the movement was fostered by the collaboration between men and women, in this way making gender dynamics critical to the formation of the movement's "energy" or "spirit."

While large numbers of women were mobilized, they were rarely leaders. For example, only 10 of the 200 members of the CNH organizational committee were women. Nonetheless, Poniatowska's narrative makes clear the importance of women activists such as Roberta Avendaño Martínez (Tita) of the CNH and Ana Ignacia Rodríguez (Nacha) of the UNAM's Faculty of Law. These women organized, gave speeches, and were on the front lines of the movement. Both suffered multiple arrests and imprisonment, during which they and other women faced the possibility of sexual assault.

In general, most of the women active in the movement were likely to be found among the rank and file. They frequently worked as members of the brigades, the guards, as caretakers of those imprisoned, or turned the nuts and bolts of administration and

²¹ Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 4.

organization. Assignments considered "women's work," such as secretarial work, regularly fell to female participants. Along with secretarial and administrative work, women were also caretakers. Domestic chores, such as cooking for the brigades, were carried out by women. But women could and did politicize the spheres of reproductive life (home, market, kitchen), understanding these tasks as contributing to a political end.

Men and women both became *brigadistas*, a high risk role, and frequently served in the same units. The brigades held a central role in the movement in that they were the link between the movement's leadership and the general public. As explained earlier, they canvassed the city and, at times, the provinces, telling everyone they could about the aims of the movement and inviting them to events. Often based on pre-existing organizations, especially educational structures, the UNAM's School of Social Work, along with Nursing and Obstetrics, had all-female brigades.²² Among the groups, the Nurses School was perhaps the most vocal and active, often providing medical care for wounded students. *Brigadistas* took to the streets, collecting money, talking to people, passing out pamphlets, announcing upcoming events, and bringing the public's opinion back to the movement leadership.

As *brigadistas*, students were likely to confront state agents along with those hostile to their cause, leaving these participants at greater risk. One student activist, an actress and *brigadista*, remembered that she would publicly begin arguments with conservatives as a way to spread her message, a strategy of street theater often employed

²² Because women largely populated these schools, the brigades tended to be all-female. Those formed in more diversified departments regularly placed men and women in the same brigades. In fact, brigade instructions often call for the formation of groups of mixed sexes.

by the brigades.²³ She recalled an argument in a sandwich shop during which she stated that a "brigade of sandwich makers would be great." In the middle of her conversation, she was forced to flee, pursued by the police. The police followed her to her apartment complex and proceeded to knock at each door in an attempt to find her. The large number of apartments and the hostility of her neighbors convinced the police to end their search. For this participant, memories of the movement focused on its excitement and beauty. While "things were going to be tough," she felt confident and excited about her role, her comrades, and their possibilities.²⁴

Like the brigades, students used women and men to protect the universities from police invasion, hoping that their numbers would grant them some degree of safety. The job was highly physical and ran the risk of violence from the military and police. It also put some of their families at risk. Just before the October 2nd massacre, the home of Manuela Garín de Alvarez was subject to a search by government authorities looking for "Guatemalan guerrillas." Garín de Alvarez, a mathematician at the UNAM, was also mother to movement leader Raúl Alvarez Garín. A neighbor claimed that the searches occurred without identification or a warrant.²⁵

Women's participation in the movement was both mobilized and restricted around the critical unit of the family. Among the groups most affected by the movement were

²³ Poniadowska, *Massacre*, 96.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 270, Page 72, newspaper article, Aug. 16, 1968.

mothers. Mothers were often moved to action when their children suffered violence at the hands of the *granaderos*. Many women had children who were imprisoned, and they criticized authorities, refusing to allow their children to be quietly taken away by the penal system. Although it was frequently mothers who mobilized around the threat of state violence against their children, official behavior often politicized entire families.

The movement often appealed to women as mothers. Women formed political organizations to protect their children, and parents' associations entered politics. In fact, Parents Associations from a variety of schools were among the most active groups in 1968, both for and in opposition to the movement. An open letter from a Parents Association invited the people of Mexico to encourage friends, family, and neighbors to join with the students: "Mother, Mexican woman: make the protest and petitions of all the groups, organizations, and outstanding people mobilized in defense of the students your own ... Mother, Mexican woman: join your children, support them, and understand them ..."²⁶ The Association emphasized women's obligation of political participation on the basis of their role as mother. In fact, their love and care were crucial to understanding the students and helped legitimate the movement. During an August demonstration, one speaker reminded the journalists they too had children and should tell the truth about the movement. Another, exhorted Mexican mothers not to let their "children be influenced by agent provocateurs or pseudo-students."²⁷

²⁶ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 51, Folder 262, Page 56, newspaper article, Aug. 25, 1968.

²⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 236, Aug.27, 1968.

Early on, leaders sent *brigadistas* to proselytize among families²⁸ A typical call to action pointed out the rising cost of living, depressed salaries, and that, "The various things necessary for a better life are very expensive and inaccessible to the people. Rents are high. Education for the children costs a lot. ..." ²⁹ Much of the rhetoric centered on working class families and the hardships they endured. If the government could call them privileged, the students could point to the class divisions the PRI had fostered. A placard proclaimed, "Mr. President, we invite you and your family to live on \$28.50 [pesos] a day."³⁰

At times, whole families joined the protest. A letter from the Parents Association condemned the government violence against the students, claiming that their children were better protected by the lawful use of authority than what the government was doing: "The bayonet is the last arm used against an invader. Who ordered its use against our children?"³¹ Some elementary school teachers mobilized families of their students. A meeting at the Superior School of Zacatenco included a group of primary school teachers who promised to give supportive letters to their students to take home to their parents.³²

²⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 31, Hoja 4. Aug.13, 1968.

²⁹ Timothy Harding, Manuel Aguilar, and Victor Rico Galan, *Mexico '68: the students speak* (New York: United States Committee for Justice to Latin American Political Prisoners, 1968), 30.

³⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 39, Hoja 16, Sept. 13, 1968; see also, Leg. 34, Hoja 230, Aug. 27, 1968.

³¹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarios, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 51, Folder 262, Page 58, newspaper article, Aug. 23, 1968.

³² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg.4 8, Hoja 205. Oct. 9, 1968.

A speaker at one demonstration noted the large number of families and parents present, and congratulated them “for having raised courageous children with a great awareness of their historic destiny”³³ During an August demonstration, one parent explained why he let his children take part, “... the demands are just, and parents, families, and students should continue the struggle until victory.”³⁴ Another speaker demanded it was a parental responsibility to support the students and the people’s civic rights. As always, the parents were asked to distribute fliers to counter the media.³⁵

Of course, not all parents supported student radicalism. Some families discouraged their daughters from involvement in the movement. Mexican women of college age usually lived with their parents, and many of these did not want their daughters staying out late into the night or spending the night at the university. Parents worried that young men in the movement were in gangs, on drugs, or sexually promiscuous.³⁶ In some cases they were right – norms regarding gender and sexual behavior were in flux. As one movement participant recalled, “I met a boy, a Guatemalan and started learning about politics. At that point we started sleeping together.” When asked how her parents felt, she responded, “They weren’t very happy

³³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hoja 4, 1968.

³⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hoja 231, Aug.20, 1968.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ For examples of such attitudes see, Silviano Martinez Campos, “Ofrecen los Padres de la Familia Luchar Contra el Pandillerismo” in *Ovaciones*. 27 March 1969. See also Poniatowska, *Massacre*, 84.

but there was a new sense of freedom back then, a feeling that your parents didn't have to know ...³⁷

The CNH invoked a link between women's roles in Mexican history and 1968, and given that link, movement propaganda made a particular point of including women. Indeed, this occurred to such a degree that state security reports noted the focus, "... in this and other fliers they [the CNH] insist that the female students should participate in the struggle."³⁸ Given Mexican women's long history of political participation, the CNH found ample ground to justify such involvement. A flier from the CNH addressed to the people of Mexico and Mexican mothers said, "the participation of Mexican women in all the great movements in Mexican history has demonstrated their interest in all the positive causes of their country ... mothers and Mexican women cannot remain on the margin of the movement, they have the responsibility to fight alongside their children, brothers, and companions..." The flier called women to a rally with the words, "All mothers support your children!"³⁹ Such calls produced results, women and family members came to demonstrations. At a protest on August 27, protesters wielded placards reading "The mothers of political prisoners demand their liberty," and "Díaz Ordaz, the people have respected your children, you respect ours." Others claimed, "The mothers of the

³⁷ Interview with the author, Mexico City, June 12, 2005.

³⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 31, Hoja 12. Aug.15, 1968.

³⁹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantiles, Esther Montero, Box 1, Folder 6, Page 230, flier, undated.

Polytechnic, the university, and the people in general demand justice for our children,” along with “Mexican mothers support their children.”⁴⁰

The theme of motherhood was often invoked. A flier from the Preparatory School 1 said, “Mexican Mothers, you gave us life only to have a soldier or *granadero* take it from us. Help us.”⁴¹ The degradation caused by poverty was also raised; the “miracle” had left women prostituting themselves to support their children.⁴² The indignities suffered by women became a weapon against the state; women as well as men were now under attack, as one speaker reported, a van of detained students included, “women, two of them wounded, one from a bayonet.”⁴³

The UNMM, a division of the Communist Party, were very visible and participated in marches and demonstrations and held consciousness-raising seminars for women and mothers in support of the movement. One of its fliers claimed that radical students were only exercising their constitutional rights of protest and assembly. The Union denounced “repeated acts of fascist-like terrorism” and especially the *granadero* violence in Tlatelolco, which they asserted was aimed at children. The Union reminded the public that many detained students had children. They called on all “women, students, professionals, employees, workers, housewives” to form fight committees:

⁴⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hojas 238-341, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁴¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 128. Aug. 10, 1968.

⁴² CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantiles, Esther Montero, Box 1, Folder 4, Page 173, flier, 1968.

⁴³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hoja 198, Aug. 28, 1968.

Mexican women, defend your home, your sons and daughters, your fathers and brothers. Join with other women comrades and friends, with your neighbors, with Mothers Associations from the schools, the women from your *barrios*, your office, and your school. Together we should demand a return to constitutional legality, a respect for individual liberties, the end of the repression, the immediate liberation of the detained, and the compliance with student and popular demand.⁴⁴

While one can argue that the Communist Party, in Mexico, as elsewhere was known for its populist manipulations, it is revealing that its feminine sector chose this issue and addressed it in this manner. For many women, maternal and political identities merged, especially when husbands, fathers, and brothers were in prison or jail.

Mothers had often fostered radicalism in their children. One student leader recalled their behavior, “The only ones who supported us were the mothers: you came home with five of your buddies and even though there wasn’t anything in the house, they made you food, and if you needed to stay over they put you up and blessed you before you went to bed. Our mothers were our great allies...”⁴⁵ Activist Federico Emerit traced his politicization to his mother, a rural teacher during the Cárdenas period.⁴⁶ An engineering student who was detained during the mobilization also paid tribute to concerned women. A student of the UNAM, Ruiz was wounded the morning of August 28, 1968. He recalled that the “... police were on drugs ... and I started running, avoiding soldiers and fallen friends.” Upon escaping, Ruiz fled into the Sanborn’s, a chain of restaurants, on Prado. The patrons of Sanborn’s did nothing, simply making

⁴⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 53, Hoja 250, undated.

⁴⁵ Asencio, 33.

⁴⁶ Asencio, 47.

comments on his plight while offering no assistance. Only the waitresses helped him, to whom he gave his “deep thanks.”⁴⁷

Women and families were particularly critical after the Oct. 2nd massacre. In fact, they inherited the movement’s leadership as the state imprisoned the majority of the male leaders. Women, drawing on their already existing expertise and experience, filled these roles. They attempted to contain the fears of the participants and not lose the momentum. While these attempts ultimately failed, they nonetheless organized meetings, demonstrations, legal and physical care for the prisoners, all in the face of considerable danger.⁴⁸

Aid for political prisoners, after the October 2nd massacre, became critical – most of it carried out by women. They worked in an environment of fear and repression. Many of those imprisoned after October 2nd were husbands and their wives, sisters, and mothers formed organizations and publicized the violence that was taking place. Women often became the sole provider and caretaker for the family, as well as offering material support to those in prison. A flier from the National Union of Mexican Women invited the people of Mexico to celebrations in Tlatelolco for the Day of the Dead, one month to the day following the massacre. They asserted that the movement, although not as visible as it formerly was, due to the massive violence against “women, children, students, and workers,” was still alive and needed public support. They encouraged people to bring

⁴⁷ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantiles, Esther Montero, Box 1, Folder 1, Page 45, flier, 1968.

⁴⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 281-288, Oct. 4, 1968.

candles and flowers to protest the “military and police dictatorship” of the country.⁴⁹ In this, the group hinted at the concept of sacrifice, later to become so predominate in analyses of 1968.⁵⁰ The Union also directed an open letter to the government, distributing it as a flier to the public, asking for the release of the political prisoners.⁵¹ Similarly, the Mexican Communist Party, held meetings for friends and families of the imprisoned to discuss legal and financial strategies.⁵² Such meetings gave hope to loved ones that the prisoners were not forgotten.

Among the most frequent public demonstrations after October 2nd were marches of mothers, beginning at Mexico City’s Monument to the Mother and ending at the Office of the Attorney General where the protestors would demand the liberty of political prisoners. The CNH began to organize such marches one day after the massacre when they announced plans for a demonstration of mothers on October 3rd.⁵³ A similar march was announced only one week later for October 11th.⁵⁴ During that demonstration, a mother of a fallen student from the Vocational 7 took the floor. She outlined her role as a mother, stating that as a Mexican mother she had fully felt the harsh and excessive use of repressive force at the hands of the government and that her son “... was the proof that

⁴⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 65, Hoja 114, undated.

⁵⁰ For an example, see Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2005).

⁵¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 53-2-970, Leg. 2, Hojas 333-334, undated.

⁵² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-183-69, Leg. 2, Hoja 6, Nov. 20, 1969.

⁵³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 268, Oct. 3, 1968.

⁵⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 121-123, Oct. 10, 1968.

demonstrates that the President has substituted force for reason.” The mother continued that she was willing to offer herself to “... all the Mexican students in the student movement ... that the spilt blood should stimulate everyone who has the privilege to be alive and free.” She believed that her only crime was to “be a mother” and that she was willing to lose her life to promote a noble cause such as that of the student movement.⁵⁵

At a similar demonstration immediately following the massacre, a group of approximately 300, mostly women, gathered in front of the Chamber of Deputies. They criticized state legislators for their indifference to student demands and insisted on freedom for political prisoners. As mothers they asked for the intercession of the President’s wife, Guadalupe Borja. One speaker also noted that mothers had been attacked by the state. They continued the demonstration, ending with an invitation to join them at the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* where they would continue the struggle “unto the doors of victory.”⁵⁶ From October through December, women denounced the invasion of the homes of *petroleros* during the events of October 2nd, revealing that not only workers but also their families were at risk.⁵⁷ They demanded that prisoners be freed and that lists of the imprisoned, many missing without a word, be posted publically so that their parents and family members could find them and pay the fine to free them.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 119, Oct. 10, 1968.

⁵⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hojas 1-3, 1968.

⁵⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 282, Oct. 4, 1968.

⁵⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hoja 1, Dec. 13, 1968.

Many parents and families were left without knowledge of loved ones under detention. They knew only that the loved one had “disappeared” into the federal penitentiary system. Raúl Alvarez Encarnación and Manuela Garín de Alvarez, in one letter to the editor, spoke of their fears and desperation. Police detained their son, movement leader and professor of physics at the IPN, Alvarez Garín, on Oct. 2nd. Two days later, his name disappeared from the list of detained yet never appeared on the list of those freed. The parents wrote to the government in the newspaper *Excelsior*, imploring those in charge. “Attorney General, we are deeply worried for our son, and making use of the most basic human right, we ask that you order an immediate investigation into his whereabouts and respect his physical safety.”⁵⁹ The letter stated that the parents saw Alvarez Garín on October 4th and found him to be in perfect health, making it clear that one of their primary fears was for his physical safety.

Families of the political prisoners were among the most vocal in their criticism of government action. In a letter to the editor of the paper, *Por Que?*, writer Silvia Miñon Rodríguez, whose father was detained by police, declared:

If it were not for the grave harm that his imprisonment is causing us, being the only source of support for our family, and the poverty that it causes us, I would not be able to write these lines, but for the family members of the political prisoners it is evident that the protests and pleas to respect the law are not considered because of the arrogance of those in power...⁶⁰

⁵⁹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 51, Folder 212, Page 23, newspaper article, Oct. 11, 1968.

⁶⁰ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 53, newspaper article, June 27, 1969.

Those in prison expressed considerable concern over their inability to care for family and loved ones outside the prison walls. The case of singer and composer Judith Reyes is illustrative. On July 21, 1969, unidentified men attacked Reyes, her children, and sister-in-law, twenty-one year old Josefina Nieto Castillo -- official violence continued long after the October massacre. Reyes, an artist well known for her protest songs, had recently completed a work of protest focused on the Oct. 2nd massacre at Tlatelolco. On that night in July, unidentified men kidnapped Josefina from her house, followed by Reyes and her children. They were beaten, bound and gagged, and driven around the city for five hours during which time the assailants encouraged Reyes to sign a confession. Her husband, Adán Nieto Castillo, a political prisoner in Cell "N" of the Federal Prison in Mexico City, wrote a letter to the editor of the magazine *Por Que?* insisting that the men were police. He expressed his feelings of impotence and frustration about the events and asked how could he protect his wife, sister, and children from prison? He argued that the crimes were troubling because they were "an outrage against the most basic individual rights and that this measure of fascist terror should alarm the people. It is an act, not only against the political prisoners, but also against all the citizens of our country ..." ⁶¹ This was an attack against freedom of expression and "destroys the sanctity of the home and the respect that should be granted to mothers and children." ⁶² The object seemed obvious: to dishonor the man and his home.

⁶¹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 59, newspaper article, Aug. 14, 1969.

⁶² Ibid.

Nonetheless, there was sufficient freedom of the press for newspapers and magazines to carry these letters and others protesting state repression and violence. Letter writers saw some of the press as an ally of “mothers and sisters who not only have family members in prison because of the student situation but who also encounter many other problems of great importance for the population ...”⁶³ It was important that the press publicize state actions and the plight of protest families.

It cost money to be imprisoned. These institutions functioned as extortion rackets where those with means could buy themselves a more comfortable existence. Outside family support sustained the prisoners. “In this cell there aren’t any bunks, and the friend whose family can’t buy a cot for him and pay its way in with the obligatory bribe will continue to sleep on the floor, protected from the rats at night by the corner of his blanket...”⁶⁴ Families knew that those inside, most likely husbands, fathers, and brothers, depended upon their ability to secure sufficient funds to make them safe within the prisons. This was often a daunting task.

Beyond the immediate aid required by incarcerated love ones, prisoners and their families had to find ways to sustain their relationships through the screening mechanisms of the prison authorities. A student prisoner in Cell “C” explained that relationships between guards and prisoners were often anything but “friendly,” but were still central to

⁶³ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 19, newspaper article, Dec. 27, 1968.

⁶⁴ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 27, Page 10, newspaper article, Dec. 7, 1968.

permitting prisoners to receive visitors. Visits from women were of particular concern. “The guards are neither ‘easygoing’ nor ‘polite,’ because their behavior is supervised for any permissiveness. On several occasions they have gone to the extreme of forcing our feminine visitors to show to them their most intimate parts, arguing than arms or drugs could be introduced.”⁶⁵ Again a masculine honor code was used against the male prisoners – their female companions and loved ones were publicly insulted with impunity.

In a similar manner, a letter from movement participants in prison asserted that visitors were routinely subjected to extensive bodily searches in the name of drug prevention. The authorities knew that the political prisoners were not addicts or dealers. But “... it has reached an untenable point when the director of the jail himself allows a girlfriend to be insulted with the most disgusting words.” The prisoners further described that they were required by the prison authorities to make a weekly list of visitors they would like to receive. They then kept tabs on the visitors outside the prison, using this as a method of “intimidation and to spy against our families.”⁶⁶

While this particular letter and much of the media surrounding the student prisoners focused on the experience of male prisoners, women too were detained and imprisoned, albeit in far fewer numbers. Following the October 2nd massacre, young

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 51, Folder 262, Page 44, Newspaper article, April 17, 1969.

women were among the first to be given their liberty, after their families paid a fine of 500 pesos.⁶⁷ They were followed later that day by eighty-one more women.⁶⁸

The women who suffered long imprisonments faced even more restrictions than their male comrades and felt they were second-class prisoners.⁶⁹ While the visitors for male prisoners were often subjected to invasive searches, female prisoners were denied conjugal visits altogether. The regulation rested on the assumption that the 1968 female prisoners, all of whom were unmarried, would not require such a visit. In recalling this, one female prisoner felt that “it’s not natural to deny women a sexual life.”⁷⁰ In fact, this was a period of changing sexual norms and many women were sexually active prior to and during the movement, making the enforced celibacy a point of considerable anger and frustration.

The family and sexuality played a role in state attempts to force jailed students to identify movement leaders or sign confessions. One female prisoner recalled hours upon hours of interrogation. She refused to sign anything or identify anyone. She complied when “... they told me that they had my mom and my sister and I broke down.” She signed a confession and the state charged her with fifteen counts of federal law violation.

⁶⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 62, Hoja 326, Dec. 14, 1968.

⁶⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 267, Oct. 3, 1968.

⁶⁹ Interview with the author, Mexico City, July 21, 2003. In fact, one female political prisoner believes that such bias continues into the present with the contemporary media consistently seeking male interviewees on issues relating to 1968. She believes that her male friends in the movement have failed to redress the situation.

⁷⁰ Interview with the author, Mexico City, Dec. 14, 2005.

Only later did she find out that her family was in the city of Taxco in the state of Guerrero throughout her interrogation and safe from the police.⁷¹

Similarly, Emerit, a student leader recalled his interrogations in prison, revealing their gendered nature. He was put in solitary confinement for approximately a month before his questioning began. Again, the authorities wanted him to sign a confession or identify other participants. Emerit recalled that the interrogation style was “evocative of *A Clockwork Orange*.” “... they gave me an interrogation ... that was terrible with a drug that provoked me from terror to euphoria, with slides of frightful paintings, with pornographic films, of homosexuals, lesbians and with a sound system blasting the music of Wagner.”⁷² Emerit was also eventually charged with multiple violations of federal law. In this instance, sex and sexuality, along with Wagner, were key components of state interrogation tactics, showing the centrality of gender and the family to all levels of the events of 1968.

Ideas on Gender Roles and Honor

An example of how gender roles in 1968 were changing is the role of Tita, CNH representative of UNAM's Faculty of Law, Roberta Avendaño Martínez. She became a famous spokesperson in 1968 leading to “Song for Tita,”:

Our favorite among the gang of students was Tita
The woman UNAM adored
She was so brave and of such ample proportions
That even the director respected her ...

⁷¹ Interview with the author, Mexico City, Nov. 25, 2004.

⁷² Asencio, 49.

And if a cop gives you trouble
 And Cueto endeavors to club you
 Please remember, my plump one,
 The Law School's behind you forever.⁷³

Through her activism, Tita changed the way men felt about her, and through her, how they felt about women in general.

Within the movement, tension and ambivalence existed between women's new opportunities and older ideas on gender and sexuality. One student participant recalled being jailed with forty-three other women. Because there were no beds available, the women were herded into the dining hall where they spent the day in freezing temperatures. Their main concern was their male comrades. This resulted in a collection being taken to send the men cigarettes and condensed milk. The women also sang songs to let the men know they were not alone and to keep spirits high.⁷⁴

While men in the movement were willing to work with women, they often minimized their role. Student leader, Eduardo Valle Espinoza, of the CNH, recalled the large numbers of female participants and their importance to the "fighting spirit," while diminishing their importance, "The girl comrades from the School of Nursing were real heroines during the attack on the Santo Tomás campus. They did the whole Adelita bit spontaneously, straight from the heart. They willingly risked their lives to care for our wounded, helped get them off the campus and attended to their every need."⁷⁵ Many

⁷³ Padrés, 93-98.

⁷⁴ Interview with the author, Mexico City, July 29, 2002.

⁷⁵ .Poniatowska, *Massacre*, 90.

women fought for political reasons, not merely to care for wounded men. Martínez (Tita) explained that she was "fighting for an ideal: fighting so that ... government officials would ... not abuse their authority; so that the Mexican people would have the right to hold public officials responsible for their acts so that, in a word, we would have a genuine democracy in this country and justice for all."⁷⁶

Female participants also challenged the patronizing attitudes of their male counterparts. In what is now a famous episode among activists, Valle Espinosa recounted a blunder in his speech during the Silent Demonstration with these words,

I said something I really regret now. It was a bad mistake, and what's more, entirely unfair of me, to have said at one point in my speech, "Let us not shed tears like women for what we are unable to defend like men." The day after the demonstration, when I got back to my school, I found two brigades of girls waiting there for me. I spent several hours trying to explain, amid angry shouts and quite justified protests on their part, that what I had said had merely been a figure of speech. They finally were kind enough to accept my apology, and two days later they brought me a delicious cake ...⁷⁷

This account shows how gender norms were used and challenged – the times were changing.

Many women attributed their politicization to outside forces, often their children, husbands, and lovers. Many became active only after the slaughter. Activist Artemisa de Gortari explained her reasons for political action: "... the most horrifying part was realizing that such a thing was possible in a civilized country: Tlatelolco, killing people, irrational behavior, throwing people in prison, but on the other hand, I also realized how

⁷⁶ Ibid., 149.

⁷⁷ Mexico City, "Concert for El Buo," program, May 14, 2005. The concert, a fundraiser given for Valle Espinoza, included a program of quotes from him written by his children.

many sources of strength a woman has when she loves a man."⁷⁸ Although Gortari attributed her political action to the love of a man, she nonetheless became politically aware and critical in ways that went beyond the bounds of her personal life. She expressed a commonly felt tension of wanting to act outside gender norms, and yet, maintain them and use one to legitimize the other. Her political activism, therefore, was rationalized as the righteous love of a woman for a man.

Student activist, Adriana Corona, understood her participation in the movement as stemming from the inequalities of Mexican economic progress and the lack of civil liberties for all sectors of society. In her view, the movement involved the possibility of "having a different life, of looking at things in another manner ... and rejecting the idea that happiness comes from conforming to established norms."⁷⁹ The family remained essential to women's identity, but ideas about women in the family were in flux. Corona felt that her political and personal ambitions conflicted with social norms that encouraged her "to marry and have ten little children, and if you study at the University, this is only for show, not for life."⁸⁰

In fact, ideas about gender roles and the female body appeared from all sides in 1968. In his annual address on September 1, 1968, Díaz Ordaz spoke of the need for men to defend the state against political and social disruption. His words framed the violence that permeated the movement. "We defend as men that which we must defend: our

⁷⁸ Poniatowska, *Massacre*, 19.

⁷⁹ Ascencio, 44.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

homes, integrity, life, liberty."⁸¹ He called upon citizens to “do whatever necessary” to protect what they held most dear, their family and their homes. Such conceptualizations were not limited to political rhetoric alone, but also extended to everyday political understandings. Tensions over the social changes created by the student movement often expressed themselves in terms of a concern for female sexual propriety and behavior. As one observer noted, "It's the mini-skirt that's to blame."⁸² Political concerns, the family, and the female body were intimately intertwined.

Similarly, notions of honor, understandings of normative gender roles and the family, and politics were deeply connected. In October of 1968, the *Iberoamerican Fraternity* distributed a flier encouraging the readers to reflect on the organization’s mission, finding it particularly relevant to the conflict in 1968. They argued for a return to the original values expressed by “fifteen men of good faith” at the founding of the group. Of particular importance as areas of consideration were the values of a Christian culture, and “our mostly deeply held values: the supremacy of the individual, the home as an indivisible unity and the national community ...” The organization argued that such principles were key in the face of the “danger” confronting Mexico in the summer and fall of 1968.⁸³

⁸¹ "Toda la Energía si es Necesario," *El Universal*, September 2, 1968.

⁸² Poniatowska, *Massacre*, 82. The PAN, who advocated a ban on the mini-skirt, shared such sentiments.

⁸³ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 269, Page 18, newspaper article, Oct, 5, 1968.

Concerns regarding honor, responsibility, and the family permeated all groups involved in the conflict. Like the students, those working for the government would, at times, share similar worries and fears for their families. Fear of non-compliance with state authority was widespread. In an anonymous letter written to editors of the magazine *Por Que?*, an agent of the Special Forces of the Chief of Police of Mexico City, admitted to entering and destroying the Vocational School 7 on August 29, 1968 on the orders of police chief Raúl Mendiola Cerecero. He denounced these actions, arguing in support of the students, and explained that he and his coworkers obeyed because “we have no other solution and it is absolutely necessary that we feed our families.” He expressed concern that if the authorities discovered his identity he would lose his life, explaining his anonymity as essential to his safety and that of his family.⁸⁴ Much like some student participants or their parents, police employees also feared for their safety and that of their children.

Not only those who spoke for the state, but also men and women in the movement, expressed themselves in reference to the family and personal relationships. A male teacher of mathematics and political prisoner, Eli de Gortari, declared that "I didn't join the Movement; I was part of it from the day I was born. It's my medium, the very air I breathe, and to me the Movement meant protecting my home, my wife, my children, my comrades."⁸⁵ Just as motherhood could be used to recruit women, manhood could attract

⁸⁴ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 1, newspaper article, Oct. 4, 1968.

⁸⁵ Poniatowska, 9.

or motivate male activists. The man was the primary provider. In a flier addressed to working people, the Fight Committee of UNAM's Faculty of Engineering paints a picture of working class Mexican life:

Your employers never lose ... Only you are condemned to always work, so that their wives, not yours, have pretty clothing; so that their children, not yours, have toys, as well as milk and fruit and meat and dessert every day. You work for the family of the boss, not your own.⁸⁶

Although many Mexican families were headed by dual working spouses or by single mothers, the movement appealed to the ideal of a family in which the father alone could provide for his family. The family was central to the student critique of the state and participants often mentioned the government's disregard for human life, particularly the lives of women and children. A flier created by the Preparatory School 8 argued: "The struggle continues ... now we must fight more than ever, because our soulless government, our dictatorship, has killed many mothers, children, and workers, hundreds of students, men and women..."⁸⁷

Notions of protecting women and children were central to the discussions of state violence. A flier addressed to the Public Opinion, related the events in the Zócalo on the 27th of August, noting that protestors were in the Plaza of the Constitution, awaiting the arrival of the President. The author noted the presence of the Parents Association, workers, professors and students of both sexes, in other words, of respectable people. The protest ended with a moment of silence and the singing of the national anthem,

⁸⁶ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantiles, Esther Montero, Box 1, Folder 6, Page 262, flier, undated.

⁸⁷ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantiles, Esther Montero, Box 1, Folder 6, Page 258, flier, undated.

demonstrating the patriotism of those present. The article said that the army arrived and immediately began an attack. “Although many women were present, the punitive forces, with a zest that many of us felt must have been caused by drugs, dared to enter the Hotel Prado, where they destroyed the place in front of everyone in the hotel (most of them foreigners), who vehemently protested this vandalism...”⁸⁸ The author then traced the movements of the army, noting its attack on bus riders, made particularly “disgusting” by the fact that the passengers were largely female. A letter written to the United States-based magazine, *Time*, related the events of October 2nd in Tlatelolco in similar fashion. The authors, members of the organization *Free Thought in Mexico*, described the horrors of the day. They explained the flares and encircling military and police, personalizing the brutality by describing the deaths of a woman and child. “A 60 year old woman was struck in the back with a bayonet; a thirteen year old boy died as a result of a bayonet wound to the head; others were shot at such close distance that hospital nurses found powder burns on their clothing.”⁸⁹ The message was repeated at home when the professors of Dramatic Arts of the National Institute of Fine Arts drafted a letter decrying the occupation of the school. They asserted that armed police and military forces filled the school, disrupting an approved assembly and attacking the students. Many who were attacked were young women who were “completely defenseless and free from any

⁸⁸ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantiles, Esther Montero, Box 1, Folder 2, Page 48, flier, undated.

⁸⁹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 270, Page 7, newspaper article, Oct. 11, 1968.

attitude of aggression.” The state forces insulted those who were present, humiliating them, and taking everyone to the police station.⁹⁰

Playing on the notion of an abusive and drugged hyper-masculinity, the September 10th cover of *Siempre!* depicted a *porra*, one of the government sponsored student provocateurs. His gargantuan chest was clothed in a CU (University City, part of the UNAM campus) sweatshirt with a CIA insignia below it.⁹¹ On the shoulders of his jacket were a swastika along with cross and bones. He glowered menacingly with red eyes, chains in one hand, and brass knuckles in the other as he stood over the buildings of the city, dominating them with his muscled body.⁹²

The fliers were not without some important truths: state aggression occurred against women and children as well as men. A flier from the National Fight Committee described the “brutal aggression that resulted in the death of a young woman, of an old woman, and a young girl of six years along with the wounding of many *compañeras*, one of whom will remain paralyzed.”⁹³ The flier ended by calling for no more deaths or

⁹⁰ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 51, Folder 259, Page 7, newspaper article, Aug, 2, 1968.

⁹¹ CU was short for University City, location of the UNAM.

⁹² CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantiles, Esther Montero, Box 1, Folder 4, Page 73, *Siempre!*, Sept. 10, 1968.

⁹³ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantiles, Esther Montero, Box 1, Folder 1, Page 16, flier, August 7, 1968.

wounded and for a real democracy so that students and “their children can enjoy what they have taken from us.”⁹⁴

At times, the fliers seem to serve another purpose – to aid the public in grieving over the events of 1968. An anonymous poem expressed this sentiment:

... here they have killed our own people
 they weren't workers on strike,
 they were women and children, students,
 young people of fifteen years,
 a girl going to the movies,
 a child in his mother's womb,
 everyone swept away, riddled with bullets, on and on,
 by the shrapnel of social order and justice ...⁹⁵

Many people of Mexico were shocked by the extent and character of the state's violence. In an open letter addressed to the President, the UNMM responded to remarks made by President Díaz Ordaz in September of 1968 in which he noted the dangers the movement posed to Mexican women, particularly those with husbands and children involved. The Union agreed with the President that women had suffered but corrected his impression that this was a result of student behavior. In no instance “were the guilty the students, companions, sons, and our brothers; those who have hit and run over us are the military and members of the repressive forces...” The letter added “as mothers, as women, as Mexican citizens and as members of the National Union of Mexican Women,

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Juan Manuel Rivera Lopez, “Catálogo Parcial del Fondo Movimiento Estudiantil Mexicano” (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Sobre la Universidad of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) 1987.

we reject the slander of the students, making clear once more our support and solidarity with the movement, awaiting the just resolution of their demands.”⁹⁶

Like many others, a mother recalled being at Tlatelolco on October 2nd with her children. The horror of the experience was heightened by the presence of her children and she understood the event through the lens of motherhood. “I had the misfortune to be at the demonstration with all my children and to witness the horrific scenes worthy of a hell hatched by sick minds. Still affected by the death of so many compatriots I faithfully relate the story It is the heart of a mother stretched before the magnitude of such tragedy...”⁹⁷

Condemnation of the massacre at Tlatelolco, fueled by rumor and hearsay, often focused on the physical, expressing concern for the body, its integrity, and how the government may have violated that integrity. While all knew that a tremendous abuse had occurred, the details remained obscured in light of the immediate cover-up and cleaning of the square and circulated largely by word of mouth. The night of the massacre and following morning, many witnesses reported seeing large piles of shoes and clothing. There was particular concern that many of these belonged to women. An editorialist, submitting to the magazine *Por Que?*, raised the issue:

... the following day they [the neighbors] recounted incredible scenes to me, above all one that appeared inexplicable: on the slabs in the Plaza of the Three Cultures there were an enormous number of articles of dress,

⁹⁶ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantiles, Esther Montero, Box 1, Folder 2, Page 64, flier, Sept. 2, 1968.

⁹⁷ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 16, newspaper article, Dec. 6, 1968.

many covered with blood. Trousers, shirts, dresses, intimate clothing and, mainly, shoes. Hundreds of men's shoes, of women, of children. Did they undress the bodies before removing them?

The writer, in relating the view of neighbors, expressed concern over the physical integrity of the fallen. Further, such possibilities were linked to international events, in this instance, some of the most horrific images of the twentieth century with the writer asking "...or as did Hitler's SS before putting Jews in the furnaces, did they strip the victims of their clothes?" The language focused particularly on the female victims, raising concerns for the female body and its role in state violence.⁹⁸

Playing on understandings of the revolutionary family, a letter from the father of Che Guevara asserted the bonds of the "family" of international leftism. His letter read: "I send to the brave Mexican students, who are enduring a difficult test, my encouragement along with a fraternal embrace." The letter is signed Ernesto Guevara Lynch and dated September 7, 1968 from Buenos Aires.⁹⁹ The newspaper, *Por Que?*, printed the article with the heading: "A letter from the father of CHE Guevara to the Mexican Students."¹⁰⁰ Much as the Mexican state sought to legitimate its economic agenda through international approval and connection, so too did the student movement,

⁹⁸ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 22, newspaper article, Jan. 3, 1969.

⁹⁹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 68, newspaper article, June 29, 1968.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

demonstrating a conceptualization of international leftism legitimated through the language of family.

The State: Understandings of Gender, Family, and Class

Both student and state rhetoric concerning gender roles was aimed at creating greater legitimacy. The government accused the students of violence, often focusing on the dangers their actions posed to women and children. The popular opposition to the movement frequently criticized the students for failure to conform to accepted gender norms. For instance, the *University Reform Front*, in an article published in *El Día*, on Aug. 27, 1968 described a student demonstration. They were concerned with the appearance of those present, particularly some of the women at the protest, "... many miniskirts were seen; masculine gentlewomen, almost men, necklaces made of rings worn by the bearded youth; many students wore the most humble clothing possible: white ponchos, like the Indians, with straw sandals."¹⁰¹ The Front condemned the students for their perceived inversion of gender and class norms, illustrated by the women who were *almost* men along with the genteel students who were like Indians (a term of social and class derision among the educated). However, the organization also believed that this was not merely a matter of appearance. In the same article they exposed what they felt to

¹⁰¹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 270, Page 17, newspaper article, Aug. 27, 1968.

be the lack of chivalry by participants, in this way, linking dress or class with behavior. “As one of the gentlemen felt that there was a lack of respect for the women on board the vehicle, he drew his pistol to punish the insult.”¹⁰² Here older forms of protecting gender norms are contrasted with the “uncouth” behavior of the younger generation and the right of the older generation to use force to restore those norms.

Much as the CNH attempted to garner support by appealing to a masculine understanding of men as the primary breadwinner, so too did those who opposed the movement. A flier printed in the newspaper *Ultimas Noticias* in September 1968, urged silence in response to the student disturbances. In fact, it was addressed to “men who *do* work,” and asserted that their silence would be the unanimous rejection of the “absurdly self-titled” Central Strike Committee.¹⁰³ The flier brings to light the notion of the students as lazy, non-working, layabouts, in need of a paternal reprimand from responsible men.

Similarly, a student attack on the CNH and the movement employed a language of work and family. The *Committee for the Authentic Student Body* urged others to action by asserting that the “true students, the young people who enjoy the incalculable privilege of a superior education, that is public no less, aspire to be useful to ourselves, our family,

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 268, Page 27, newspaper article, Sept. 13, 1968.

and our country, we cannot remain at the sides with our arms crossed.”¹⁰⁴ By stressing a responsibility to themselves, their families, and their country, the students asserted the logic of a patriarchal structure, arguing for its defense and conflating family and nation. Furthermore, the writers asserted their masculinity, “We ask all men with integrity, with the civic honor that has characterized all Mexican students in their legendary battles, to return immediately to classes ...” Again and again, honor was involved. Finally, while critics argued that the lazy activists might not mind losing an academic year, those on the Committee of the Authentic Student insisted they would complete the school year.

The state-sponsored opposition also connected work and the family in their denunciations. A letter to parents and families printed in the newspaper, *Ultimas Noticias*, said the movement was inspired by “professional agitators” bent on using the “noble banner” of Mexican students. They condemned the disturbances and argued that the student movement was bent on subverting the “ceaseless work” required for Mexico’s greatness. They finally urged all heads of families (assumed to be male) that had school-age children, to teach them about the “efforts realized by previous generations to create a worthy country ...”¹⁰⁵

Many parents, of course, blocked their children from joining the movement, opposing it as irresponsible and a waste of opportunity. In this way, the Coalition of the

¹⁰⁴ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 268, Page 30, newspaper article, Sept. 13, 1968.

¹⁰⁵ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 269, Page 10, newspaper article, July 31, 1968.

Parents Association published an article on October 5th, 1968, in the newspaper *Excelsior*, making clear their position on the movement. The organization argued that the movement posed a great danger to the economy and the tourist industry in Mexico, particularly given the impending Olympic Games. They asserted that as parents “we have proven that the desire of our children and the majority of the students is to end this absurd conflict and to discuss and form a constructive plan...”¹⁰⁶ As parents, it fell to them to put an end to the “absurdity” of the student protest by setting their children straight and preventing their involvement in the mobilization.

Those in opposition often used the family to criticize the behavior of the participants. Many perceived the students as spoiled, throwing away opportunities and privileges that were the result of hard work within a family. They saw many students as receiving benefits:

... from their own parents who want to equip them with an education that will make them useful to society and to themselves. In how many Mexican homes, does the noble desire to have a professional son imply great sacrifices and deprivations of the parents and of other siblings that the favored student hardly recognizes!¹⁰⁷

The students were seen as wayward children, betraying their parents’ sacrifices. The behavior of upwardly mobile youth appeared incomprehensible to many of their elders. Similarly, such sacrifice and involvement on the part of parents allowed them a particular

¹⁰⁶ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 269, Page 16, newspaper article, Oct. 5, 1968.

¹⁰⁷ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 270, Page 15, newspaper article, Aug. 23, 1968.

viewpoint from which to criticize the movement. The father of an UNAM student wrote to the newspaper *Siempre!* to express such a view:

... from talks with other parents who have children in the University I knew I wasn't alone. I dreamed that my son would be a great professional and that I would be so proud of his efforts, but before the sad reality, I did not do more than accept his decision and to feel humiliated and ashamed. The word is "SWINDLED."¹⁰⁸

Many commentators consistently employed the language of family. Such language made claims for reconciliation and an end to the conflict. Illustrative of such an approach is a letter to the editor written on October 30, 1968:

The blood from victims on both sides demonstrates the need for brotherhood: brother students, brother *granaderos*, brother President of the University, brother deputy. The price for this struggle is very high. A few families in mourning, a few who are insulted, one or two decades of civic regression, a nation sunk in political ignominy and complacent silence.¹⁰⁹

While making a very pointed argument, the author nonetheless, argued for an end to the “familial” conflict.

Similarly, an open letter to the President of the Republic considered agitation a family matter. “It is likely that there are many professional provocateurs in the movement; but those who really sustain it are the young boys who in the working class home listen to the father thunder against the turncoats and sold labor leaders; who in the

¹⁰⁸ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 272, Page 82, newspaper article, Nov. 6, 1968.

¹⁰⁹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 272, Page 79, newspaper article, Oct. 30, 1968.

professional home, against the judges and the bribes.”¹¹⁰ Such national problems were seen as rooted in the home life. As such, a language of the home was necessary to understand and resolve the conflict.

On Oct. 28, 1968, the newspaper *Tiempo* published a letter to the poet, Octavio Paz, from his daughter Helena.¹¹¹ Helena took her father to task for his views on the student movement, arguing that the students were victims of the teachers who had so “deprived them of spirit” as to turn them into “crazy machines of destruction who further their [the teachers] personal interests.” She attributed this to an intellectual environment of “ambiguity” in which “love is rejected for physical promiscuity and the ideal replaced with erotic technique ... the good no longer exists, nor the spirit, nor wrong, everything is ambiguous.”¹¹² She attributed these beliefs to particular global-ideological belief systems. She felt herself influenced by Jungian thought and her father by Marxism. Again, those involved in 1968 attempted to make connections on a global level, each rationalizing a particular belief and practice. In this instance, divisions between such discourses within one family were applied to the whole of Mexico.

¹¹⁰ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 51, Folder 262, Page 31, newspaper article, Nov. 1968.

¹¹¹ The letter received wide circulation and was also published in the newspaper *El Universal* on the 23rd of the same month.

¹¹² CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 48, Folder 248, Page 25, newspaper article, Oct, 28, 1968.

Conclusion

The student movement of 1968 was a time of tremendous hope and change. Shifting conceptions of gender contributed to the form of the movement itself and reflected its broader ideological questioning. Despite the large numbers of female participants, the student movement paid little attention to gender discrimination or women's rights. Even so, the tragic events of 1968 led to a critique of authority that eventually included new perspectives on gender and changed the way women and men thought about their roles. The experience of 1968 is critical to contemporary Mexican politics and gender relations because it helped define the importance of women's future political participation as well as popular understandings of political and gender identity. Designating the student movement as proto-feminist, however, is anachronistic and does not consider how those involved saw themselves. Neither men nor women understood 1968 in such terms. Even as they gained a greater sensitivity toward gender roles, they never developed a feminist agenda. Rather, what existed was an ambivalence and tension concerning the relationship of values instilled in them earlier and the requirements of changing Mexico's politics.

One of the most significant achievements of the movement was its creation of an intellectual opening. With its anti-authoritarian emphasis, the movement challenged power relations, creating a space in which other ideologies could be questioned. Many participants believed that the movement initiated a different consciousness within the

population, altering what could be said, asked for, and fought for.¹¹³ These subsequent changes included the way in which women, mostly of the middle class, perceived themselves. Reflecting on the movement thirty years later, CHN member, Mirtocleya González declared, "When I became involved with the movement ... I was a shy, introverted girl, but after 1968 ... I was a representative of the CNH ... my life and thought completely changed."¹¹⁴ However, such changes went beyond the individual, affecting the larger society and the ways in which a younger generation of men and women perceived each other were irrevocably altered.

The experience of 1968 does not conform to a liberal feminist trajectory as developed in the United States or Europe, nor does it mirror the experience of women in the 1960s student movements of those countries. Rather, drawing on an entrenched pattern of corporate, organic politics, Mexican women generally expressed their political identity through familial relations or roles. Their male counterparts did so as well. Nonetheless, there is some expression of women's political identity that does not rely on their roles as mother, daughter, and/or wife. Despite the students' call to normative femininity, they also reinvented femininity to meet their purposes. The student movement, therefore, expressed and created a conflicting desire to legitimate its cause through the purity of women/motherhood, male honor, and the sanctity of the home and also through challenging such gender narratives.

¹¹³ Ascencio, 139. Both male and female participants in the movement expressed such sentiments with great frequency.

¹¹⁴ Ascencio, 75.

The family is one of the most central categories to political belief and practice in 1968 Mexico. Men and women, both for and against the movement, drew on normative gender patterns to politicize the populace and offer a political critique. The state and the movement were involved in a contest for gender legitimacy. The social values invoked by activists did not depart radically from those of the state. Each side used normative understandings of gender and the family to legitimize itself and delegitimize the mobilization. While little scholarship exists on male politicization, the available literature often assumes it to be ideological in nature and, implicitly, juxtaposes it with common understandings of female politicization (occurring through others: husbands, children, brothers, etc.).¹¹⁵ The participants in the 1968 Mexican mobilization demonstrate instead that both men and women expressed a political identity and legitimated action through a language of the family, personal relationships, as well as abstract ideological notions, albeit they did so terms of an inherited behavior code that demanded different distinct behavior for each gender. These same concepts of family

¹¹⁵ The bulk of the historiography on women's politicization focuses on mobilizations in which motherhood is a defining fact of the movement that women then use to change politics. An example is the excellent and well-developed body of research on the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. This body of literature is particularly relevant to this chapter in that women in 1968 Mexico, much as in Argentina, were among the most important groups to publically seek redress for a political trauma, despite government fear and intimidation. While the scale of women's organization after the Mexican massacre is smaller than that of the mothers of the disappeared, there are nonetheless, striking similarities. Less explored in the historical literature, is the role of women in broader political protest and their politicization vis-à-vis men, an approach that must also examine the politicization of men. For an example of such scholarship see Marysa Navarro's chapter, "The Personal is Political," in Susan Eckstein, *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) and Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in conflict : the politics of gender, sexuality, and labor in the Chilean agrarian reform, 1950-1973* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

and honor were essential to the critics of the 1968 movement, orchestrated by the government, demonstrating the flexibility of such norms. In short, we should view 1968 in terms of the concepts that motivated Mexican politics in general in that era, concepts that reached back to much earlier periods, but which always included the appropriate behavior of men and women which assigned each gender a purpose in the larger patriarchy that was society and signaled social meanings. Radicals, no less than the officials they opposed, remained rooted in their Mexican past and changed as a result of 1968.

Chapter 5

“We Were in the Vanguard”

International Communities in 1968 Mexico

Viewed from the perspective of other developing nations, Mexico’s 1968 movement emerged from an era of instability elsewhere in Latin America. The Olympics bestowed international legitimacy on the Mexican state in contrast to the turmoil in other parts of the Americas. Mexico’s strong security ties to the US, formalized by the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, also pledged its leaders to an openly anti-communist stance following the 1948 International Conference of American States, which resulted in the formation of the Organization of American States (OAS). Following the outbreak of Cold War hostilities in the Korean peninsula in 1950, conflict came to Mexico’s doorstep in 1954 with the U.S.-led overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz’s democratically elected government in Guatemala. By 1968, U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War had created a surge in youthful, left-wing protests at home – just across the border from Mexico.

With respect to Latin America, two important U.S. exports during the Cold War period were the counterculture and CIA-orchestrated coups. Following the 1959 Cuban Revolution, U.S. attempts to consolidate control over the region intensified, and with that intensification, came a surge in Mexican student protests targeting the state, U.S. business, and U.S. imperialism. As a result, concerns for national sovereignty, rather than solidarity with other anti-government movements in other nations, were critical to how

Mexican students defined their movement. Instead, international changes reinforced a sense of a crucial national moment among Mexican students. Che Guevara, killed by U.S.-trained Bolivian soldiers in 1967, was one of the symbols of the movement and its ideals. Assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. (April 4, 1968) and Robert Kennedy (June 6, 1968), along with reports of guerilla violence to the south, dominated the news and further fed student perceptions that the political systems of both hemispheres were in flux, and that direct political action might precipitate a change in the status quo.

This mix of national and international reference points made for a heady rhetorical brew. On August 13, at the famous demonstration at the *Plaza de la Constitución*, with its ringing of church bells, a crowd of 80,000 listened to speakers covering topics such as the importance of the Constitution and the need to protect individual liberties, the important legacy of workers' movements, and the majesty of Mexico's political history. The movement was proclaimed as the next phase in a series of national movements for social change, and it was also placed within the context of the other national protests that exploded in 1968.

These ideas were echoed by the rank and file, those walking the streets, those gathering to cheer, and those listening to the speeches. As students, parents, workers, passersby, and other participants milled around the *Plaza*, they hoisted placards with a multiplicity of messages. The placards covered domestic issues, focusing on the Constitution, and international issues, especially the student movements taking place elsewhere; they revealed the breadth of the political orientations and ideas of the 1968

student movement. One student held a sign reading, “To Defend Rights is Not a Crime.”¹ Another showed an image of a gorilla trampling a bleeding Constitution with the slogan, “This is what the *granaderos* do with the Magna Carta.” And another participant lifted a sign reading, “What Mexico needs is to imprison politicians not political prisoners.”² In reference to the laws on social dissolution, or subversion and insurrection, that the state routinely used to suppress popular movements, one protestor held a sign, “According to Articles 145, we’re all criminals,” while another proclaimed, “Only totalitarian countries have legislation like 145.” Invoking the liberal reforms of the 19th century President and national hero, Benito Juarez, one placard read, “Juarez, your ideals are being trampled.” Finally, another student hoisted a sign proclaiming, “Long live the world proletariat.”³

Similar messages were prevalent at other gatherings throughout the movement. At a demonstration held later in the month, participants lifted more than 2,000 signs into the air, including the following messages: “We the people, victims of the constant violation of our Constitution, ask for a popular jury to judge the public functionaries responsible for these unconstitutional acts,” and, “Our struggle is for national sovereignty.”⁴ Another showed a *granadero* destroying the Constitution with the slogan,

¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 339, Aug. 27, 1968.

² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 30, Hoja 2-4, Aug. 13, 1968.

³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 39, Hoja 166, Sept. 13, 1968. Article 145, a law pertaining to social dissolution, was used by the state to repress social dissent in 1968 and in earlier social movements such as the strikes of doctors, teachers, and railway workers.

⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 340-342, Aug. 27, 1968.

“Is this just, *pueblo?*”⁵ Invoking Mexico’s political history that included the Constitution of 1857 and the Revolution of 1910, another sign said,, “Justice and Liberty, 1857-1910-1968.”⁶ Many held posters with images of the imprisoned railway strike leader Demetrio Vallejo and demanded “Liberty for Political Prisoners.” Others pictures showed the face of Mao Zedong, head of the People’s Republic of China.⁷

As the placards reveal, political rhetoric in 1968 was both national and international in scope. The Cold War encouraged a global framework for politics, as did the emerging international youth culture. Students adopted international symbols of protest. They derived inspiration from the images of Che Guevara, the Argentine doctor made famous by the Cuban Revolution, as well as Mao and the radical students in France, Prague, China, the United States, and throughout Latin America. Students located their criticisms of Mexican politics within a global framework of political and economic conditions and referenced international events such as the Vietnam War and relations between nations, particularly those of the “Third World” in relation to the superpowers. Indeed, as one student participant later remembered, “Mexico was in the vanguard, we were on the forefront, on the edge of all the movements around the world.”⁸ To this particular participant, Mexico’s role in 1968 was unique, an important contribution to

⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 348, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 345, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 348, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁸ Raúl Alvarez Garín. Interview, June 24, 2005.

world history from a country often condemned or ignored for its poverty and political insignificance.

The international context and Cold War tensions were also central to the criticisms of the students leveled by the state and those in opposition to the movement. State officials, retired presidents, and state-sponsored student groups often emphasized the relationship of movement participants to foreign powers, attempting to delegitimize the movement as a product of communist activities. Security officials sought evidence that foreigners were intent on corrupting Mexican youth, and they paid particular attention to the response of the Russian Embassy to the outbreak of the protests. While there was little hard evidence of foreign infiltration or manipulation, the accusations, nevertheless, were a potent part of a larger effort to condemn the students as unpatriotic.

Nationalism and global tensions were central to the events of 1968, regardless of the political identity of those involved, and both sides appealed to this larger context, seeking to attract the domestic audience as well as the foreign one.⁹ Each side sought to attack its opponent on both fronts, giving rise to a series of dichotomous accusations. The state charged students with being communists and anti-Mexican. Students called government officials and politicians undemocratic, cynical compradors. Both sides drew

⁹ Robert Putnam's work on two-level games influenced the framing of this chapter. Putnam argues that theories must account for a "general equilibrium" or the simultaneous interaction of domestic and international factors. In terms of domestic factors, politics (parties, social groups, interest groups, etc.) are among the most important factors. The theory accounts for the inevitability of conflict concerning what is in the best interest of the nation and argues that decision makers have to reconcile domestic and international interests at the same time. See, Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* v. 42:3 (Summer, 1988), 427-460.

on notions of honor and shame to make moral claims about their opponent. Each cast the other as a servant of foreigners, a Cold War threat or a threat to Mexican sovereignty, and as morally corrupt and degenerate. As this developed, the government brought to bear its considerable resources, particularly the state-controlled news media, backing this up with violence.

Despite claims to the contrary by both participants and scholars concerning the global importance of Sixty-Eight, much of the student rhetoric remained focused on Mexico, drawing on patriotic themes and icons and invoking the political history of the country through its heroes such as Juarez and Emiliano Zapata, as well as condemning villains like Porfirio Díaz and linking him to the then-president who shared his patronym, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. Along with these earlier reformers, students cast themselves as the inheritors of the nation's movements for social change.

The Cold War and the Olympic Games

Just as the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union provided a backdrop to interpretations of what happened, the Olympics was an important catalyst for the unfolding of 1968. That year's Olympics would not only prompt the Mexican student movement, but would also shock U.S. audiences when track stars raised their fists on the podium in protest of the treatment of Blacks back home. The Olympics also provided a forum in which the success of differing political systems could be measured with the United States and the Soviet Union competing for the greater numbers of

medals.¹⁰ For the Mexican state, the prize of playing host to the Olympic Games legitimized the move away from the Revolution in the 1940s, the promoting of foreign investment in Mexico, the development of closer ties with the United States, the abandoning of agrarian radicalism, and the focus on economic development and industrialization over social justice.¹¹ For the students, the Olympics were a moment to circumvent the state-controlled news media. They hoped that the presence of international journalists would protect them and, moreover, circulate their message among both national and international audiences. In short, the Olympics provided an opportunity to attack the state with some hope of survival.

The students believed that international journalists offered them a degree of protection from state repression, with the assumption that reports of violence would reach foreign audiences and that this would be a sufficient deterrent to the state. They also hoped that the news media would broadcast their message to a global student community throughout the world. Students believed that the Mexican press failed to give them a fair shake and questioned the freedom of Mexico's press. In a speech given on August 9, one student leader explained that in regard to "the violence that they were victims of, the Mexican press has quieted the reality, in Europe and the United States, especially in the journals Time, New York Times, and News Report, they explain the reality of the events

¹⁰ For an examination of the Olympic Games, their significance, and controversies during 1968, see Kevin B. Witherspoon, *Before the eyes of the world: Mexico and the 1968 Olympic Games* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

¹¹ For the significance of the Games to Mexico, see Eric Zolov, "Showcasing the 'Land of Tomorrow': Mexico and the 1968 Olympics," *The Americas*, v. 61:2 (October 2004), 159-188.

and that there have been deaths that now reach twenty-one in number.”¹² Similarly, at another demonstration, a student speaker asserted that there were “foreign correspondents present and they would tell the truth and expose Mexico’s corrupt press.”¹³

Students consciously played on the international media to create a sense of a global community of youthful protestors. They hoped that the foreign press would create an international readership and audience for events in Mexico. Although students ultimately miscalculated the protection the international news media could provide, they assiduously courted foreign journalists, inviting them to demonstrations and press conferences. At a demonstration on October 1 in University City, almost 3,000 people attended. Among them were correspondents from the United States and England, including representatives from CBS and NBC, as well as correspondents from the French Press and Tokyo Press. They came with their pencils and papers and also with their cameras to film the event. Moreover, the spectators included foreign athletes who were attending the Olympic Games.¹⁴ At another demonstration, one leader took the floor and mentioned that blood would be shed and the movement needed foreign journalists “to tell the world the truth and nothing more.”¹⁵ As the Olympics approached, the students held a press conference intended to reach the worlds’ students and told journalists their movement had broken “... thirty years of official demagogy ...” and that the students

¹² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 5, Aug. 9, 1968.

¹³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 1, undated.

¹⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 118, Oct. 1, 1968.

¹⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 3, undated.

would struggle until “complete triumph.” They outlined their demands and said they had been met with “bayonets and tanks.”¹⁶

While they sought out journalists, students also sought to make tourists aware of the movement. On September 13, state security forces noted the presence of students on the streets and their attempts to attract the attention of tourists, “... detaining them to explain the why of their movement ... others in comedic fashion, encouraged people ... to join them on the island ...” between traffic lanes where they had gathered for their protest.¹⁷ Students also encouraged foreigners to support their cause by designing propaganda specifically for them. As early as mid-August, protestors marched through the city holding placards with slogans such as, “FOREIGNER: IN THIS PLACE THERE IS NO FREEDOM.”¹⁸ Similarly, on October 1, students plastered the UNAM’s, Faculty of Law, with fliers in French, Russian, and English.¹⁹ Days later, following on the heels of the October 2nd massacre, students decided to create propaganda in a multiplicity of languages to “... be distributed among the foreign athletes with the hope that they won’t go to the Olympics and, in this way, discredit the Government before the world,” or so claimed state security agents.²⁰

¹⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 117-125, October, 1 1968.

¹⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 39, Hoja 159, Sept. 13, 1968.

¹⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 30, Hoja 3, Aug. 13, 1968.

¹⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 123, Oct. 1, 1968.

²⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 281, Oct. 4, 1968.

Fears for the Nation: Patriotism and the Cold War in 1968

In their public protests and propaganda, students repeatedly drew on the most popular symbols of the Mexican nation-state, employing its revolutionary history, especially the War of Independence, as a way to legitimate the student mobilization. Among the most important symbolic rites in Mexico is the *Grito*, the call to the struggle for Independence, originally made by Father Miguel Hidalgo on September 16, 1810 and reenacted by the President of the Republic every year. Plans were made on September 12 to stage a student *grito* on the 16th.²¹ Herberito Castillo, a Professor of Engineering, gave the historic call – the goal was to delegitimize the government. Invoking heroes such as “Hidalgo, Morelos, Juárez, Villa, Zapata, and many more,” a speaker during a September demonstration portrayed the students as the inheritors and “true” representatives of these earlier movements. He asserted that these leaders “... struggled for the liberty of the Mexican people, but liberty with justice and equality not ... the freedom to exploit what is left, which is Mexico, and the equal opportunity to be exploiters.”²² These “exploiters” were government officials and businessmen, the winners in Mexico’s bureaucratized, market economy.

Students also attacked Mexico’s subservience to foreign interests, especially those of the United States. They emphasized that the War of Independence from Spain and the Mexican Revolution had expelled the Spanish and then the American overlords. A student flier circulated in September said the movement supported the nation’s

²¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 39, Hoja 158-169, September, 13 1968.

²² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hoja 207-217, September, 25 1968.

constitution and was not controlled by foreign agents as the government maintained.

“The true provocateurs are the repressive Corp of *Granaderos* that serve the oligarchy, the same exploiters who are actually in Power.”²³ A placard at an August demonstration claimed, “They violate our autonomy American style, we need to kick their asses Mexican style.”²⁴ The movement also invoked the Revolution of 1910: Mexico for the Mexicans. Castillo, in a letter to the editor summarized, “We also know that as long as we continue to give the nation’s wealth to monopolistic North American interests the political interventions of our northern neighbor will continue to grow, and with that, the repression of the just aspirations of our people.”²⁵ Castillo argued that the movement had to “unmask” the North American interests at work in Mexico.

Mexican students saw their nation’s bourgeoisie as allies within an international system of wealth. Early propaganda from the Vocational Schools asserted that the student conflict “...should directly confront the reactionary forces of Mexico, allied with the international police of the United States against the advanced and democratic forces of our country.”²⁶ These notions found continued expression throughout the movement. Indeed, a flier later that month claimed that business in Mexico was increasingly foreign owned: “... look for a business ... that is Mexican owned and see that you are unable to

²³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hoja 207-217, September, 25 1968.

²⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 1-15, August 13, 1968.

²⁵ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 35, Newspaper article. Jan. 30, 1969.

²⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hoja 3-14, August, 1968.

find one, even the French fries are foreign owned ...” The author concluded that these economic practices were antithetical to the welfare of the Mexican population and that “... there isn’t a climate favorable to our own development ... [and] the people of Mexico ... don’t participate in the decisions the government makes.”²⁷

To many, the Cold War was an excuse for the rise of “North American monopolies” in Mexico. The 1960s were a decade of massive U.S. investment and an intensified anti-communist campaign in Latin America. The movement considered that the U.S. may have sent its intelligence agents in Mexico as it had done in other Latin American nations. Castillo argued that CIA agents may have staged events to raise tensions in the country to justify “... increasing the repression to SILENCE the people ...”²⁸ In a similar way, students from the Vocational 5 argued that United States security forces were willing to depict the student movement as part of an international communist conspiracy and so justify intervention in Mexican affairs. In a letter to the editor of the paper, *El Día*, the students argued that the CIA and the FBI “... had predicted a great communist conspiracy and they had to prove its existence, regardless of the methods they used!” Movement leaders, however, argued that U.S. efforts had the

²⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hoja 313-323, August, 25 1968.

²⁸ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53 Folder 277, Page 27, Newspaper article. Aug. 18, 1968.

support of the Mexican state. The students sarcastically argued that they may have done “North American agencies” a favor and so should be paid for their efforts.²⁹

Invoking the past was a way to confront the present for, at bottom, the movement’s rhetoric focused on Mexican law and the rights guaranteed in the Constitution of 1917. A flier from the Confederation of Mexican Youth in the earliest days of the movement demanded: “... respect for the rights of organizations and their members, regardless of ideology, creed, sex, and economic condition ...”³⁰ Days later at a demonstration, a speaker declared to the crowds: “... the actions of the students are noble because they defend the most basic human rights, the rights consecrated in the Constitution.”³¹ Activists and leaders alike, despite their many ideological differences, repeatedly stressed the liberal democratic nature of the movement. A flier urged, “Mexicans, defend your rights, know your Constitution, and tell everyone that it has been violated.”³² They especially drew attention to the military in the schools, in violation of the legal autonomy of the University from the state. They also pointed out examples of the state’s repression of dissident voices, including those of earlier movements.³³ They

²⁹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 50, Folder 253, Page 4, Newspaper article. Aug. 11, 1968.

³⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hoja 62, July, 27 1968.

³¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hoja 6, Aug, 1 1968.

³² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 30, Hoja 15, Aug. 13, 1968.

³³ For examples, see AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hoja 233, Aug. 20, 1968 in which a law student denounces the intervention of the Army on the University campus.

believed that constitutional rights were the cornerstone of any democracy. How could one have a decent judicial system without them? In their view, the state, as a prelude to real negotiations, had to remove troops from the UNAM and end the violence against the students within.³⁴ Their favorite target was President Díaz Ordaz, who was ultimately responsible for the occupation of the campus.³⁵

Students discussed these matters through constant meetings that led to massive demonstrations. In the early days of the movement, a student at a meeting in the UNAM's Faculty of Law framed the protest in this way, "We struggle for democracy in Mexico, for respect for the Constitution, and for the student demands..."³⁶ These notions were central as students developed a political agenda. Indeed, they found traction with the teachers who immediately seconded the principles of liberal democracy and Constitutional protection. A member of the Faculty of Law stated that he supported the movement, because it "... had as its end respect for the Constitution which has always been violated."³⁷ Similarly, the Coalition of Professors, the primary organizational body of faculty from the schools of higher education in Mexico City, came down on the side of the students because of their demands for the redress of constitutionally guaranteed rights. Their leader, the engineer Castillo, publically declared: "... the Coalition of Professors came today to demonstrate that they have not remained on the sidelines of revolutionary

³⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 36, Hoja 211, Aug. 31, 1968.

³⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hoja 4, 1968.

³⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 263-264, Aug. 8, 1968.

³⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 2, Aug. 9, 1968.

struggle. The Constitution has been violated and the students assaulted, many wounded, and we know that some are dead ...³⁸

The government's brutal behavior, ignoring even the simplest of constitutional rights, fed the movement's strongest point. In their criticism of the Mexican state, participants most frequently drew attention to the state violence that prevented protestors from freely mobilizing. They also decried the violation of rights concerning freedom of expression, freedom of press, and the right to strike. In doing so, they consistently reminded listeners of the long history of official impunity since the Revolution.³⁹ At a huge demonstration in August, a professor took the microphone to take their argument to the masses gathered in the *Plaza de la Constitución*:

To speak in this majestic *Plaza de la Constitución*, is for all Mexicans, a great honor, and as its name reveals, we won our Constitution thanks to our many Mexican brothers who left their blood on battlefields and the thousands of brothers who died so that we can now enjoy the guarantees that the bourgeoisie in power want to take from us. Our Constitution, that we all respect and should honor ...has again and again been trampled and besmirched. It falls to us to demand that all citizens have their individual rights: freedom of expression, freedom of press, although in Mexico the press has sold-out, freedom to strike, although when some try to do so they are punished, beaten, and imprisoned, like the old railway fighter Demetrio Vallejo...⁴⁰

As more protestors were detained, arrested, and jailed, the movement became more strident about civil rights. Students were particularly concerned for the safety of

³⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 255, Aug. 8, 1968.

³⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hoja 316-318, Aug. 25, 1968.

⁴⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 30, Hoja 9, Aug. 13, 1968.

the political brigades and protestors detained by the police. A central, civic demand was that the police and *granaderos* get out of their campuses and not invade them any longer.⁴¹ Students asserted that they had the right to “run through the streets” distributing material that was “informative protest propaganda.” They believed that it was unjust to categorize the exercise of their constitutional rights by such terms as “subversion, disorderly conduct, vandalism, agitation, etc., etc., etc.”⁴²

Many students were especially concerned with the *Corp of Granaderos* and the laws on social dissolution (Articles 145 and 146). These laws justified the presence of the riot corps at demonstrations and on the campuses. The laws on social dissolution were essential to the deployment of the *granaderos*, both in 1968 and in earlier protests. Students considered the laws to be unconstitutional and outdated, arguing that they were created during a time of war when it was more logical to restrict certain rights, but that was a situation that did not exist in 1968.⁴³ Removal of the laws from the books was one of their six demands, forming a central part of their agenda for reform. These laws had nothing to do with social order, but were fundamentally a justification of repression. During a September demonstration, one student speaker asserted that they “... violate the essence of democracy by cutting off the right to expression, assembly, [and] thought,

⁴¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 3, 1968.

⁴² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hoja 247-248, Aug., 1968.

⁴³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 332, Aug. 27, 1968. At a demonstration on that date one speaker asserted that the articles 145 and 146, pertaining to social dissolution, were used to jail IPN students in 1956 and railway strikers such as Demetrio Vallejo, now that the wartime state of emergency had ended.

with the result that countless political prisoners are deprived of their liberties ... when everyone knows that they were detained for disagreeing ideologically with the Government....⁴⁴

Despite constitutional freedoms protecting the press, the press was restricted in its coverage of student activities, and this, in the view of the students, allowed the *granaderos* to act with impunity. Students repeatedly stressed the limited nature of the Mexican news coverage. They argued that, in practice, freedom of the press scarcely existed, allowing the state to distort reporting of events and to ignore student versions of what was occurring.⁴⁵ Students understood that they would have to generate their own opportunities to reach the Mexican public and counter the accusations against them. A flier circulated in August concluded, "... we have to ask: how is it possible that the authorities accuse us of these crimes, when they are the ones who violate and trample the most fundamental articles of our Constitution? We aren't communist agitators ... we aren't agents paid by the CIA or the government. We're students and we're part of the people! We're students and we demand respect for our individual rights!"⁴⁶

State officials and state-sponsored organizations consistently leveled charges of foreign agitation and communism as a justification for repression. In arguing for the patriotic intent of their actions, a student from the UNAM's Philosophy and Letters invoked the words of Francisco Madero, "The sacrifices do not matter if we reach our

⁴⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 39, Hoja 162, Sept. 13, 1968.

⁴⁵ For instance, see AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg., 44, Hoja 7, 1968.

⁴⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hoja 247-248, Aug., 1968.

goal of creating a better country.” Madero, in his famous presidential campaign of 1910, which led to the Mexican Revolution, also denounced an elite that enriched itself as “the people” suffered. The student argued Mexico needed a new revolution against the system of Díaz Ordaz, “... we need a movement like that of 1910 since the youth are in this movement to defend the rights of the people.”⁴⁷ The movement’s rhetoric also raised an important issue, a people’s “honor,” a sense of controlling one’s own life rather than living in one of subservience.⁴⁸ Employing a time proven slogan, one student asserted that they “... will struggle to the death.” If they were to die, it would be in “... defense of democratic liberties consecrated in the Constitution and for the dignity of the Mexican people.”⁴⁹

The students thus saw their movement as a beginning of a fight for popular, democratic rule, not as an end in itself. As a speaker in August noted, “... it will be a major mistake if the student movement ... after achieving their six points goes to the beach to have fun ... it is when the real popular movement begins that the movement to reestablish democratic liberties in Mexico begins ... we mean ... a governmental regime that truly represents the working people and not as it does, those that exploit the working people.”⁵⁰ A September flier proclaimed: “... if students are fighting now it’s ... not for

⁴⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 331, Aug. 27, 1968.

⁴⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 333, Aug. 27, 1968 and AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 39, Hoja 162, Sept. 13, 1968.

⁴⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 121, Oct. 1, 1968.

⁵⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hoja 316, Aug. 25, 1968.

foreign ideologies as the corrupt Government claims. The facts demonstrate that the true agitators are misery, ignorance, and injustice. The true provocateurs are repressive corps in the service of the oligarchy.”⁵¹

Following the October massacre, students intensified their denunciations of state officials and agents, rejecting the premise that their violence was justified as if defeating a foreign communist plot. Instead, they attempted to refocus public opinion on constitutional rights. The condemnations of state violence were particularly potent after the October 2nd massacre. A letter to the editor of the left-of-center newspaper, *Por Que?*, addressed the issue of communist agitation in the wake of the massacre. The author rejected the notion of a communist conspiracy, arguing instead that the blame for the events of recent months lay with the military. In fact, he asserted, “Now we are sure that there never was a communist conspiracy, only that the same generals are pressuring the President of the Republic to repress any expression of freedom.”⁵² State repression, he concluded, had created deep wounds among the Mexican population, leaving scars that would long remain after the brutality at Tlatelolco. It was the state, not the students, who had “discredited Mexico in front of the world.”⁵³ Similarly, a September flier proclaimed

⁵¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hoja 215, Sept. 25, 1968.

⁵² CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 4, Newspaper article. Oct. 30, 1968.

⁵³ Ibid.

that the true agitators in Mexico were “misery, ignorance, and injustice. The true provocateurs [were the] repressive corps in the service of the oligarchy.”⁵⁴

Supporters and opponents of the movement denounced the students’ use of international symbols. Following a mega-demonstration on August 26, a meeting took place in the Physics-Mathematics building of the IPN. Representatives of the Parents Association expressed their disapproval of the images of Che Guevara hoisted by students at the demonstration. They declared that such images were unnecessary when Mexico boasted heroes such as Juarez and Hidalgo. The students replied that the image represented “the global student struggle to defend their rights.”⁵⁵ Nonetheless, the CNH quickly encouraged students to restrict themselves to national icons and figures. Students drew on Mexico’s revolutionary past, defying the state’s monopoly on Mexico’s powerful political symbols. Indeed as one placard at an August demonstration read: “If Juarez hadn’t died, the *granaderos* would have killed him.”⁵⁶

Fears of Foreign Infiltration – the State Response

As noted above, to their critics the students were simply subversives, and links to student movements abroad only proved it. Domestic fears of communism and the example of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 meant that waving Che Guevara posters represented something more than youthful fashion and idealism. Che represented the

⁵⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 42, Hoja 215, Sept. 25, 1968.

⁵⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 328-355, August, 27 1968.

⁵⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hoja 56-59, August 1968.

possibility of a youth-based guerrilla war and many feared this possibility. The state and their supporters played on these fears incessantly through the media. The central argument against the movement was that it was an instrument of communist policy.

There were very few foreigners linked to the movement, and this is proven by the state security's own archives. But the state could not give up its trump card. Indeed, accusations of foreign influence even came from within the University. The Committee for the Authentic Student Body, headed by UNAM professors, argued that the state response was justified given that "The movement has been planned for a long time. The professional agitators only awaited the pretext, the spark, to put the wheels in motion to subvert constitutional order."⁵⁷ To their minds, the fact that the student movement reached beyond educational reform was a clear indication of outside influence: "None of the petitions are of an academic nature. You don't have to be very smart to figure out what's behind all this."⁵⁸ They saw the movement as part and parcel of a broader moral decline within Mexico due, among other things, to bad parenting and a failure to properly teach Mexico's youth. This decline created a space for foreign agitators who took advantage of the moral and social climate in Mexico, and further, exploited the sense of vulnerability that permeated Mexican society because of the threat of nuclear war.

Some believed that the movement gave the Russians a key opportunity to infiltrate their country. This fact was exacerbated by global tensions which fed the fear

⁵⁷ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 50, Folder 254, Page 73, Newspaper article. Sept. 27, 1968.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

that the Russians had penetrated into the very heart of Mexico. To counter these impressions, a demonstration of approximately 60 students took place in front of the Soviet Embassy on August 27th. Its aim was to denounce the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. Students hoisted placards that read, “Communism, No,” “Russians, No,” and “Christianity, Si.” The military arrived and asked the protestors to leave. They responded with shouts of “Long live Mexico” and “Long live liberty!”⁵⁹ This did not change the theme against the movement as demonstrated by anti-movement student literature, such as the following flier:

We hope that many comrades who are fooled by agitators and those who serve anti-Mexican communists will open their eyes (if they still can open them), so that they see what awaits their families, their girlfriends, their mothers and themselves, if they unfortunately establish their reign of terror in our country. Where now are the marionettes that cry and tear their clothes over the war in Vietnam? Why don't they now cry: “RUSSIANS GO HOME? Why don't they denounce the red guerrillas? WE WANT TO ... CRY FOR THE DEATH OF A PEOPLE! ... FRIEND: don't let yourself be dragged down for any reason or pretext by people who are at heart manipulated by communist agents (Even if some of them say they're Catholics), because behind their agitations, is chaos and slavery ... TODAY FOR CHEKOSLAVAKIA TOMORROW PERHAPS FOR US!”⁶⁰

While participants in the student movement feared expansionist politics from the United States, those in opposition feared the same from Russia. In sum, it must be said that Cold War tensions shaped important aspects of 1968 Mexico.

⁵⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 328-355, August, 27 1968.

⁶⁰ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 35, Hoja 56-59, August 1968. Part of the original text reads in English: “RUSOS, GO HOME!”

The student movement not only encountered state-sponsored *porras*, but also genuinely anti-communist students. When students from Mexico City traveled to the southern state of Oaxaca to organize, they met with some resistance. Students from the “Benito Juarez University of Oaxaca” issued a statement in response to the presence of students from the capital on their campus in which they examined events in Mexico City. Addressed to their university and the nation, the authors denounced bringing global politics into Mexico and the presence of foreigners in the student movement. They stated, “The students of Oaxaca are lovers of peace, of the law and we are always ready to fight for these, but we will never fight for agitators that attempt to make Mexico a place for the interventions of the so called forces of peace on the Continent.”⁶¹ The Oaxacan students insisted that they wanted University autonomy and to protect other students from injustice and violence, but would not act on behalf of movements that denigrated Mexico. They concluded that the student protests were simply an attempt to discredit Mexico in front of the world, and therefore, unworthy of sacrifice, physical or otherwise, on their part. Rather, the student movement was to be condemned.⁶²

Within UNAM, a state-sponsored student group MURO wrote to *Sucesos*, arguing, “MURO has been openly and honestly against the communists who have for many years been preparing for the student disturbances that culminated in the past year. If MURO had the power, the communists would not have gained power in the University, or in the

⁶¹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 52, Folder 268, Page 3, Newspaper article. Aug. 14, 1968.

⁶² Ibid.

Polytechnic, or in many other schools as they did ... the MURO ... fight[s] communism within the educational system and amongst the youth ...⁶³ Another anti-movement communication cited the Che Guevara posters and the behavior of students within the movement:

One of their maneuvers demonstrated their ridiculous nature, that they made evident in the Cultural Tribunal (Kulture in the nazi or communist style?) ... as if universal culture is the exclusive patrimony of some self-styled intellectoids who haven't even finished their education at the hands of uninformed teachers

The author argued for loyalty to the President of the Republic, maintenance of the honor of the nation, respect for the constitution, and the "...unconditional veneration of our heroes."⁶⁴

Popular expression of these ideas, whether from professors, students, and writers of letters to the editor, echoed the official state response. While the president in office, Díaz Ordaz, never officially addressed the issue of the movement except obliquely in his state of the union, the government brought its publicity machine to bear on it. In August as the movement began, former president Miguel Alemán Valdéz (1946-1952) denounced the entire Mexican student body, painting them as willing victims of foreign, communist interests. "There are many young Mexicans who travel to Cuba where they

⁶³ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 277, Page 19, Newspaper article. May 3, 1969.

⁶⁴ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 500 Folder 253, Page 7, Newspaper article. Aug. 14, 1968.

train them in the art of the urban guerilla, sabotage, and chaos ...”⁶⁵ During his presidency, Alemán, at the beginning of the Cold War, had increased penalties against “social dissolution,” raising the maximum sentence to twelve years in prison.

President Alemán was not alone. Former president Emilio Portes Gil (1928-1930), roundly condemned the student protest. He cast the movement as little more than a veiled communist attempt to discredit Mexico. The students were profoundly unpatriotic:

The scandals of the last few days are provoked by foreign agitators, the infamous communists, among whom are found Spaniards, who are not permitted in their own land to provoke disorder; Puerto Ricans, French, and a few North Americans have dragged thousands of students into committing criminal acts, such as burning buses, destroying private automobiles, breaking windows; they clearly reveal the existence of a campaign to discredit Mexico and undermine the revolutionary regime in its nationalist program that is intended to benefit, primarily, workers, *campesinos*, the middle class and numerous sectors of the population that need economic, social, and cultural advancement.⁶⁶

He sought to counter student claims to represent the people of Mexico by claiming that the state had a legitimate right to rule. The argument concerning foreign involvement in the movement was also used to counter student claims that the University was autonomous and thereby exempt from state interference. Portes Gil succinctly stated that the autonomy of the university did not extend to “an extraterritorial privilege,” thus using the presence of outside agitators in Mexico to validate state action on the UNAM’s

⁶⁵ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 48, Folder 244, Page 34, Newspaper article. Aug. 4, 1968.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

campus. Given his role in consolidating the post-revolutionary state, his comments also reminded everyone of who had really won control in Mexico.

Global Protest in 1968 Mexico

Despite the political need to appear as Mexican as possible, students also wanted to be part of their time, of their world – one bursting with radical idealism. Students considered themselves a part of an international community of youthful protestors. Youthful opposition to the status quo was fueled by the media, consumer fads, and a shared experience of post-war change. Students exchanged letters and materials, held demonstrations in solidarity in their home countries, and read about each other in the news. While the information and knowledge they held about their counterparts in foreign countries may have been vague and partial, it nonetheless contributed to the notion that change was sweeping the globe. This imagined community was also fostered by the highly interrelated nature of politics and economics during the Cold War. In many ways, global integration was nothing new. Mexico had always been connected to the rest of the world, from the colonial period to the present. Yet students articulated an understanding of global relations in which political and economic power was heavily wielded by the United States to the detriment of developing countries such as Mexico. They were heavily influenced by Marxist professors and what came to be called “dependency theory,” the idea that capitalist political and economic power was centered in the United States

which exploited the “periphery” of nations such as Mexico. In turn, the ruling classes of peripheral countries gained at the expense of their own populations by serving as intermediaries in the capitalist system. The power of the United States, however, was not seen as absolute. Rather, many saw outside interests as bound to national ones as well. As one student phrased it: “... the intervention of the Central Intelligence Agency, that has acted in complicity with the national bourgeoisie and the pseudo-revolutionary parties of the UNAM, as well as the structures of the Mexican Government” were responsible for the public aggression against the students.⁶⁷

As part of an imagined community, students in 1968 Mexico looked to their counterparts for strategy, inspiration, affirmation, and indeed, the gaze was returned. In their press releases, interviews, speeches, and at rallies, Mexican student protestors consistently made reference to movements outside of Mexico, particularly throughout Latin America, the United States, and Europe. Indeed, many felt that it was the responsibility of students to bring about change, that they alone would be the harbingers of a total transformation. At a meeting convened on the theme of “The Global Student Conflict,” one participant identified the common problem as one in which “the majority of the families of the world” suffer economically. He generalized the role of state institutions, regardless of national identity, and described the solution in this way, “... the State realizes its functions within a system in which the people are always condemned, that is why the student body of the world has intervened to defeat this.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 33, Hoja 58, Aug. 22, 1968.

⁶⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-69, Leg. 91, Hoja 79, undated.

The student movement was not only part of an emergent global youth culture, but also part of an increasingly interconnected global economic and political system. Author and activist, José Revueltas, claimed, “It would be an inane provincialism to believe that the rebellion of the Mexican youth in 1968 is separate from an outside world and war and isn’t influenced by the dominant tone of relations between countries – small or large ...”⁶⁹ He argued that the world was divided between those who possessed nuclear energy and those who did not. For Revueltas, the threat of nuclear war and, especially, the war in Vietnam, undergirded both national and international politics. In short, students not only drew on global dissent as a way to legitimate their movement, but saw such a response as rooted in increasingly global economic and political practice. Indeed, they considered themselves on the vanguard of a movement against Cold War insanity.

Students particularly targeted the United States in their criticisms of the global nature of politics, arguing that the United States sought to keep Mexico and all of Latin America mired in dependency. They noted U.S. aggression against the region. For many, the coup against the Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz and the numerous attempts against Cuba were keys to their view of international events. It was not a far jump to assume CIA presence throughout Latin America and in Mexico itself.

Students argued that U.S. concern for popular politics, particularly those that hinted at communism, was the justification for their involvement in the region, drawing on the Cold War tensions to legitimate such action. In an August speech, Professor

⁶⁹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53, Folder 273, Page 48, Newspaper article. April 4, 1969.

Castillo asserted that the “North American monopolies” wanted to maintain Mexico in a state of reliance on their technology, funds, and expertise. He argued that “... it isn’t hard for the CIA agents who have infiltrated Mexico – given the climate of tension in the country – to give arms to some Mexicans to execute terrorist actions that provoke the repudiation of the population ... who have found voice through the students.”⁷⁰ Making somewhat different use of a strikingly similar argument, the students from the Vocational School 5, in an August letter to the editor of the paper, *El Día*, asserted that the United States government used the movement as a justification for their intervention in Mexico, thereby denying the country’s territorial sovereignty. The students claimed that the CIA and the FBI “...had prognosticated a great communist conspiracy and they needed to prove its existence, regardless of the means!”⁷¹

This position was widely held and students roundly condemned the United States, particularly for its foreign policy. In letters to the editor, at meetings, and in speeches, students routinely gave voice to the notion that the United States was a pernicious force in Latin America and that Mexico’s relationship to the country needed to be changed. Indicative of the hostility was a student action after a meeting at the UNAM. They headed to the University City’s Faculty of Architecture where a United States sponsored exhibit was on display. The students wrote “Yanqui get out” across it. Those in charge

⁷⁰ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 53 Folder 277, Page 27, Newspaper article. Aug. 18, 1968.

⁷¹ CESU, UNAM, Colecciones Universitarias, Movimientos Estudiantil Mexicano, Dirección General de Información, Box 50, Folder 253, Page 4, Newspaper article. Aug. 11, 1968.

of the exhibit, all of whom were from the United States, could do little to stop the vandalism, and in the end, dismantled and removed it from the UNAM.⁷² This episode occurred in early October, yet students protested the actions of the United States from the earliest days of the mobilization. Indeed a flier circulated at the start of August termed the mobilization a "... direct aggression against the reactionary forces in Mexico, allied with the international police of the United States against the democratic and progressive forces in our country."⁷³

Given the belief in the interconnectedness of politics and economics, as well as global youthful protest, students sought to learn about their contemporaries in other countries. Not surprisingly, given the movement's roots in the educational system, students wanted to know more about the activities of others like themselves. For instance, at a meeting in the UNAM, one professor raised "the French movement" in which he had "the opportunity to be present." He urged those at the meeting to bear in mind the experiences in France, using them to help formulate their activities in Mexico.⁷⁴ Other students joined their contemporaries in Sofia, Bulgaria for the 9th Annual Youth Festival and brought back stories of their experiences there that they shared during meetings in the UNAM.⁷⁵

⁷² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 281, Oct. 4, 1968.

⁷³ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 26, Hoja 118D, Aug. 2, 1968.

⁷⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 27, Hoja 253, Aug. 8, 1968.

⁷⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 31, Hoja 13, Aug. 15, 1968.

As the movement gained ground, professors and students alike began to organize conferences and seminars. On August 9, 1968, in response to student demands, teachers organized a lecture series on the student movement. Their aims were to examine the “roots of the movement, the attitudes of the repressive forces, the French movement of May and June, and the crime of social dissolution.”⁷⁶ Similarly, only days later, students at the UNAM’s Faculty of Law circulated fliers for a conference on “Roots and Perspectives on the Student Movement in Mexico and Latin America.” In this seminar, lecturers and participants focused on the relationship between the student movements in Mexico, France, Italy, West Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Brazil, attempting to determine the commonalities between them. They determined that these “... derived from the deformations and contradictions of the liberal world ... similarly, they are a product of the discontent that pervades studious youth, that cannot be turned into democratic channels, and will continue making its presence felt in the movements that are now completely democratic, and that may lead to future revolutions.”⁷⁷

As part of an imagined international community of righteous protestors, student used their demonstrations as a forum to oppose issues beyond Mexico and to comment on events abroad. At an August 26 march, the overall message was one of change within Mexico. Yet one student carried a placard that read, “The students of Mexico decry the invasion of Czechoslovakia and Vietnam. Long live liberty!” Others carried signs with

⁷⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 8, Aug. 9, 1968. A similar conference was organized on the theme: “Global Student Conflict,” in 1968. See AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-69, Leg. 91, Hoja 79, undated.

⁷⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 31, Hojas 6-8, Aug. 15, 1968.

photographs of Mao Tse Tung.⁷⁸ Students intellectually connected themselves with movements abroad, adopting some of their strategies and at times embracing their revolutionary heroes. In doing so, they attempted to legitimate their actions through them, using an international gloss to give validity to their own movement. At a meeting in late September, one student argued for the “... the strategies used by Mao Tse Tung in his famous Cultural Revolution, of which the students should make use ...”⁷⁹

Transnational Networks in '68 Mexico

Thus, the international nature of 1968 can be explained, using Benedict Anderson’s language about nationalism, as “an imagined community” comprised of youths who learned of each other and shared in a series of simultaneous national protests.⁸⁰ Students existed in a political, economic, and cultural system that was increasingly global and many of them were subject to similar structural changes: the Cold War, the post-war economic boom that was beginning to wane, and a global youth culture fueled by new patterns of consumption. Taken together, these created a feeling of shared community. These ties were greatly influenced by the international media whose

⁷⁸ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 34, Hoja 328-355, August, 27 1968.

⁷⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 117-125, October, 1 1968.

⁸⁰ Benedict Anderson. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. (New York: Verso, 1991).

presence in Mexico during the 1968 movement was extremely important. Although this was largely an imagined community, the connections, however, were at times more direct. Students exchanged letters, wrote in support of each other to foreign governments, held solidarity protests, and even left Mexico to learn about movements elsewhere.

The international exchange of letters was a key way in which Mexican protestors, particularly student leaders, sought to legitimize their movement. When they gained a seal of approval from their foreign counterparts, they were sure to make it widely known. At a meeting in August 1968, those in charge stated that not only were they mobilizing students to protest in the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Morelos, and San Luis Potosí with the hope of achieving a national student strike, and they also corresponded with students abroad. Indeed, leaders claimed to have received letters of support from "... France, China, Germany, and various countries in Latin America." These claims were generally addressed to the President of the Republic, informing him of foreign support for the students, and at the same time, they were also intended for broad, public circulation.⁸¹ Similarly, months later, one student leader from the UNAM gave a speech in which he analyzed the movement from "an international point of view," a form of analysis popular throughout the Mexican movement. He declared that "some universities" abroad had denounced the Mexican government for its occupation of University City. Beyond the broad and somewhat vague "support," however, the student speaker asserted that on that day, October 1, 1968, only one day before the massacre, a demonstration was held in France in support of the students. He outlined the plans: "In France in front of the

⁸¹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 28, Hoja 8, Aug. 9, 1968.

Mexican Embassy, they held a demonstration of solidarity with the Mexican students.” He furthermore declared that a similar demonstration was held in Finland and that the university community in Colombia had written a letter to the President condemning “the repression exercised against many parts of the Mexican society.”⁸² The speaker also outlined the support conveyed in telegrams and letters that the student movement had received from countries such as Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina Venezuela, Italy, Spain, France, and England. He concluded with plans for a large-scale international demonstration. Students had organized a protest on October 5 that would be international in nature with rallies outside the embassies of the countries discussed.⁸³ Thus, while the community was sometimes imagined, it was also realized through direct correspondence and demonstrations of cooperation.

Students and radicals from other countries were certainly present during the Mexican protests this was less common. Indeed, during the 1968 protest, Mexican police detained at least fifteen foreign youths, the majority of them students from the United States. These visitors were of great interest to the state security agents who sought to find evidence of outside agitation in order to justify state repression on the grounds of territorial integrity. Such evidence would also be used to publically delegitimize the movement. Yet, the majority of these students were only in Mexico en route to Cuba. Inspired by the Cuban Revolution, they wanted to visit that country. Due to the embargo, however, they were prevented from travelling directly to Cuba from the United States.

⁸² AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 121-122, Oct. 1, 1968.

⁸³ Ibid.

Hence, en route to Cuba through Mexico, the foreign students heard of the protests and went either to the UNAM or to one of the demonstrations. Given their own participation in leftist politics in their home countries, they were sympathetic to student demands and wanted to learn more of their efforts. The Mexican police, fearing the presence of outside “agitators,” and foreign spectators more broadly, were quick to detain the visitors.

The foreign presence appears rather innocuous, not intended to foster international revolution. Such was the case of a trio of Germans who were detained in August of 1968. Upon arriving in Mexico, the German visitors made their way to the IPN’S Vocational 5 School with television cameras. Claiming to be at work on a project on the colonial charms of Mexico and the Olympics, they had applied to the proper channels for visas and permits during their stay in Mexico, and were indeed, granted permission to film the city. Their stated purpose had little to do with student protests, and while it is impossible to discern if they were forthright in this matter, the Germans and their cameras did, however, arrive at the protests. The Mexican state dreaded such occurrences. Upon interrogation, the German visitors asserted that they had no interaction with the students, despite being in their school. They said they were unable to communicate with the students even if they had wanted since they did not speak Spanish.⁸⁴ Similarly, a Chilean journalist was arrested at one of the earliest demonstrations for the Cuban Revolution. After his arrest he was found to be in the country illegally, yet employed as a reporter for the newspaper, *The Voice of Mexico*. He was interrogated and signed a statement, which he later renounced. He claimed that

⁸⁴ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hoja 237, Aug. 20, 1968.

while he recognized his signature on the confession, he refused to ratify it because he “was held without communication and threatened by Agents, who hit him in the stomach and put a pistol to his neck.” The journalist claimed to be at the demonstration because of his sympathy for the Cuban Revolution and was a card carrying member of the Mexican Communist Youth.⁸⁵

Like the Chilean journalist, other foreign students were in Mexico because of their leftist politics or experience with political protest in their home countries. A foreign student was detained in Mexico in July. Hailing from the United States, she had stopped in the country on her way to Cuba where she planned to study Spanish. Once in Mexico, she joined the student protestors and police detained her at a student meeting. The foreign student claimed to have learned of the meeting at the University by seeing propaganda around the city and decided to attend as she had “... assisted various demonstrations in New York City, in which they had demanded an end to war.”⁸⁶

Weeks later, in August, Mexican police arrested twelve more foreign students, the bulk of them law students and their companions, all from the United States. Police detained these students, eight men and four women, when they joined with Mexican student protestors on their way to a public demonstration. Security officials claimed that the students from the United States were in contact with the Cuban Embassy and planned to leave for that country from Mexico. During the demonstration they distributed

⁸⁵ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hoja 135, July 29, 1968.

⁸⁶ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 24, Hoja 135, July 29, 1968.

propaganda, on behalf, the reports claimed, of the “Black Panthers and Black Power,” although all but one of the students was white.

Of these foreign students, all were from the United States, ranging in age from twenty-three to twenty-eight years old. The majority studied law, although a social worker and undergraduate were listed as well. They came primarily from California and New York and a few traveled as couples. They had stopped in Mexico to obtain visas to Cuba, their ultimate destination. On arriving in Mexico City the visitors learned of the movement and went to the UNAM where they joined Mexican students. After boarding a hijacked bus they went to the IPN for a demonstration. One of the detained explained his situation to security agents with these words, “... he says he’s not a socialist but that he wanted, because of curiosity, to know Cuba and decided to make the trip and he went to the demonstration for the same reason.” They brought propaganda to the demonstration along with a placard reading “The Redemption of the People will be All or Nothing.”⁸⁷

The law students detained in Mexico formed a delegation from the U.S., a leftist National Lawyers Guild that intended to visit Cuba, both as a challenge to the embargo and because of the deep interest of many of its members in the nature of the Revolution there. The trip was intended to be an educational learning experience. Numbering perhaps twenty participants, none of them Black Panthers, they passed through Mexico City on their way to Cuba. While waiting for their visas, the delegation learned of the detainment of a group of Black Panthers in Mexico City who were also making their way to Cuba on a completely unrelated trip. Fearing for their safety because of the violence

⁸⁷ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 30, Hoja 13-14, Aug. 13, 1968.

directed against the Panthers in the United States, the group from the Lawyers Guild immediately went to the United States Embassy to demand the release of the Black Panthers. A smaller portion of this group then made their way to the UNAM, the protest in the Zócalo, and later returned to their hotel to find secret service agents awaiting them. They were detained, along with their colleagues who had not participated in the demonstration. They were interrogated throughout the night and eventually taken in pairs to a jail outside the city where they were held for several days. Drawing on their experiences with organizing in the United States, and uncertain of their release, the law students organized a hunger strike that soon gained them a call to the United States Embassy. They were placed on planes, told never to return to Mexico, and sent back to the United States.⁸⁸

The discovery of two Guatemalans, perceived by state agents to be communists and active in the student movement, created a flurry of state activity in October when they were detained on the first day of the month. Casting them as communist agitators, security officials exhibited deep concern over the potential of these international connections, using them in reports as a strong case for the international nature, or at least the potential for it, of the student protest. During interrogations, both Guatemalans claimed to have arrived in Mexico in August as political refugees and self-identified as “Trotskyist urban guerrillas.” Upon arriving in Mexico, they made contact with a member of the Revolutionary Worker’s Party who was also a student in Economics at the UNAM. The security report details a confession from the Guatemalans that they, along

⁸⁸ Barry Winograd, Telephone interview, April 11, 2010.

with their student comrade, killed a soldier “to take his weapon, with the aim of using it for guerrillas in Guatemala.” According to the interrogation report, their student ally, “who actually acts in the Mexican student movement,” was the one who planned the assassination of the soldier: “... he gave them a pistol with which to rob a car ... an armory, and a bank.” They also claimed to have assaulted the daughter of a General in Puebla. Linking the movement to international guerrilla movements, the interrogators determined that “they have intervened, along with their Mexican Trotskyite friends, in different student activities such as assemblies ... telling them about guerrillas activities in Guatemala and the tactics of urban guerrillas.” Agents left it as a “continuing investigation,” although such efforts would have changed considerably following the massacre that took place the next day.⁸⁹ The nature of these international connections, between students in Mexico and leftists elsewhere, generated considerable concern among state agents. Thus the activities and intentions of foreign visitors to Mexico were often unclear. Some found their way to the student protests, in a form of revolutionary tourism rather than agitation.

Conclusion

What emerges from these materials is a picture of 1968, not as a global moment born of a single protest repertoire, but a highly diverse moment of social mobilization based on discrete national concerns as well as a shared mobilizing framework of “global”

⁸⁹ AGN, DFS, Exp. 11-4-68, Leg. 44, Hoja 124-125, Oct. 1, 1968.

revolution. In one sense, increased prosperity and ties to global commerce created an internationalized consumer culture and news media through which Mexican students not only shared reference points in areas ranging from music to literature, but also, became aware of the political activities of their counterparts in other countries. While actual contact was almost wholly mediated *by* the news media, this sense of solidarity nonetheless provided a powerful tool of legitimization through which students in Mexico justified their demands for justice by pointing to similar rhetoric in Paris, Prague and elsewhere. Students consistently drew on the international “spirit” of the moment, in their propaganda and letters to the editor; indeed, the idea that Mexican movement participants stood at the vanguard of international leftism, and in solidarity with other radicals throughout the world, first gained currency *during* the movement and remains one way in which participants understood the significance of the event. However, from an organizational perspective, links between Mexican students and other student groups were quite limited. From the perspective of political mobilization, an assessment of the global nature of the 1968 student movement in Mexico requires moving beyond a shared “student”- or “youth culture”-centered of transnational political community, and toward other points of contact between student politics and rightful resistance, or contentious politics, elsewhere.

Economic growth and the concurrent emergence of a transnational, youth-targeted consumer culture in the media constituted two key structural conditions of Mexico’s Sixty-Eight. The subjective experience of transnational solidarity, or internationalist “spirit,” was the primary framework through which former students have remembered the

event, but new sources reveal that actual connections to national and regional events were just as significant, forming the primary content of movement discourse. Indeed, movement participants drew on a long history of Mexican radicalism, often imparted by their parents, throughout the protest. During the actual protests, activists from the United States, Cuba, and Guatemala joined the Mexican student ranks—sometimes in prison—as opponents to U.S. imperialism in Latin America. These international supporters, although few in number, also sustained students' enthusiasm for rightful resistance to the state and highlight the degree to which the movement was tied to regional Cold War-era concerns. While Sixty-Eight was certainly a global moment, in many ways it was an intensely national moment. Students were concerned not only with the Mexican state's violation of its own Constitution, but also their own economic and political futures as Mexican citizens.

Conclusion:
A Familiar Tragedy?

The year 1968 was unusual. A large number of people, located in disparate parts of the world, challenged state authority. The actors in these movements were transformed by events as geographically distant as Europe and South America, leading many to describe the year as one of “cultural revolution.” In Mexico too, the events of 1968 had a profound effect on political culture, and indeed this assertion has become a truism in recent historical writing. But what changed?

In their painstaking excavation of an equally short-lived but iconic moment, the Salem “witch trials” of 1692, social historians Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum examined the relationship between “ordinary” people and an “extraordinary” event:

... we have tried to use the interaction of the two – the ‘ordinary’ history and the extraordinary moment – to understand the epoch which produced them both. We have, in other words, exploited the focal events of 1692 somewhat as a stranger might make use of a lightning flash in the night: better to observe the contours of the landscape which it chances to illuminate.¹

The central contention of this study is that the Mexican student movement of 1968 was like a “lightning flash,” illuminating ongoing changes in mid-century Mexico’s political, economic, social, and cultural landscapes. An extraordinary event, it brought vast numbers of “ordinary” people together to demand change. Participants in 1968 coalesced around their insistence on greater democratization and economic reform – demands that

¹ Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), xii.

harkened back to the early twentieth century and would be echoed by neo-Zapatistas in Chiapas in 1994. Both the protest, and the violent state response it elicited, moved Mexico one step forward within the restricted possibilities for progressive, egalitarian movements, and the counter-movement of neoliberal development. The relationship that it illuminates is one between state and society, and the consolidation of the Revolution as well as its alleged betrayal. The 1968 student movement was powerful because it spoke to issues broader than education, because it addressed concerns of the larger populace, and because it mobilized key social and economic sectors of the populace. The physical and intellectual spaces of Mexico City's system of higher education, and the social position of the student participants, provided a highly visible base from which to criticize the state, and broke the implicit pact between students and party officials. Intended to foster social and political consensus, Mexico's educational system instead provided its students with the tools to contest state domination and open their movement to a citizenry that also wanted reform.

But while the origins of the movement can be found in Mexico City educational institutions, and the rank and file in its student body, the movement also attracted young people, parents, doctors, workers, and campesinos. Indeed, the grievances and strategies of the student movement from its outset addressed issues beyond education and directly challenged the political system of an undemocratic official party, the PRI. When the daily practice of the movement is examined, what emerges is less an image of generational conflict (youth against government, children against parents) and more of a multi-generational opposition based on wide-ranging mix of social actors, led by students,

who challenged the practices of the Mexican state. It is this diverse aspect of the movement that is rarely highlighted in the scholarly literature – a blind spot that implicitly sanctions state narratives of the 1968 movement by directing focus toward the student “core” and away from its resonance among the broader populace.

Strategies, Precedents, and Responses

Those involved in the mobilization drew on the grievances, strategies, and experiences of earlier movements, most notably the mid-century strikes by teachers, doctors, and railroad workers, incorporating these inherited oppositional traditions into their own protest repertoires. Students made a particular effort to organize among these groups, going to factories, hospitals and, at times, provincial schools. While the moments of contact between students and such sectors were limited, they were deeper than previously known and important in that students gradually garnered limited support among these groups, convincing workers to join demonstrations, hospitals to go on strike, and receiving letters of support from students outside the capital city. The state viewed such connections with concern, and state agents expended considerable effort gathering information on student interactions with workers and campesinos. They tried to quickly put an end to any interactions between the students and laborers, for example, arresting and dispersing activists who entered factories. Each side, the state and the movement, used class analysis to discredit the other. This, too, is underplayed in the existing

literature. The state and its representatives consistently depicted the movement as comprised exclusively of students – middle class kids – who failed to appreciate their privileged place within society and behave accordingly. Students highlighted the failure of the “miracle” to benefit all levels of society and the ongoing repression of those willing to publically challenge the PRI. In other words, “Sixty-Eight” in Mexico was not the result of youthful discontent, which spontaneously erupted on the political scene; rather, it was a response to the ongoing climate of violence and repression that underlay the Pax Priista and its economic foundations.

The state responded to these challenges with daily violence, attempting to silence dissent. While violent conflict between state agents and students was fairly continuous, it reached its highest levels around the days of large-scale demonstrations and centered on the educational facilities, the Zócalo, and surrounding areas. These were the sectors of the city most visible to tourists – the historic center of the city and the UNAM, home of the Olympic Stadium -- and the groups involved fought for control of these key areas. The students hoped to air their grievances before the international press and the state sought to maintain the image of a politically stable nation. These groups together created considerable disorder throughout the capital city with students hijacking buses, shutting down key transit lines, and *granaderos* chasing students through major city thoroughfares.

Student tactics seem fairly harmless when considered against the bayonets and imprisonment exercised by state actors, especially since no *granaderos* lost their lives while many students did. Nonetheless, students consciously sought to disrupt city life on a large scale. Movement-connected disturbances within the city, more widespread than

typically acknowledged, also provided the justification for state violence. Fearing the presence of outside agitators, state agents looked for links between movement participants and communist agents from abroad, although ultimately, there was little evidence of such connections. Students themselves were aware of the ways in which foreign involvement or politically radical behavior could make their attempts to organize subject to laws of social dissolution, and so sought to keep their movement free from provocateurs intent on fostering violence within the movement or between the movement and the government.

In addition to persistent repression, state representatives launched a publicity campaign against students and movement participants, condemning them for their failure to adhere to normative gender and class structures, and casting them as wayward and spoiled children while in the state controlled press. In many ways, movement participants challenged dominant social and cultural norms. The movement, while not feminist, called into question norms concerning gender roles and sexuality. Women portrayed themselves as caretakers but, in a radical movement, unity with dissenters changes the meaning of “women’s roles.” They nursed the wounded, fed everyone, took their places in the brigades that invaded buses and papered the city with leaflets, and they stood up and spoke at demonstrations. They found a new respect for their capacities as people much as women who are mobilized to work during a war do not surrender their gender so much as they acquire pride in themselves. The year 1968 was a breakpoint in their lives no less than for the men. To challenge the state required courage from them no less than from male students and, even after all this years, when interviewed, they speak

of the movement as central to what kind of people they became. Still, all groups involved, and both men and women, the movement and the state, drew on a language of family and domesticity to legitimate their political claims and actions. The protest highlights the changing nature of these norms during this period, as well as the struggle between state and students over cultural terrain.

The International Question

Students drew inspiration from movements abroad and used international symbols such as images of Che Guevara to announce their ideals. Through the news media they communicated with students elsewhere, creating an imagined community of progressive global protest. This created an important means of legitimating the movement, positioning it at the vanguard of a series of international, state-directed protests and is one of the key ways in which the Mexican protest is remembered. Yet at base, Sixty-Eight was a nationalist movement. Participants invoked national heroes, earlier Mexican social movements, as well as the social and economic promises made by Revolutionary leaders, particularly drawing on the Constitution of 1917. The state response, however, must be understood in light of international pressures that made them “see red” lurking in every corner, and seek to excise communism from the country before it gained a foothold. The fear of revolution provided the key rationale – even though there was little actual threat – for state violence.

Recent literature on 1968 often highlights the interconnectedness of the movements across national borders, the ties between actors involved in each, and the shared sense of political change. Yet the literature fails to locate “global Sixty-Eight” within the longer history of international leftism beginning earlier in the century. Rather, the historiography focuses almost entirely on the transnational nature of the year, noting its exceptionalism, but disconnecting it from national narratives by highlighting the ways in which ideas and actors moved across national frontiers. Indeed, scholars are preoccupied with addressing the reasons behind the explosion of radical politics across such boundaries. They note the proliferation of social movements in 1968, and the Sixties more broadly, along with changes in sexual relations and gender norms, characterizing the period as one of greater individualism, tolerance and permissiveness. An example of compelling scholarship in this mode is the work of Klimke and Scharloth, who argue in their work on Europe that the global experience of Sixty-Eight questioned the presumed omnipotence of the state, and that for the radicals of that period, the nation was too restrictive a source of identity due to the limitations it imposed on individual rights and collective action.²

Such analysis also echoes current scholarship on the Cold War, with its focus on geopolitics and military or diplomatic relations during the period. The bulk of this historiography is deeply preoccupied with grand strategy, and the confrontations between the two great superpowers, Russia and the United States, and how these played out in other parts of the world. From a Latin American perspective, it has resulted in attention

² Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, eds. *1968 in Europe: a history of protest and activism, 1956-1977* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), vii.

to a few key events (the Cuban Revolution and Cuban missile crisis) and political coups (United States-led attempts against Castro or the ousting of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 and Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973). Consequently, the understanding of the “global” 1968 student or youth movements is one that highlights their international nature. Jeremi Suri’s recent work on the importance of 1968 within the Cold War argues that the global unrest had a direct effect on the foreign policy of both the United States and the Soviet Union, giving rise to a period of *détente* and limiting the behavior of the superpowers. He asserts that “social movements and diplomacy interacted with each other across a broad international terrain” and that “*détente* had a social origin that is neglected in that it was a convergent response to disorder among the great powers.”³ For Suri, much of the “disorder” was generated by protest at home. He thereby locates this key shift in the balance of power to the global protest launched by students in 1968, addressing the international impact of these movements, and finding a social basis for the shift in diplomatic and military relations.⁴

³ Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2.

⁴ Suri’s objective is to trace the rise of *détente* following 1968. However, his focus is largely on Europe and the superpowers. A broader focus, one that includes Latin America and the third world, may, however, throw the usefulness of the concept of *détente* into question. While the balance of power between the superpowers may have shifted, the continued violence and political intervention in Latin American politics during the 1970s and 1980s, belies the usefulness of *détente* as a concept for understanding politics during that period for Latin America and perhaps the developing world more generally where these tensions continued to be made manifest and highly contested.

In Mexico, the relationship between the Cold War and student politics is a clear. The movement, and especially the state response to it, cannot be understood outside of a larger international context. Yet an account of the daily life the 1968 student movement shifts the narrative of grand strategy and diplomatic relations to the periphery. Instead of a focus on elite politicians and military commanders, this story describes more closely the experiences of activists as they confronted the state and entrenched forms of public politics. Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spencer's recent work on the Latin American Cold War makes clear that "Cold War history should be properly fixed on the exercise of power, but appreciate that power does not flow only from the policies and interventions of the states; it also works through language and symbolic systems and manifests itself in identities and everyday practices."⁵ My study of the 1968 movement has tried to reconcile the two approaches by examining the daily actions, language, and experiences of movement participants *and* state agents and sympathizers, to create a new account of Sixty-Eight.

It should be reiterated that emphasis on the transnational within the Cold War literature is not without basis. State leaders and planners feared the possibility of communist activity and the presence of outside agitators, and students believed themselves to be in solidarity with protestors elsewhere although no foreign actors had any direct say within the movement leadership. They participated in a shared global consumer culture and were affected by the same global historical processes following World War II. Moreover, students in Mexico and elsewhere challenged social, cultural,

⁵ Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spencer, eds., *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 17.

and political norms, and expressed a strong anti-imperialism; even though, given the country's colonial history, Mexican protestors had a different attitude to and experience of "imperialist" relations than students in Europe or the United States. Indeed, for most students the points of reference were far closer to home and students were more likely to express a regional, pan-Latin American identity, than a global one. To highlight the global nature of the movement is to come strikingly close to state representations of the movement during its lifespan. At heart, the movement was a local one, and while at times the framing of the movement may have drawn on international symbols and events, the deep structures were domestic and based on radicalism and political organization that proceeded 1968.

Legacies of the Mexican Left: Getting Context Right

While international connections existed, albeit in a limited fashion, it is important not to homogenize the many movements of 1968. The Mexican mobilization was deeply tied to a national history. The Cold War and the Olympics helped crystallize its origins and students saw themselves as a vanguard of international change, theirs was a movement for Mexican notions of constitutional rights and reform. It was based on class analysis and a view of the world in which Mexico was subservient to a foreign power, the United States. It was not about individualism, a preoccupation of movements in other, more developed countries, but about economic and social justice. Those who ran the

state were corrupt, undemocratic, and brutish and would remain so unless real change occurred.

At base, the Mexican student movement should be located within the context of mid-century changes: incipient economic decline, unprecedented demographic growth, and a leftist resurgence in the wake of the Cuban Revolution. It was one of the largest of a series of challenges to the authority of the PRI, demanding democratization, the protection of constitutional rights, and economic change. Begun as a demand for reform, state violence pushed many activists in increasingly radical directions, hence the proliferation of guerrilla movements, both urban and rural, following Sixty-Eight. Indeed, 1968 would not be the last instance of state violence directed against social dissidents. Only three years later, state agents led an attack on protesting students on June 10, 1971. Known as the “Corpus Christi massacre,” over 900 state agents attacked 5,000 protesting students, resulting in an estimated 30 dead, 100 wounded, and 1,000 physically beaten. Like the Zapatistas who would follow decades later, they highlighted the undemocratic nature of the Mexican state, its ties to foreign capital, and the repression of social dissent.

Post-Revolutionary Protest and Violence: 1968 as Episode

The Tlatelolco massacre is generally seen as a moment of rupture in which the state broke with the promises of the Revolution. Roger Bartra described the Sixty-Eight movement as an event in which “... unforeseen characters shattered the cultural continuity of the comedy in which national destinies harmoniously intertwined with

universal, Olympic history.”⁶ While Sixty-Eight was important in revealing the deep cynicism of the PRI, it was not the only event to shatter the “cultural continuity” of the Priista rule. Rather, criticisms of the Mexican state echoed long after the movement and began well before it. Beginning with campesino revolts in the 1950s, social protest gradually worked its way up the economic chain, moving to workers, teachers, doctors and students, each arguing that they deserved “economic justice,” or, in other words, a greater share of the rewards of the “miracle.” While the promise of social reform engendered by the Revolution and the Constitution of 1917 were central, at the heart of the protest was the PRI’s failure make good on “miracle,” a feeling that finally reached the highest levels of workers and Mexico’s technocratic class. Sixty-Eight did not represent a break with the Revolution but was rather another episode – albeit one of the most visible and large-scale – in the erosion of the Revolution’s economic and social promises.

The movement and the state’s rejection of democratic methods of dealing with dissent in favor of violence reveal it nation’s fragility. Taken together, the mid-century movements exposed the lie of national unity, demonstrating that the state failed to represent not only workers and campesinos but also the middle class. They furthermore discredited the claims to political and economic stability during the period. Unable to generate economic growth that would benefit large sectors of Mexican society, dissent would crystallize around key issues at key moments, as in the case of the 1968 Olympics. Moreover, the events of 1968 reveal that the mobilization was based less on youthful

⁶ Roger Bartra, “Culture and Political Power in Mexico,” *Latin American Historical Perspectives* 16:2 (Spring, 1989), 69.

idealism and more on persistent structures – namely the failure of the economic miracle to permeate all levels of society – and the discouragement that this provoked. This undergirds Echeverría's success in co-opting the middle class radicals into the state after the massacre with his third world, anti-imperialist rhetoric and dramatic increases to university spending.⁷ Economic discontent made co-optation possible, backed by the continued use of state terror. The failure of the PRI to openly and democratically engage its opposition, and its willingness to promote development at the cost of the broader population, paved the way for the country's neo-liberal development.

By 1968, many no longer believed the promises of revolutionary statesmen.

Writing two years after the Tlatelolco massacre, Octavio Paz analyzed the 1968 movement, pointing to the continued importance of education in Mexico. He described students as the conscience of the Mexican people, the harbingers of social change. He characterized the movement with these words:

One difference with the French students in May of this year, the Mexican students did not propose a violent and revolutionary social change nor did their agenda have the radicalism of the German or North American groups. Nor was there the almost religious and orgiastic tone of the "hippies." The movement was reformist and democratic, even if some of its leaders belonged to the extreme left. Was this a tactical maneuver? It makes more sense to me to attribute this consideration to the natural circumstances and the weight of objective reality: neither the temperament of the Mexican people nor the historical conditions of the country is revolutionary. No one wants a revolution but rather a reform: with the exception of the regime begun by the Institutional Revolutionary Party forty years ago. The demands of the students were, on the whole, very

⁷ Echeverría granted amnesty to many participants in the 1968 movement and incorporated greater numbers of intellectuals into the state. He is reputed to have said that his method for dealing with political opponents was not to fight them but rather "take them up in an airplane with me so that they can see what I'm doing."

moderate. ... All the demands can be summed up in one word that was the axis of the movement and the secret to its instant power of seduction over popular conscience: *democratization*.⁸

For Paz, democracy was at the heart of the movement and the hearts of the people of Mexico. That students tapped into its promise gave potency to the movement.

Elena Poniatowska, in her seminal book on 1968, opens with an image of student protest, aptly highlighting the joy of the movement and the exuberant hope of its participants. Yet she describes the protestors as “children,” demanding democracy: “... the youngsters are marching up Cinco de Mayo, Juárez, the Reforma, the applause is deafening, three hundred thousand people have come to join them, of their own free will ... they are climbing up through the forests to the mountaintops, *Mé-xi’co, Li-ber-tad, Mé-xi-co, Li-ber-tad ...*”⁹ Echoing these sentiments, chronicler of the movement, Ramón Ramírez characterized the mobilization as “... confronting the attitudes of the dominant oligarchy, the movement assumed national dimensions and took their struggle to the highest levels bringing before the country demands of a popular democratic nature.”¹⁰

Taken together, Paz, Poniatowska, and Ramírez present the conventional way of remembering Sixty-Eight: a movement of students who peacefully demanded democracy from an authoritarian government. Yet as shown here, the movement was far more complicated and such characterizations defang it, removing its radical edge,

⁸ Octavio Paz, *Posdata* (Mexico City: siglo veintiuno editores, 1970), 34-35.

⁹ Elena Poniatowska, Helen R. Lane, trans., *Massacre in Mexico* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 4.

¹⁰ Ramón Ramírez, *El movimiento estudiantil de México (Julio/Diciembre de 1968) Tomo I* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1969), 21.

homogenizing its diversity and replacing it with an image of respectable, middle class protest in which students challenged the state on the behalf of others. When the daily life of the movement, the attitudes and actions of the participants, and the practices of the state are examined a different picture emerges – one of a much broader and more varied entity that linked itself to earlier social protests and was beginning to incorporate other sectors of the populace, much to the alarm of state officials. In the streets and neighborhoods of Mexico City, movement participants challenged state forces willing to employ violence against them. They did so knowing full well the likelihood of the state response, even while they hoped that the international news media and their privileged status as students would protect them. Their awareness of earlier social movements and the violence used against them made them well aware of the terror that undergirded the Priista state, and they proceeded despite the considerable risks which their actions entailed. Tragedy resulted as, day by day, the state built an argument for repressing the movement with deadly force – violence that was not irrational, but which represented the tool of a weak state continuously forced to employ its terrors to silence dissent before, during, and after the movement had passed.

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