Abstract. This dissertation analyzes the social and historical motives behind the persistency of lynching - a public, illegal, and particularly cruel form of collective violence - in twentieth-century Mexico. In order to do so, the dissertation addresses three main questions: Why has lynching persisted throughout Mexico's twentieth century despite the country's process of modernization and democratization? What has been the impact of Mexico's process of state formation on the reproduction and endurance of this form of violence? How have the motivations of lynching changed over time and what does this tell us about communities where lynching takes place?

Focusing on the historical trajectory of lynching in the state of Puebla, this dissertation covers a period of seven decades (1930 to 2000). As such, it offers the first systematic analysis of the longer history of this practice. The research is based on a wide range of periodical and archival materials, including national and local newspapers, government records, security reports, official correspondence, and letters of complain written by citizens and civil society organizations. Based on these sources, this dissertation articulates two main arguments. First, it claims that the ongoing presence of lynching in Puebla and in Mexico at large needs to be understood in light of the civilizing and de-civilizing forces characterizing the country's process of state formation during the twentieth century. According to this argument lynchings articulate two contrasting tendencies. On the one hand, they signify communities' rejection of the so-called modernizing forces of the state. On the other, they emulate, if not all out reproduce, public officials' overt use of public, illegal, and harsh forms of violence. Secondly, this dissertation argues that while the social function of lynching as a form of social control has remained constant, the reasons eliciting this practice have changed. This change in drivers of lynching, so the dissertation shows, reveals shifting conceptions of

danger and deviancy in Puebla: from mythical and religious offenses during the first half of the twentieth century, to criminal offenses - particularly crimes against property - during the second half of the century.

Lynching in Twentieth-Century Mexico:

Violence, State Formation, and Local Communities in Puebla

by

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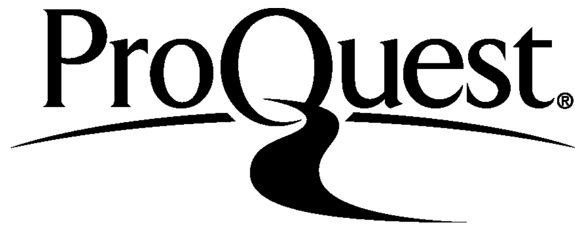

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INTRODUCTION

In the municipality of Tecamachalco, in northeastern Puebla, two individuals were caught in flagrante while allegedly trying to kidnap three children on July 31, 2000.[1] After the two had been put in police custody, word of mouth began to make its round spreading the rumor that the suspects were snatching children in order to sell their organs. A large group then gathered around the mayor's office and demanded authorities to hand over the two suspects so people could lynch the so-called criminals. When authorities refused to do so, they set fire on five police cars after which they went on to attack both the mayor's offices and the local police station. The rioting continued for hours with the police unable to ease the crowd. When the mayor arrived at his offices the next day, a crowd of nearly five hundred people seized him and threatened to hang him if the two suspects, who had by then be sent to the city of Puebla, were not brought back to them. As the scene escalated once more and as chaos ensued all over again, the mob poured gasoline over the mayor's body. Being soaked and hazed by all the gasoline the mayor was only moments away from being burned alive, when he was saved by the arrival of an out of town anti-riot police. Even then, the police managed to take control of the chaotic gather only after firing tear gas into the crowd.

On January 5th of 2015, a crowd of one hundred people lynched three men and a one woman who were accused of breaking into a house in the poor neighborhood of La Cantera in Tehuacán, Puebla.[2] A neighbor caught the individuals in flagrante while allegedly trying to steal some electronics from a house. He consequently alerted the rest of the neighbors. Following these initial allegations, a mob gathered swiftly, and after getting a hold of the four alleged perpetrators, the belligerent crowd armed with sticks, stones, and metal clubs dragged the four individuals through the neighborhood while they were brutally beaten. The ordeal went on for over two hours. The crowd then tied the hands and feet of three of the alleged robbers and put a noose around the neck of the fourth one. On a video taken by one of the perpetrators, one of the individuals, by then severely injured, is seen asking for mercy while the lynch mob threatens to kill him. The bloodied bodies of the two other men lie inert on the floor, while the woman, who was seemingly pregnant, stands silently with her face covered by blood. By the time the police finally arrived, one of the victims had already died from asphyxia while the remaining three were taken to the hospital severely injured.

[1] "Intentan linchar al alcalde," *La Jornada de Oriente*, August 2, 2000.
[2] "Muere sujeto tras ser linchado por pobladores en Puebla," *El Universal*, January 6, 2015.

As unsettling as they are, these incidents are far from isolated events. In Puebla and across different states of Mexico lynchings have reportedly been on the rise over the last thirty years. According to an estimate, the number of lethal lynchings increased from an average of 10 cases per year in the 1980s to more than 40 by the second half of the 1990s.[3] Furthermore, a recent study argues the number of lethal and non-lethal cases increased from a total of 107 between 1988 and 1999 to 129 between 2000 and 2010.[4] Characterized by the use of overt and rough forms of violence, lynching offers disquieting insights into a country often considered on a steady path of democratic consolidation and economic development.

However, Mexico is not the only Latin American country experiencing an apparent upsurge in this expression of violence. In countries as different as Bolivia, Guatemala, Brazil, Venezuela, and Ecuador, lynchings have purportedly intensified since the 1990s as a means to respond to increasing levels of crime and insecurity.[5] The escalation of this form of violence alongside these countries' democratization and economic globalization points at the potentially deep contradictions brought about by these processes. These contradictions include the ongoing social and economic marginalization of entire communities, as well as the persistent incapacity of state institutions to protect citizens and provide legitimate and effective mechanisms to access justice.[6] Situated at the crossroads of rising levels of crime and disputed state security apparatuses, lynchings are one of the most dramatic expressions of the deep rooted challenges faced by Latin American democracies today.

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[3] Fuentes Díaz, *Linchamientos, Fragmentación y Respuesta*, 83.
[4] Rodríguez Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social, 48-9; see also: Vilas, "(In)Justicia por Mano Propia...;" Binford and Churchill, "Lynching and States of Fear in Urban Mexico;" Guillén et al, "Linchamientos: recuento de un periodo largo," 57; Gamallo, "Crimen, Castigo y Violencia Colectiva," 92.
[5] Snodgrass Godoy, "When Justice is Criminal…;" Goldstein, *The Spectacultar City*; Krupa, "Histories in Red;" Handy, "Chicken Thieves, Witches, and Judges;" Souza Martins, "Life by a Thread…"
[6] Arias and Goldstein, *Violent Democracies*; Davis, "Undermining the Rule of Law...;" Holston and Caldeira, "Democracy and Violence in Brazil."

The present dissertation originated in an interest to elucidate Mexico and Latin America's historical present through the lenses of lynching. I define lynching as a public, illegal, and particularly cruel form of collective violence aimed at punishing individuals considered offensive or threatening by a given group or community. While lynching may or may not result in the victim's death, it always involves an unusual and excessive use of violence, such as the mutilation, hanging, torturing, or burning of the victim's body or corpse. Despite of their short-lived character, this dissertation understands lynchings as being grounded in intra-community conflicts and historical dynamics that precede and inform their occurrence. In this sense, lynching is not conceptualized as a moment of pure frenzy, but as an expression of violence that is historically and sociologically significant.

In spite of their illegality, those who perpetrate lynching do not consider it a crime. Rather they see it as a legitimate way to attain justice. As such, the phenomenon of lynching offers a productive site to analyze the state's capacity – or lack of thereof- to ground its claim to the legitimate monopoly of violence. It furthermore offers a window into citizens' perceptions of state authority and communities' social understanding of justice, legality, and legitimacy. As a collective reaction to an alleged wrongdoing or threat, lynching also expresses a community's social construction of deviancy and danger, as well as its apparent predisposition to enforce social control through communal forms of violence. In this sense, lynchings serve to illuminate some of the most central questions regarding the sociology of the state and the sociology of violence and punishment. Such as, how does the state establish its authority and legitimacy over a given population? How is violence sanctioned, normalized or contested by the state and by civil society? How are criminal conducts constructed and through which mechanisms are they controlled, punished, or disciplined?

Scholarly literature on lynching in Latin America has tended to interpret this practice as a reaction to contemporary levels of crime and as means to overcome or correct the state's current institutional challenges.[7] This dissertation acknowledges the contributions of this literature but argues also that prevailing interpretations of lynching fall short of elucidating the structural, cultural, and long-term underpinnings of lynching. In the interest of going beyond the most immediate reasons precipitating lynching, my research thus develops a historic examination of the phenomenon. It does so by posing the following research questions: Why have lynching persisted throughout Mexico's twentieth century despite the country's process of modernization and democratization? What has been the impact of Mexico's process of state formation on the reproduction and endurance of this form of violence? How have the motivations of lynching changed throughout time and what does this tell us about the communities where lynching takes place?

In order to answer these questions I focus on the historical trajectory of lynching in the state of Puebla over a period of seven decades, stretching from the 1930s and up to the 2000s. Based on a wide range of periodical and archival materials, I investigate changes and continuities in this practice. I do so by looking at three particular elements: types of conducts eliciting lynching; the sources and motives of legitimation articulated by perpetrators of this practice; and the relationship between lynch mobs and other expressions of overt violence and self-help justice, including vigilantism and extrajudicial killings.

The use of a regional level of analysis was considered paramount towards fostering a rigorous and grounded sociological and historical argument. Regional-based studies reveal

[7] Vilas, "(In)Justicia por Mano Propia...;" Binford and Churchill, "Lynching and States of Fear in Urban Mexico;" Snodgrass Godoy, "When Justice is Criminal;" Binford, "A failure of normalization;" Handy, "Chicken Thieves, Witches, and Judges...;" Risor, "Twenty Hanging Dolls and a Lynching."

inflections of violence and dynamics of power that are often lost under a national outlook.[8] In addition, they bring out the interactions between central and regional elites and can provide a granular view of how communities comply, transform, or resist projects of state building.[9]

The particular focus on the regional history of Puebla is based on the following two criteria. First, Puebla was regarded as illustrative of the phenomenon of lynching in the country as manifested over the last three to four decades (1980s-2010s). This is so based on the fact that Puebla is consistently ranked amongst the top seven states, out of a total of 32, with the highest incidences of lynching in the country today.[10] Secondly, Puebla was considered representative of what, up until recently, had been the dominant national narrative of Mexico's state building during the post-revolutionary period. Above all, this narrative concerns the question of how violence was monopolized or institutionalized by the state after the 1910 Revolution.[11] Accordingly, Puebla's trajectory of state building was characterized by the ability of the central state to establish its rule at the regional level through repression, cooptation, and cultural politics during the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s. It furthermore involved an alleged process of political stabilization and relative social pacification after the 1940s in the state of Puebla and the country as a whole.[12] Based on these elements, Puebla was regarded as a valuable site to understand the persistency of lynching against the backdrop of a national narrative of state building. It also provided an

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[8] Rubin, "De-centering the regime;" Gillingham, "Who killed Crispín Aguilar?"
[9] Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*.
[10] This assertion is based on three different studies carried out at the national level and which, taking together, cover the years 1984 to 2014. Other states included by these studies are: Mexico City, State of Mexico, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Morelos, and Guerrero. See: Fuentes Díaz, "Violencia y Estado, mediación y respuesta no estatal,"117; Guillén et al, "Linchamientos: recuento de un periodo largo," 57; Gamallo, "Crimen, Castigo y Violencia Colectiva," 92.
[11] This narrative would become increasingly challenged after the spike on levels of lethal violence in Mexico during 2007, in the context of the so-call war on drugs. See: Pansters (ed.) *Violence, Coercion, and State-Making*.
[12] In Puebla, this trajectory is often attributed to the fierce rule established by Maximino Ávila Camacho (1937-1941) and his ensuing legacy of patronage networks of control. See: Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla*; Gillingham, "Maximino's Bulls."

opportunity to weight this narrative of state building at the regional level and through the lenses of lynching.

The period covered by this dissertation stretches from the 1930s to the year 2000. The 1930s was chosen as the starting point of the investigation, for it was this decade that helped defined and give direction to the main characteristics of the post-revolutionary state project. These characteristics involved the development of a national party structure, the promotion of an agrarian reform, the secularization of public life, as well as the incorporation of different sectors of society- peasants, workers, students, and local powerbrokers- into the party-state machinery. Furthermore, the 1930s signaled the first decade in the history of twentieth century Mexico that was not marked by civil war or by a national armed conflict.[13] Thus, from the 1930s onwards, lynching could be more clearly framed as an illegal form of violence against the state's claim to the monopoly of legitimate violence. The year 2000, chosen as the endpoint of this study, signals Mexico's transition from a one-party rule system to a formal democracy with political alternation at the national level.[14] It was the first year, after more than seventy years in power, that the dominant "revolutionary" party- the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI)- officially lost the presidential election. By concluding the research in this year, this dissertation offers a window into the history of state building under the PRI's national dominance during the twentieth century.[15]

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[13] Although this period witnessed the rise of the so-called Second Cristiada (c. 1934-1938)- a sequel of the *Cristero* civil war- this conflict did not reach a national dimension and was mostly concentrated in the Bajío region. See: Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*, 31

[14] The PRI lost the presidential election to the right-wing party, *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN). Democratization had certainly initiated decades earlier, both inside and outside the ballot box, as manifested in competitive local elections and the development of a stronger civil society. The 2000 can thus be seen as the formal realization of a longer process of democratization. Although in the state of Puebla PRI politicians continued to control the governorship until the year 2010, the state had witnessed the multiplication of social movements, streets protests, and the strengthening of opposition parties since the 1970s.

[15] The PRI won the presidential election of 2012. However, the return of this party to the presidential seat can hardly be regarded as the continuation of the dominance it exercised during the twentieth century. Elections are

In addition to lynching, there are two central concepts for this dissertation: state formation and community. State formation can be defined as the ongoing process of institutionalization and legitimization that allows the state to be recognized by citizens as the ultimate source of authority, sovereignty, and legitimate use of violence. It refers to the interplay between an emerging authority and communities of people that are incorporated into a larger political association.[16] Understood as a historical process, it involves both the development of the state's institutional and material capacities, as well as the creation of a cultural and symbolic repertoire that serves to ground the state's rule over a given population.[17] In this sense, the process of state making is neither unilateral nor entirely coercive. Rather, it is relational, negotiated, and evolving in light of communities' attitudes of compliance or resistance vis-à-vis the encroachment of the state.[18] In this sense, the monopolization of violence depends as much on the state's material and institutional strengths as it does on its ability to transform the dispositions and attitudes towards violence observed by different social groups.[19]

The notion of community refers to individuals or groups of individuals that share a given locality, neighborhood, or town. Defined in terms of a spatial or geographical demarcation, a community can also be understood as a historical, social, and cultural artifact which boundaries are "imagined" and delineated by its different members.[20] In this study, a community is understood as circumscribed to smaller localities, wherein personal and face-

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more competitive and political alternatives at the regional and local levels have diversified. In addition to PRI and PAN, the third main party in Mexico is the left-leaning *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD). Newly formed parties include *Movimiento Regenración Nacional* (Morena) and the *Partido Humanista*.

[16] Weber, "Politics as Vocation;" Loveman, "The Modern State and the Primitive Accumulation;" Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State."

[17] Joseph and Nugent, *Everyday Forms of State Formation*.

[18] Loveman, "Blinded like a State;" Sieder, "Contested sovereignities."

[19] Elias, *El proceso civilizatorio*; Migdal, *Strong societies, weak states*, 22.

[20] Anderson, *Imagined Communities.*

to-face interactions occur with relative regularity. A community is often characterized by a hegemonic cultural, political, or religious identity. This identity serves to draw the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate, tolerated and rejected, behaviors and ideologies. Nonetheless, this identity should not be understood as expressing some primordial or unchanging core. Rather, it should be regarded as socially constructed and as involving long-term power dynamics. Furthermore, a community is not a homogenous entity. On the contrary, it is internally fragmented along divisions motivated by religious affiliation, political ideologies, levels of wealth, even age differences. As a communal or collectively sanctioned form of violence, lynching can thus be seen as an instrument by which the boundaries of a given community are enforced.[21]

The argument of this dissertation is three-fold. First, I argue that the persistency of lynching needs to be understood in light of both the civilizing and de-civilizing processes[22] characterizing Mexico's process of state building, as manifested in the state of Puebla. As such, I claim that lynchings constituted a reaction on behalf of given communities against the encroachment of the post-revolutionary state project and its so-called modernizing forces. Particularly during the 1930s, communities resorted to lynching as a means to resist three particular developments: the secularization of public life, the promotion of a socialist model of education, and the reform of land holding regimes. Conversely, I argue, lynching need to

[21] Senechal de la Roche, "Why is Collective Violence Collective?" Garland, "Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning."

[22] I am referring to the concepts civilizing and de-civilizing as used by Norbert Elias. For this author, the civilizing process consisted on a long-term process of social differentiation and growing interdependence that eventually gave rise to feelings of repugnance and shame regarding unrestricted, public, and cruel forms of violence and suffering. Following Elias, Mennell defines the "de-civilizing process" as a break in the links of interdependence "associated with higher levels of danger and incalculability in every day life, the re-emergence of violence into the public sphere [and] …reduced pressures on individuals to restrain the expression of impulses…" See: Elias, *El proceso de la civilización*, 282-97; Mennell, "Decivilising processes," 205.

be situated in light of other public and overt forms of violence enabled by public officials and political elites from the 1930s and up to the 1970s. In other words, lynchings were part of a broader repertoire of private, illegal, and extralegal forms of violence that were either tolerated or directly promoted by political elites in order to reassert their power or respond to alleged threats. This repertoire included the actions of non-state actors such as *pistoleros*, bandits, private militias, and self-defense forces. It furthermore involved the activities of public officials such as police, mayors, and military personnel who resorted to particularly cruel forms of violence in order to advance their private or political interests. In fact, a number of extrajudicial killings perpetrated by state actors resembled, in their level of publicity and cruelty, the lynch mob. Lynchings were thus part of the de-civilizing tendencies incarnated by public officials and political elites who, in principle, should have served as purveyors of the civilizing process.

In addition to these overt uses of violence, the state's provision of security and justice remained partial, uneven, and corrupted throughout the twentieth century. This led to the formation of a citizen ethos that regarded the law as biased and unjust and therefore subject to being negotiated, altered, and privately appropriated. State officials, in turn, particularly police officers, came to be perceived as inherently corrupted and abusive. This context of citizens' distrust and disavowal towards security officials, together with rising levels of crime, served as the backdrop for the increasing prominence of lynching against so-called criminals and police officers during the last three decades of the twentieth century.

The second argument of this dissertation is centered on the function of lynching within given communities and, most importantly, on the historical continuities and changes of its motivations across different periods. Above all, the function of collective violence in

general and lynching in particular can be conceived as a means to excel social control.[23] Lynchings in twentieth-century Puebla have indeed served as an instrument to exclude and punish individuals whose conducts are considered threatening or offensive by members of a given community. Throughout the twentieth century, lynchings have consistently targeted individuals that are either marginal or outcasts, regardless of their membership to the community. That is, lynchings have been directed against individuals that belong and are known by members of a given community as well as against persons that are external to it. In both instances, however, lynchings serve to reinforce the lines between those conducts that will be tolerated versus those that are not to be accepted. As such, individuals targeted by lynching in twentieth century Puebla have included so-called witches, mythical beings, socialists, communists, Evangelicals, crooked politicians, security officials, and alleged criminals- such as rapist, robbers, murders, and kidnappers.

Although the social function of lynching has remained stable, conducts eliciting lynching have changed across different periods of time revealing shifting conceptions of danger and deviancy in Puebla. Thus, while lynchings driven by mythical beliefs and religious offenses experienced a relative decline during the second half of the twentieth century, criminal offenses-particularly crimes against property- crystallized as the most important reason eliciting lynching during the period stretching from the 1970 to 2000. There are at least two reasons for this historical transformation. The first has to do with the secularization of public and communal life in Puebla. From the 1970s onwards, the exercise of religion became more individualized, de-ritualized, and compartmentalized within communities that identified predominantly as Catholic. This process weakened the role of religion in the social organization of communities and, in turn, undermined the importance of

[23] Senechal de la Roche, "Why is Collective Violence Collective?," 127; Black, "Crime as Social Control."

religion as a source of legitimation of lynching. The second reason is linked to the sudden increase in crime rates, particularly robberies, in the 1980s. It is also related to the ensuing emergence of "the criminal" as the most important threat to community's security and wellbeing. My claim is that, as a result of these variations, there has been a gradual convergence of those conducts or wrongdoings punished by formal law and those punished by lynchings. Put differently, lynchings against witches, Evangelicals, and atheists, have been superseded by lynchings against so-called robbers, rapists, murders, and kidnappers.

The third argument of this work has to do with the peculiar *culture of lynching* that developed in Puebla.[24] That is to say, with the distinct elements of Puebla's social and political culture that informed the organization and legitimation of lynching in this region. Puebla's peculiar culture of lynching, I argue, becomes most evident when analyzing the central role that Catholic religion and conservative politics played in the organization of lynching in the state. Even though the importance of lynchings driven by Catholic beliefs and practices declined during the last three decades of the twentieth century, their occurrence is central to understanding the distinct historical trajectory of lynching in Puebla. In particular, I claim that Catholicism in Puebla was informed by reactionary and conservative ideologies that called for the vehement defense of communities' traditional values and power structures. These ideologies led to the legitimization of the use of communal forms of violence against impious or so-called dangerous elements at moments when the status quo seemed threatened or destabilized. Furthermore, the exercise of Catholic religion in the state was underpinned

[24] The notion of culture of lynching or "lynch culture" has been used by sociologist Ivan Evans to refer to how the distinct elements of the American South (including racial discrimination, the observance of an honor culture, and of a form of redemptive Protestantism) informed the occurrence of lynching in this region. In Evans' work and certainly in this dissertation, culture is understood as historically and socially constructed rather than as an expression of inherent or unchanging predispositions. See Evans, *Cultures of Violence*.

by the relational and ideological proximity between Catholic priests and public officials. Local priests and mayors, in particular, formed networks of complicity in order to retain their influence and political power. These networks, which brought together traditional and modern or bureaucratized forms of authority, added to a milieu where lynchings against communists, impious, and Evangelicals, were rendered plausible and even legitimate.

The peculiar culture of lynching in Puebla is thus informed by a reactionary and conservative exercise of Catholic religion. The existence of this peculiar culture helps explain why, in spite of defying the state's claim to the monopoly of violence, lynchings actually echoed the anti-communist and nationalistic ideologies privileged by political elites during the 1940s-1970s period in this region. Under the rule of Maximino Ávila Camacho (1937-1941) and the *Avilamachistas* (1940-1970), political elites in Puebla rejected the anti-clerical undertones of the previous governments, while they openly embraced Catholic religion, and declared communism and "foreign" ideas as dangerous and destabilizing. Ultimately, I argue, the affinity between the sources of legitimation of lynching and the political ideologies of the dominant elites contributed to the seeming impunity of lynchings as well as to their further reproduction.

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the data informing this research as well as the sources and methods used to compile it. In addition, it outlines the main elements shared by lynchings and discusses the general sequencing, ritualization, and forms of torment underpinning their occurrence. It then analyzes the geography of lynching in Puebla. That is, the spatial distribution of lynching within the different regions of the state as well as the historical and demographic characteristics of these regions.

Chapter 2 examines the impact of Mexico's post-revolutionary process of state formation towards the persistency and ongoing legitimacy of lynching. Focusing on the1930s through the 1970s and based on the regional history of Puebla, the chapter analyzes lynchings as an expression of the discontents and divisions produced by the post-revolutionary state project. Additionally, it situates lynching against the backdrop of the multiple forms of illegal, public, and overt forms of violence that were either tolerated or promoted by regional elites. The chapter shows that, contrary to the dominant understanding of the period stretching from the 1940s to the 1970s, it was in fact a time much less defined by a centralized or top-down exercise of violence. Next, it argues that this period did not put Puebla into a pathway of social pacification. As such, lynchings and other forms of popular and de-centralized violence continued to surface in the decades to come. In particular, the ongoing occurrence of lynchings against security officials up until today signals the state's enduring incapacity to centralize the exercise of violence through the rule of law. Furthermore, it reveals citizens' current perception of the security apparatus as partial, illegitimate, and unjust.

Chapter 3 analyzes the different conducts that have given rise to lynchings in twentieth-century Puebla. The chapters argues that, in contrast to what literature on lynching in Latin America has suggested, lynchings against so-called criminals cannot be limited to the region's current context of insecurity and crime. Based on the analysis of a series of cases taking place from the 1930s to the 2000s, it demonstrates that lynching against rapist, robbers, murders, and kidnappers are not a new phenomenon. The chapter also advances the idea that lynchings against so-called criminals are part of a wider spectrum of conducts and individuals targeted by this expression of violence. This spectrum covers mythical beings,

people chastised by their political ideas, police officers and crooked politicians, as well as people considered to be hostile to Catholic beliefs and practices. In this sense, the chapter pluralizes our understanding of the motivations behind lynching violence. In addition, the chapter documents the reasons behind the crystallization of the criminal as the most prevalent victim of lynching over the last three decades of the twentieth century. It does so by looking at statistics on crime as well as shifting perceptions of deviancy and danger. All in all, chapter 3 establishes that lynchings have consistently targeted individuals whose behavior destabilizes the putative moral, political, and economic integrity of a given community. As such, lynchings against so- called criminals are interpreted as the latest iteration of a longer history wherein communities have constructed those "dangerous others" that ought to be punished.

Chapter 4 analyzes the pivotal role religion, particularly Catholic religion, has played in the organization and sanctioning of lynchings in the state of Puebla. The chapter suggests that, informed by a reactionary and anti-communist ideology, popular and local enactments of Catholicism served to legitimate the use of violence against impious or so-called dangerous elements. In order to understand how did religion become a source of legitimation for collective, cruel, and highly visible forms of violence, the chapter traces the intricate connections that existed between priests and public officials in Puebla. It also shows how the exercise of religion was not confined to symbolic and spiritual concerns. Rather, the chapter argues, religion served to define the political, moral, and economic contours of the community. In this sense, when informed by religious questions, lynching tends to be grounded on a communal and all-encompassing exercise of religion that is connected directly to the political dynamics of a given community. Lastly, the chapter explores some of the

reasons for the declining weight of religion as a driver of lynching by looking at the seeming secularization of communal life in Puebla.

As suggested by the opening paragraphs of this introduction, lynchings have persisted in Puebla up until today. The endurance of this form of violence in this region and in Mexico as a whole needs to be understood in light of long-term processes of state building, intra-community dynamics of power and conflict, and shifting understandings of deviancy and danger. Each of the following chapters seeks to elucidate the social, cultural, and institutional fabric of lynching in twentieth-century Puebla. Based on an analysis that spans over seven decades, this dissertation offers the first systematic account of the longer history of lynching in Mexico. As such, it brings to the fore the historical trajectory of an illegal, collective, and particularly cruel form of violence that lies at the heart of Mexico and Latin America's present history of violence.

CHAPTER 1

Anatomy and Geography of Lynching in Post-Revolutionary Puebla

The aim of this chapter is three-fold. First, it seeks to discuss some of the conceptual and methodological considerations informing this work, including the definition of lynching, the sources consulted, and the database that serves as the basis for this dissertation. Second, it aims at presenting a general characterization of lynching in twentieth-century Puebla. By examining the sequencing, ritualization, and level of organization of the cases analyzed, the chapter outlines the anatomy of lynching in the region and period under study. Third, the chapter seeks to discuss the geography of lynching in Puebla. That is, geography as far as it concerns the spatial distribution of lynching within the different regions of the state as well as the historical and demographic characteristics of these regions. The discussion will be divided into three sections, each corresponding to the objectives of the chapter.

Conceptual and methodological considerations

As illustrated by scholars working on lynching in the United States, the question of how and by which criteria are lynchings defined can be highly contentious. Waldrep, for instance, reminds us that from the 1890s to the 1940s the definition of lynching became the object of heated political debates in the U.S.[25] While defenders of this practice defined it as justifiable responses to crimes that offended the values of a given community, anti-lynching activists emphasized the racist and unjustifiable character of these acts. Although mob violence opponents conceded that a community's support of lynching was what distinguished

[25] Waldrep, "War on words…"

this practice from plain murder, by the 1930s, anti-lynching activists defined any racial killing against an African-American as lynching, regardless of the communal support behind it.[26] Controversies regarding how should lynching be defined have continued up until today. As recent as February of 2015, the Equal Justice Initiative published a new report that added 700 names to the list of more than 3,000 African-Americans that were victimized by lynching in the United States.[27] The report underscored a racial centric definition of lynching and which focused on racial killings perpetrated against African- Americans, stating: "Lynchings were violent and public acts of torture that traumatized black people throughout the country and were largely tolerated by state and federal officials.[28] Just a few days after the report was published, historians Carrigan and Webb wrote an op-ed where they acknowledged the significance of this report, but argued that it was necessary to recognize that lynching "targeted many other racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, including Native Americans, Italians, Chinese and, especially, Mexicans."[29]

The question of how and by which criteria should lynching be defined has not been the focus of a public or national debate in Mexico. This may in fact signal the absence of a tangible and generalized concern regarding this practice. Nonetheless, some definitions have been put forward. In 2002 and 2003, the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) published two edited volumes on the topic of lynching under the name "*justicia por mano propia"* or self-help justice.[30] These publications emphasized three elements of lynching: its collective character, the fact that it appeals to some notion of retributive justice, and the

[26] Waldrep, "War on words…", 81.
[27] Robertson, "History of Lynchings in the South Documents Nearly 4,000 Names."
[28] Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America*, 3.
[29] Carrigan and Webb, "When Americans Lynched Mexicans."
[30] CNDH, Justicia por propia mano; CNDH, Primer Certamen Nacional de Ensayo. Linchamiento…Justicia por mano propia.

perceived legitimacy of this practice in the eyes of perpetrators.[31] Scholarly works on lynching in Mexico and Latin America at large tend to focus on these three elements as well, adding that lynchings might be spontaneous or semi-organized; taking the form either of highly ritualized acts or of rather ephemeral events.[32]

Beyond this descriptive characterization, scholars have also attempted to define lynching according to the drivers or motivations behind this form of violence. Here the tendency has been to interpret lynching as communities' attempt to reassert their sense of security and agency in the face of three phenomena: rising levels of crime or fear of crime, rampant social inequalities, and corrupted and illegitimate state institutions.[33] An exception to this trend is the work of Christopher Krupa whose work focuses on the *effects* on lynching rather than on its *causes.* By taking contemporary Ecuador as his site of analysis, Krupa traces the ways in which lynchings have been represented as "Indian-like acts." According to this view, these representations have served to reify a public image of indigenous communities as "barbaric" and incapable of participating in a white-mestizo society that claims for itself the values of modernity and order.[34]

As stated in the introduction, this dissertation defines lynching as public and illegal acts of collective violence, which aim is to control and punish individuals considered offensive or threatening by a given group or community. In spite of its illegality, those who

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[31] Similarly, in 2000, a report published by the United Nations Mission to Guatemala (MINUGUA) defined lynching as collective acts of violence (*hechos de violencia tumultuaria*) directed against one or more persons that may or may result in the death of the victim. MINUGUA, "Los Linchamientos: Un Flagelo Contra la Dignidad Humana."

[32] Huggins, *Vigilantism and the State in Modern Latin America,* 1-18, Snodgrass Godoy, "When Justice is Criminal," Fuentes Díaz, "Violencia y estado, mediación y respuesta no estatal," 10. For a useful discussion on the literature on lynching written by Latin American scholars over the last twenty years, see Gamallo, "Crimen, castigo y violencia colectiva,"14-50.

[33] Snodgrass Godoy, "When Justice is Criminal," Goldstein, "In our own hands,"Rodríguez Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social;" Handy, "Chicken Thieves, Withches, and Judges…;" Binford, "A failure of normalization…"

[34] Krupa, "Histories in Red," 21-2.

perpetrate lynching do not consider it a crime but in fact a legitimate way to attain justice. Furthermore, while lynching may or may not result in the victim's death, it always involves an unusual and excessive use of violence, such as the mutilation, hanging, torturing, or burning of the victim's body or corpse through the use of fists, pistols, stones, clubs, or sticks. Although their level of organization and premeditation varies, lynching is a short-lived phenomenon in the sense that a lynch mob often dissipates after an attack. However, lynching is grounded in intra-community conflicts and dynamics that precede and inform their occurrence. They, therefore, should not be understood as an aberration of a given state of affairs but, rather, as a symptom of it.[35]

While private citizens are the main instigators and perpetrators of lynching, lynchings may and in fact have involved the direct participation of public officials such as mayors, police officers, and local judges. In this sense, and in contrast to what literature on lynching in Latin America has suggested, lynchings cannot be squarely defined as a practice carried out by private citizens alone.[36] Victims of lynching, on the other hand, may include people that do not belong to a given community as well as individuals that, despite belonging to these communities, occupy a marginal or external position. In both instances, lynchings tend to target individuals whose behavior, political ideas, or religious beliefs is seen as destabilizing the putative moral, political, and economic integrity of a given community.

This dissertation's definition of lynching is both sociologically and historically grounded. Sociologically speaking, it is built in dialogue with relevant sociological theories

[35] In the case of more publicized lynchings, their ocurrence may linger in the collective memory of those who participated or witnessed it for months and even years. For a similar reflection on Guatemala, see: Burrel, "After lynching."

[36] Cfr. Snodgrass Godoy, "When Justice is Criminal," 646). This contrasts with literature on lynching and vigilantism in the United States where the participation of local officials and law enforcements in the organization of mob violence is acknowledged as a defining feature of its occurrence. See: Carrigan and Webb, "The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States," Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 38-9; Senechal de la Roche, "Why is Collective Violence, Violent?," 103.

on collective forms of violence. In particular, it is informed by the works of scholars such as Black and Senechal de la Roche for whom collective violence is first and foremost a form of social control, "a process by which people define or respond to deviant behavior." [37] It is furthermore informed by Garland's definition of lynching as collective criminal punishments that can be read in tandem with other penal practices.[38] In historical terms, this definition is based on the analysis of a wide range of periodical and archival materials pertaining the trajectory of this practice in twentieth-century Puebla. In other words, it draws upon empirical evidence in order to establish a general characterization of the phenomenon.

In terms of the specific periodical and archival materials consulted, sources include local, national, and U.S. newspapers. They furthermore include government records, security reports, official correspondence, and letters addressed to state and federal officials on behalf of individual citizens and civil society organizations. In order to identify potential cases of lynching, I worked with four basic criteria. First, the event had to involve at least three perpetrators and the number of perpetrators had to outnumber the number of victims in a ratio of 3 to 1. Secondly, violence had to be unilateral, meaning that victims did not reciprocate or respond to a given attack.[39] Third, the event had to be described as an attempt to punish a behavior that offended a collective and not just one particular individual. Fourth, attacks had to be perpetrated on an overt way rather than in a secretive manner, with violence taking place at plain sight and often in front of various witnesses. These four criteria were

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[37] Senechal de la Roche, "Why is Collective Violence Collective?", 127.

[38] Garland, "Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning," 795-6. In the Mexican case, there are important similitarites and connections between lynching and the so-called *ley fuga* which are worth exploring further. The *ley fuga* (or "flee law") consisted in the extra-judicial killing of a criminal upon his alleged attempt to escape from the authorities.

[39] Senechal de la Roche distinguishes unilateral acts of violence bilateral and reciprocal expressions of violence such as brawls, feuds, and warfare. See: Senechal de la Roche, "Why is Collective Violence Collective?"

then used to identify cases of lynching, independently of the word or term used by my sources in order to describe the event.

In terms of periodical materials, I revised nine local newspapers[40] and two national newspapers.[41] From these publications, the daily newspapers *La Opinión* and *El Sol de Puebla* were chosen as the basis for a more comprehensive examination. This choice was made in light of these publications' longstanding presence in the state (going back to 1928 and 1945 respectively) as well as their distinct weight in shaping Puebla's public opinion and local politics.[42] For *La Opinión*, in particular, up to two months (July and September for all years available) were revised from the year 1930 to 1989. Thus, more than 3,000 newspaper editions were reviewed. Because these newspapers have neither been digitalized nor made available in a searchable index or database, this meant going through each of these editions in search for cases of lynching. In addition to these materials, I used the Latin American Newsstand database- using the search criteria "linchamiento(s)" and "Puebla"- to do a cursory search of cases of lynching taking place from 1995 to 2000 in Puebla. A similar database was used for the revision of U.S. newspapers. Using the keywords "lynching," "Mexico," and "Puebla," I searched the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database for cases taking place from the year 1900 to 1970.

The use of newspapers was central to trace the historical trajectory of lynching as well as to capture how was this practice represented, condemned, or legitimated by public

[40] Local newspapers included: La Opinión, El Sol de Puebla, Diario Síntesis, Diario de Puebla, El Liberal Poblano, Novedades, El Combate, Heraldo de Puebla, and La Jornada de Oriente.
[41] The two national newspapers consulted were *Excélsior* and *El Universal.*
[42]*La Opinión* was considered the most important newspaper in Puebla during the 1930s and the first years of the 1940s. In 1945, with the support of former governor Maximino Ávila Camacho, *El Sol de Puebla* was created. It would become the most influential newspaper in the region. Agüera Ibañez (ed.), *Memoria y Encuentros*, 109-10; Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla,*132-4.

opinion. Because lynching is not formally defined as a crime by Mexican law[43] and because cases of lynching were rarely brought to justice, the utility of judicial archives as a source to trace both the occurrences and changing dynamics of lynching turned out to be rather limited.[44] In addition, as other scholars working in Puebla have pointed out, several archives, such as the *Archivo General del Estado de Puebla*, were partially destroyed and do not contain government documents for any of the years between 1917 to 1959.[45] In view of this, newspapers offered an invaluable source to locate a practice that for a long time has been neglected by both historians of post-revolutionary Mexico and social scientists specializing on the phenomenon of lynchings.[46]

Certainly, newspapers are confronted with and can present various limitations. For instance, events might be exaggerated or minimized in order to make a story more appealing or attractive for a given audience. This may lead to the difficulty that overt forms of violence such as murder and lynching may in fact be particularly susceptible to these dynamics of narration and representation, as they render themselves to gruesome and morbid narratives in ways that other crimes can hardly emulate.[47] Nonetheless, other sources are subject to similar limitations. Official statistics on crime may reflect the inclination of police and judicial

[43] I have found a few cases of lynching that were punished under the crime "tumultuous homicide," but more research would be needed in order to establish how systematically were lynchings punished under this category in Puebla or other states of Mexico. See, for instance, Semanario Judicial de la Federación, Quinta Época, 1a. Sala; S.J.F.; Tomo CXXVIII; Pág. 434 "Homicidio tumultuario, delito de" (Legislación del Estado de Puebla), Suprema Corte de Justicia.
[44] Furthermore, Puebla's judicial archives are poorly classified making it necessary to have as many details as possible in hand in order to carry out the research. Given the lack of a formal classification of lynching, the task of locating relevant cases would have been extremely difficult.
[45] Quintana, "The president that never was,"19-20.
[46] In the case of Mexico, studies on lynching are focused exclusively on the last three decades, taking the 1980s or 1990s as their point of departure. The four following studies are based exclusively on the analysis of newspaper materials published at the national level: Vilas, "Linchamiento por mano propia;" Fuentes Diaz, "Violencia y Estado, Mediación y Respuesta No Estatal;" Rodríguez Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social;" Gamallo, "Crimen, castigo y violencia colectiva..."
[47] Piccato, "Homicide as Politics in Modern Mexico,"116-23.

authorities to prioritize certain crimes over others.[48] Similarly, judicial records may underrepresent certain conducts that communities consider central for their security and wellbeing, even if they are not typified as crimes.[49] Furthermore, when properly acknowledged and when weighted against other sources, the oftenmorbid characterization of newspaper accounts may be useful. The sensationalist description of certain cases of lynching allowed me to collect details that other sources (as the ones I will describe below) did not always include, such as how was the victim tortured and what was done to the corpse after the event. Most importantly, newspapers gave me the opportunity to trace how journalists and readers reacted to different cases of lynching and how victims, perpetrators, and local authorities were represented in narratives of lynching. Being at the crossroads of debates about violence, crime, and justice, newspaper representations of lynching proved also a productive site to understand how these categories were socially and historically constructed in twentieth-century Puebla.

Newspaper materials described most incidents of lynching with the Spanish word for it: "*linchamiento.*" As a matter of fact, throughout the 1930s, various cases of *linchamiento* were described with the word *"lynchamiento*," following its English spelling. Nevertheless, other events that matched the criteria used by this research to identify a case of lynching were described under different names, such as "*justicia por mano propia,*" (self-help justice), "*zafarrancho*" (disarray), "*tumulto*" (tumult) or even "*crimen salvaje*" (savage crime). These expressions point at the diverse opinions or sentiments provoked by mob violence amongst a

[48] Piccato, "A historical perspective on crime in twentieth-century Mexico," 3.
[49] Carey, *I ask for Justice*, 17. Examples of conducts that are not typified as crime and yet may be deemed central by given communities include witchcraft and rape within marriage (when not punishable by law).

given public or readership.[50] The incidents described by the word *linchamiento* involved both cases justified by the press as a means to attain justice, as well as cases portrayed as expressions of the alleged savagery, backwardness or ignorance of those who perpetrated them. In other words, the term *linchamiento* in itself implied neither support nor rejection of this practice. In most cases, a *linchamiento* made reference to mob violence enacted by non-state actors in reaction to a given wrongdoing. However, the press at times also used the category of lynching to refer to some extrajudicial killings perpetrated by and with the support of state actors; particularly when these involved the use of public, cruel, and overt forms of torment. This apparent elasticity of the term lynching highlights the complex connections between organized and "disorganized" forms of violence in twentieth-century Puebla.[51]

In terms of archival materials, most of my sources are based on the National Archive of Mexico.[52] There, I examined all the series of *asesinatos* (murders) for the state of Puebla located in the *Documentación de la Administración Pública* archive (Documents of the Public Administration). This series contains reports, letters, and complaints regarding intentional homicides taking place during the 1930s and 1940s. I also consulted the *Archivos Presidenciales* (Presidential Archives) for the 1930-1960s period. These archives hold reports, letters, complaints, and telegrams regarding intentional homicides, physical assaults,

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[50] Newspaper readership was limited to an educated and mostly urban political and economic elite. In 1930, only 21% of the population could read and write in Puebla; the percentage was 26.22% in 1940. See: INEGI, Censo de Población y Vivienda 1940, available at: http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/ccpv/cpv1940/. Last accessed: December 14, 2014.

[51] Auyero has suggested the use of the term "gray zone" to denote the connectios between riots and formal political networks in the contex of Argentina. Auyero, "Gray zone of politics and social movements." For a reflection on the relevance of the term in the context of Mexico, see Pansters, "Zones of state making," 24.

[52] I also consulted the archives of the *Biblioteca Lerdo de Tejada* and of the *Instituto de Estudios Históricos de las Revoluciones de México*, both in Mexico City. In Puebla, research was conducted on the municipal archive of Atlixco.

religious conflicts, and violations carried out by public officials. Because these documents include statements and opinions articulated by ordinary citizens, these sources offer an important window into how individuals and communities related to the state and to each other. Granted, these documents were mostly focused on violent episodes within and between different communities as well as between these communities and state representatives. As such, they often contained belligerent and one-sided accounts of these events. Still, most of the materials consulted present multiple accounts of one incident; including those provided by perpetrators, victims, witnesses, neighbors, and public officials. In this sense, they offer a multivocal and multilayered rather than a univocal or "official" perspective. While some scholars could consider this cacophony a disadvantage, in my case, it proved instrumental to understand the contentious and highly political character of lynching. The use of secondary sources, including historiographical material and anthropological studies, allowed me to put these different voices into perspective and assess their soundness before articulating my own narrative and interpretation.

In addition to the above two archives, I consulted the *Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales* (Political and Social Investigations Archive), which holds detailed security reports prepared by federal agents. The purpose of these reports was to keep the central government informed about social unrest and political conflict taking place in different parts of the country. Written in the form of investigations, these documents include interviews, copies of leaflets, as well as quasi-ethnographic descriptions of given towns. They also comprise descriptions of street protests, meetings, and riots organized by students, militant activists, common citizens, and so-called religious fanatics. Even if or when informed by official ideology, these sources often include the voices of dissidents and

protesters, whose actions were being observed and recorded by state officials.[53] Because of their focus on organized forms of protest and political dissent, lynchings often appear often on the margins of broader narratives centered on so-called radical groups such as communist organizations and proto-fascist movements. Because of this, these documents also proved a useful source to understand the drivers and sources of legitimation of lynching in Puebla. Although generally spontaneous and short-lived, lynching needs to be situated within long-term intra-community dynamics and conflicts. In other words, lynchings are also political and as such they can and should be situated within these broader political dynamics.

Drawing on this variety of sources, I assembled and catalogued over a thousand incidents of both illegal and extralegal forms of violence between the years 1930 and 2000. Situated predominantly in Puebla, these incidents include cases of lynching, attempts of lynching, rioting, and vigilantism, as well as extrajudicial forms of violence perpetrated by state officials. In documenting these manifold expressions of violence, my aim was to situate the occurrence of lynchings within a broader spectrum of illegal and extralegal forms of violence taking place in Puebla and other parts of the country. Based on this extensive revision, I selected a total of 136 incidents that, given their characteristics, fell under the definition of lynching or attempt of lynching used by this dissertation.[54] An attempt of lynching can be described as the seizure of one or more individuals by a given group who threatens to collectively beat, injure, or kill these individuals in retaliation for an alleged violation or misconduct. Attempts of lynching do not necessarily involve physical violence, but the seizure of one or more individuals by an enraged group that outnumbers them does imply a significant level of stress or trauma for the potential victim or victims.

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[53] Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata*, 17.

[54] From the 136 incidents selected, 79 were lynchings (including lethal and non-lethal) and the rest were attempts of lynching.

These incidents were then systematized and included into a database that contains the following information: date and place of the event; name and gender of victim and perpetrators; the purported motivation of the attack; and, whenever available, the age of the victim as well as the means used to threaten or assault the victim. It should be noted that some of these incidents involved more than one victim. The press often referred to these cases as "double" or "triple" lynchings. Although cases of lynching and attempts of lynching were documented for all the decades covered by this study, most of the cases included in my database pertain to the 1930s and 1940s decades.[55] This can be explained in light of the timeframe and content of my archival sources, many of which were focused on these two decades. The limited timeframe of these sources is telling of the general limits of Mexico's archives, which materials for the second half of the twentieth century tend to be scanter.[56] It can also be attributed to shifts in press coverage of lynching. In other words, it does not necessarily reflect how the intensity of the phenomenon has changed over time. A more exhaustive revision of newspapers, covering all months for all years would be necessary in order to establish more accurately how the intensity of the phenomenon has shifted throughout the twentieth century.[57]

Given the focus of my study, the majority of the incidents I documented, a total of 108, took place in the state of Puebla; 28 are situated in other states of Mexico including Mexico City, the State of Mexico, Veracruz, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Querétaro. In terms of the geographical distribution of the cases within Puebla, most of the cases collected

[55] The temporal distribution of the cases is the following: 68 cases for the 1930s, 25 for 1940s, 15 for1950s, 5 in 1960s, 4 in 1970s, 10 in 1980s, 9 in 1990s.
[56] For instance, the series of *asesinatos* (murders) for the state of Puebla is not available for the 1950s onwards.
[57] Even a more extensive revision would be describing how press coverage changes over time and not necessarily how the phenomenon itself changed over time. One could argue, nonetheless, that this limitation applies to all sources, not just the press.

correspond to the regions known as San Pedro Cholula (62), Sierra Norte (13), Valle de Atlixco (12), and Serdán, (12).[58] I will explain in more detail the characteristics of these regions in the section on the geography on lynching.

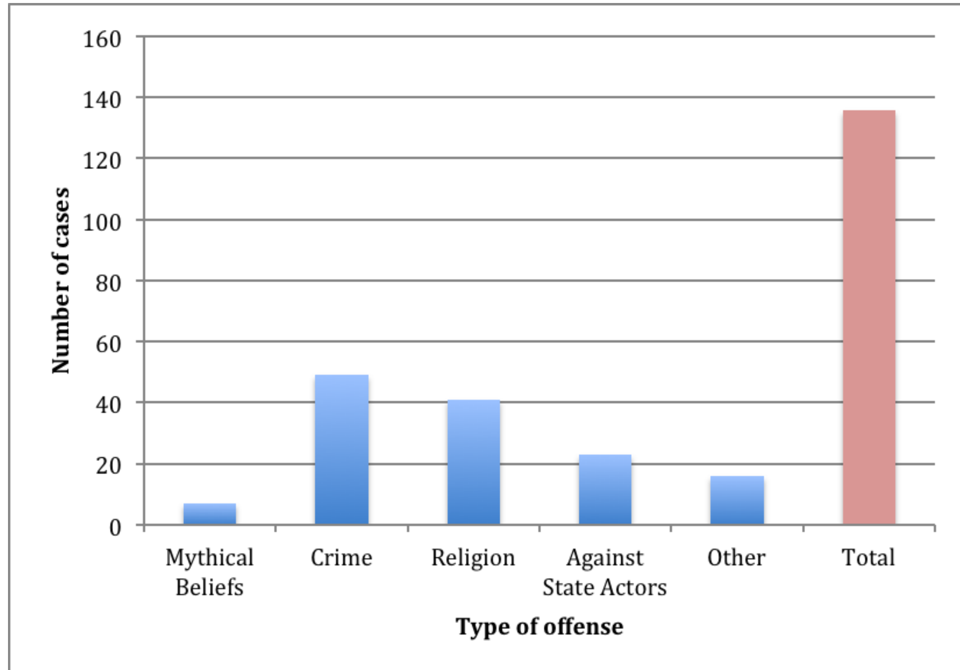
In terms of the gender distribution of victims and perpetrators of lynching, the presence of men was predominant. With the exception of 9 cases, practically all victims were men. The cases involving women were triggered by accusations of witchcraft or by alleged offenses to Catholic religion. The later offenses included professing Evangelicalism, following socialist ideas, and desecrating a religious image. Men, on the other hand, were accused of a wide variety of offenses, including robberies, rapes, kidnapping, murders, following socialist or communist ideas, offending Catholic religion, and in a few cases, practicing witchcraft or incarnating a mythical figure like the *degollador* (decapitator). Perpetrators of lynching likewise were in most cases men. Nevertheless, there were a few cases where women either participated directly in the attacks or where they played a key role in the circulation of rumors leading to lynching.

Regarding the types of conducts precipitating lynching, most of the cases I collected were either motivated by a crime (mainly robberies, kidnappings, and rape) or were underpinned by religious conflicts and so-called violations of Catholic religion (such as desecrating a church, professing Evangelicalism, or stealing a religious image). 49 of my cases fall into the first category, 41 in the second. The rest of the cases are linked to mythical beliefs (7), attacks against state authorities (23), and the category "other" (16). The later

[58] The Institute for Federalism and Municipal Development (INAFED) divides the state of Puebla into 7 different regions: 1) Sierra Norte (or Huachinango), 2) Sierra Nororiental (Teziutlán), 3) Serdán, 4) San Pedro Cholula (or Angelópolis), 5) Valle de Atlixco y Matamoros, 6) Mixteca (also known as Izúcar de Matamoros), and 7) Tehuacán y Sierra Negra. Following the division used by other historians working in Puebla and for the purposes of our discussion, I will discuss the Sierra Norte and the Sierra Nororiental as one region under the category "Sierra Norte."

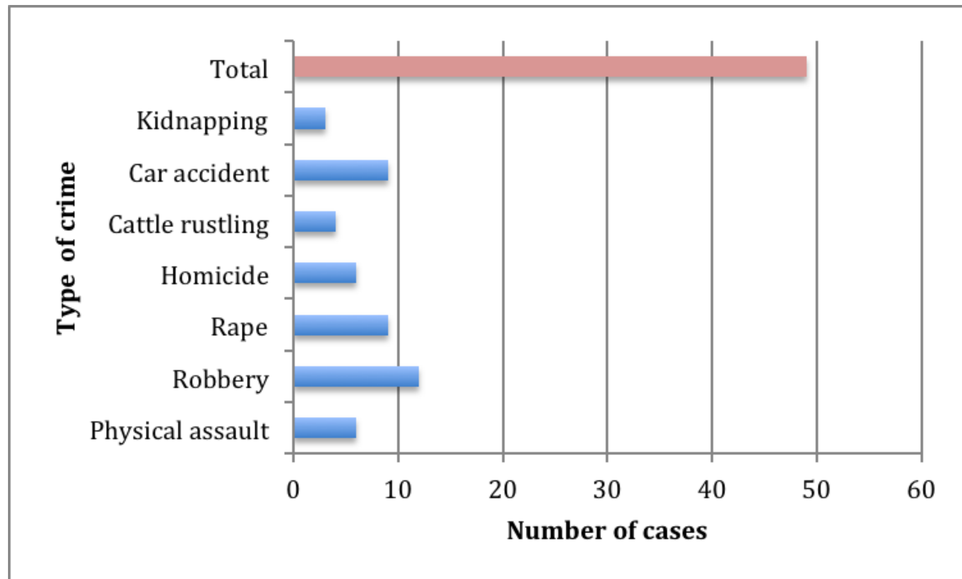
category includes lynchings caused by political conflicts, intercommunity feuds, or cases where the cause was unspecified. Graph 1 shows the distribution of cases according to offense; graph 2 illustrates what were the main violent and non-violent crimes eliciting lynching.

Graph 1. Distribution of cases according to offense (1930-2000)



Source: Elaborated by author based on database

Graph 2. Distribution of cases according to crime

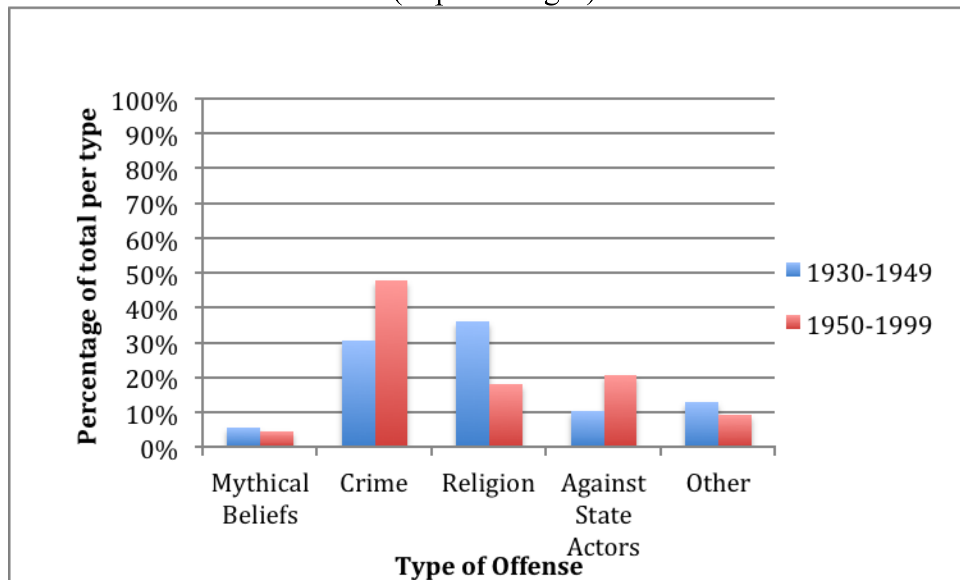


Source: Elaborated by author based on database

Whereas lynchings driven by religion and mythical fears amounted to 40% of the cases during the first half of the twentieth century, during the second half, these cases represented 18% of the total cases studied (see Graph 3). As will be analyzed in Chapter 3, evidence suggests that, from the 1970s onwards, there was a relative decline in the weight of religion and mythical beliefs within the social organization of given communities. Furthermore, studies focused on lynching in present-day Mexico (1980s to 2010) indicate that incidents driven by religion and mythical fears have only a marginal presence, with the majority of lynchings being driven by robberies and violent crimes, including homicide, kidnapping, and rape (see table 1).[59]

[59] Fuentes Díaz, *Violencia y Estado, mediación y respuesta no estatal,* 117; Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social," 55; Gamallo, "Crimen, Castigo y Violencia Colectiva," 92.

Graph 3. Distribution of cases according to offense and period of time
(in percentages)



Source: Elaborated by author based on database

Table 1. Offenses Precipitating Lynching at National Level*
Different studies

	Fuentes Díaz (1984-2003)			**Guillén (1988-2010)**			**Gamallo (2000-2011)**		
	Type of offense	Total of incidents	%	Type of offense	Total of incidents	%	Type of offense	Total of incidents	%
1	Robberies	120	36	Robberies	98	42.2	Robberies	176	43.6
2	Sexual assault	25	7.5	Sexual assault	28	12	Sexual assault	44	10.9
3	Physical assault (homicides, child theft, injuries, torture)	44	13.3	Physical assault (homicides, kidnappings, injuries)	47	20	Physical assault (homicides, kidnappings, injuries)	73	18.2
4	Car accidents	22	6.6	Car accidents	18	7.7	Car accidents	40	9.9
5	Reaction towards authorities	30	9	Reaction towards state authorities	19	8.1	Reaction towards state authorities	27	6.7
6	Assault to cultural values (witchcraft, against Evangelicals)	35	10.5	Assault to cultural values (religion)	7	3	Assaults to cultural values (religious offenses, witchcraft)	23	5.7

7	Political conflicts (political rivalry, eviction, squatting, fraud)	26	7.85				Political conflicts (electoral violence, conflicts over land)	20	25
8	Others	29	8.7	Others	15	6.4			
	Total	331	100	Total	232	100		403	100

* The classification of the offenses has been slightly re-grouped in other to make the three students comparable
Source: Elaborated by author based on the studies of by Fuente Díaz, Guillén, and Gamallo

Anatomy of Lynching

As stated above, the definition of lynching provided by this dissertation is historically grounded. In the following lines I will discuss what are the general characteristics of the cases of lynchings included in my database, in terms of their sequencing, ritualization, and level of organization. As observed by Brundage in reference to the United States, lynchings can assume a “variety of forms, ranging from secretive small groups to enormous crowds.”[60] The same holds true in the case of twentieth-century Puebla, where some cases involve the participation of dozens and even thousands of people while others consist of smaller groups of three or five. In general, smaller lynch mobs tend to be less ritualized and develop over a shorter period of time. In contrast, larger mobs tend to last longer and encompass a greater level of ritualization and organization. In this sense, both quantitative and qualitatively speaking, there are two general types of lynching, each situated within a broader spectrum that includes more subtle variations.

On one side of the spectrum, we have lynchings that involve a small number of participants. These cases are often triggered by an accusation against a so-called criminal on behalf of one or more individuals that claim to have witnessed a wrongdoing or crime. Once

[60] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 18.

the alleged offender is identified, allegations against him or her are transmitted by word of mouth and are followed swiftly by an attack orchestrated by groups of three or five. The attack often involves an assault with fists, kicks, or whatever objects the lynch mob has at hand. This type of lynching includes attacks directed against drivers that accidentally killed or injured someone, assaults against individuals accused of harming a child, or against robbers or kidnappers caught in flagrante. These lynchings involve usually the participation of bystanders, neighbors, or groups of merchants. Their occurrence, from the moment the offender is identified to the moment he or she is seized by a group, tends to unfold in a hasty manner, and thus do not attract a wider "audience."

On the right side of the spectrum we have lynchings that involve the participation of larger groups, ranging from dozens to thousands of participants. These lynchings present a more ritualized character and tend to take place over a longer period of time.[61] As in the previous cases, the lynching often starts with an accusation made against a so-called offender by one or more persons who claim to have witnessed a crime or wrongdoing. In this case, however, word of mouth takes the form of more elaborated rumors that echo deep-seated communal fears or predispositions. For instance, rumors about churches or religious symbols being desecrated or about children being snatched in order to use or sell their organs. Thus, instead of swiftly attacking the guilty party, perpetrators here gather into a recognizable public space (church, plaza, public school) following a seemingly centripetal logic.[62] That is to say, perpetrators come from different points and move towards an identified center, dragging the so-called offender with them. The lynching is often announced not only by word of mouth but also by tolling the church bells, a method of communication that serves to

[61] Fuentes Díaz also points at a correlation between larger lynch mobs and ritualization levels. See: Fuentes Díaz, "Violencia y Estado: Mediación y respuesta no-estatal," 114-5.
[62] I thank Eric Van Young for this observation.

attract a larger number of participants and spectators, including women, children and elderly. In this type of lynching the victim is often tortured at length, maimed, and his body or corpse set on fire. In other words, the cruelty used against the victim tends to be harsher. In some cases, perpetrators are described as being heavily drunk before and during the lynching. This points at the almost carnivalesque or celebratory undertone surrounding the attack.[63] Examples of this kind of incident include lynchings against so-called anticlerical or iconoclast communists, cases against mythical beings or kidnappers, as well as attacks against recidivist criminals.

As mentioned before, these two types of lynching represent two extremes of a wider spectrum that incorporates manifold variations. Rather than falling exactly into one type or the other, most lynchings fall somewhere in the middle and present elements of these two ideal types. One variation of lynching that is not captured by this spectrum, however, corresponds to those cases of mob violence that seem to meet and mesh with more organized forms of vigilantism. I am referring in particular to the series of attacks orchestrated by organized vigilantes against so-called socialist teachers during the second half of the 1930s.

As argued by sociologist Senechal de la Roche, both lynch mobs and vigilantes tend to disband after attacking a given individual.[64] Nonetheless, vigilantes are more organized, have a more established membership, and are capable of orchestrating and planning multiple attacks over time. Lynch mobs, on the other hand, have a more loose organization and their degree of premeditation is far more elusive. Moreover, lynch membership is more flexible

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[63] This dynamic echoes what Garland describes as public torture lynchings in the U.S., wherein white American Southerners would attend lynchings as spectacles to "enjoy themselves." Newspaper reports would publicize these events as "lynch carnivals" or "Negro barbecues" where children, women, and the elderly were invited. In a more practical or phychological level, the consumption of alcohol may contribute to anticipate perpetrors lost of self-restraint. Garland, "Penal excess and surplus meaning," 45; Mullen "Atrocity as a Function of Lynch Mob Composition."

[64] Senechal de la Roche, "Why is Collective Violence, Violent?," 103-4, 119.

with anyone being able to "join" a mob, without necessarily participating in any future incident. In this sense, attacks against socialist teachers organized by well-armed vigilantes should be plainly categorized as vigilantism. Empirical evidence, however, points at a more blurry distinction between vigilantism and lynching. For instance, some sources referred to cases of lynching that were "staged" in order to appear as spontaneous attacks, when they were actually planned. By the same token, vigilante attacks were sometimes described as involving the participation of lynch mobs or of groups of neighbors acting in a more unstructured manner.[65] Given the animosity of locals towards socialist teachers and their support of vigilantes within given towns, it is possible to think that the actions of lynchers and vigilantes overlapped occasionally. Moreover, the public and cruel character of these killings, many of which involved mutilations and hangings, makes the distinction between vigilantism and lynchings even blurrier. Rather than ruling out these cases as an anomaly, I believe we should interpret them as an expression of the politics that precede and inform lynchings, no matter how short-lived they appear on its face. For the purposes of my database, I included those cases that matched the four basic criteria mentioned above. That is, qualifying cases required being unilateral, overt in nature, aimed at punishing a conduct perceived as a collective offense, and lastly, to be perpetrated by a group of individuals that outnumbered the victim(s) by at least 3 to 1.

Before discussing the geographical distribution of mob violence in the state of Puebla, I will discuss three elements of the anatomy of lynching delineated so far: the circulation of rumors, the tolling of church bells, and the particular cruelty used to punish an alleged wrongdoer. These three elements are central to illuminating further the sequencing,

[65] See, for example, the case of teacher José Ramírez Martínez who was allegedly killed by Enrique Rodriguez alias *El Tallarín* but then hanged and lynched by a group of neighbors (cfr. Chapter 4).

ritualization, and communicative dimension of lynching. As such, they deserve particular attention. The circulation of rumors is central to the triggering, organization, and escalation of lynching. As argued by Samper, “rumor represents unverified information that is constructed in order to explain uncertain, ambiguous events or intangible fears, anxieties, or perceived dangers.”[66] In the case of lynching, a rumor is often initiated by a person who claims to have witnessed a given offense or misconduct, but who does not verify this information or offer any proof to ground her claim. Thus, a neighbor may claim she saw a strange person near a store that was recently robbed or a parent may warn others about a suspicious person standing outside of a school with the intention of kidnapping children. In neither instance does the person present actual evidence that a crime has taken place. Even in the case of “in flagrante” offenses, such as a car accident, the rumor consists in distorting the intentions of the so-called offender by claiming, for instance, that it was not an accident but an intentional homicide. In the cases analyzed by this dissertation, a rumor’s first utterance is frequently attributed to a woman or to a group of women, while it is men who generally carry out the attack. This suggests women tend to have a more active role in the triggering of a lynching than in its actual execution. In other cases, the uttering of a rumor is attributed to a person in a position of authority, such as a priest, a mayor, or a community leader. In these scenarios, a rumor might be further validated following the influence and respectability that such individuals have within given communities.

In general, the longer the time elapsing between the first utterance of the rumor and the lynching, the more elaborated the rumor. Scott argues that the retelling of rumors facilitates their “embellishment and exaggeration” in ways that are not random at all: “As a rumor travels it is altered in a fashion that brings it more closely into line with the hopes,

[66] Samper, “Cannibalizing Kids…,” 4.

fears, and worldview of those who hear it and retell it."[67] This is clear in some of the cases analyzed by this dissertation, including the lynching of Edgar Kullmann in 1930, a Norwegian geologist accused of kidnapping and decapitating children in order to use their body fat to power his airplane. In that case, the rumor reflected local anxieties regarding the disappearance of children, but also fears produced by flight tests that were being performed every night. The rumor also echoed a legend held in central and southern states of Mexico, which refers to an outsider or foreigner who decapitates bodies in order to power machines or build modern constructions. As illustrated by this example, in order for a rumor to be effective, the "right conditions" need to be in place.[68] The same can be argued about rumors of child theft during the 1970s-2000s period. In these cases a lynching is often preceded by reports about missing children and tend to target outsiders who are seen nearby elementary schools, often driving a car or a van, which is allegedly used to transport the abducted children. For instance, on March of 1993, two men who were driving a car and had been seen taking pictures outside of a primary school were lynched in Tepatlaxco, Puebla.[69] The attack originated in a rumor that claimed the men were: "the ones that steal children and rip them open." After tolling the church bells, a large group of people gathered around them, armed with stones and clubs, all while the two men sought refugee in the police station. With the mob arriving at the station, they were soon seized, dragged outside by the enraged crowd, tied up, and dosed with gasoline. The police was able to rescue them, but only after they already sustained severe injuries.

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[67] Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance, 145.

[68] Kullmann was Norwegian and most probably looked like the tall and white men imagined as the decapitator; moreover, newspapers reported that some children had gone missing days before the incident.

[69] ¿Quienes intentaron linchar a fotógrafos y profesores?:¡Tepatlaxco señor!, March 17, 1993; *La Jornada de Oreinte*;"Ustedes destripan niños nos gritaba la gente," March 31 1993, *La Jornada de Oriente*'; see also Fuentes Díaz, "El Estado y la furia..." pp. 7-8

Similar to rumors, the ringing of church bells is instrumental in the triggering and organization of lynching. Although their use is only present on those cases that acquire a more ritualized character, their historic and symbolic meanings are worth exploring further.[70] The use of church bells has a long history in Mexico. In the nineteenth-century, church bells served to signal a moment of emergency or rebellion. Van Young describes the practical and symbolic character of church bells as follows:

> Certainly, the ringing of village church bells was important in its own right, often serving to call rural people to the defense of their pueblos during the rebellion or to mobilize them for the insurgent or royalist causes. Such ringing, however, was only the aural manifestation of a deeper projection of community into the outside world and ultimately of the impulse towards communal auto-defense that drove much of indigeneous and more generally rural participation in the anticolonial insurgency...[71]

In Puebla, in particular, church bells were used to summon rioters and lynch mobs in the context of the nineteenth-century liberal reforms. For instance, on December 12th of 1855 in the town of Zacapoaxtla a group of parishioners assaulted the military barracks after learning that Puebla's bishop was going to be expelled. The attack followed the tolling of the church bells and was organized by local priest Francisco Ortega y García.[72]A year later, on November 18th of 1856, three men who were passing by the town of San Miguel Canoa were lynched as a punishment for their anticlerical ideas. The lynching started with the tolling of the church bells as a warning sign and was led by the local priest, Miguel Santa María, and the town's mayor, Manuel Pérez.[73]

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[70] To see a similar use of church bells to summon people before a lynching takes place, see: Gutierrez y Kobrak, *Los linchamientos, Pos-conflicto y violencia colectiva en Huehuetenango*, Guatemala, 36-7.
[71] Van Young, *The Other Rebellion*, 484.
[72] Banzant, "La iglesia, el Estado y la sublevación conservadora de Puebla en 1856," 101-3.
[73] Gálvez, "San Miguel Canoa, Matanza en tres tiempos: 1856, 1924, 1968."

In twentieth-century Puebla, church bells have continued to be used as a means to summon people prior to a lynching. At the most basic level, church bells serve as a means to communicate and convoke. They communicate both the presence of an imminent danger as well as the potential occurrence of a lynching. They convoke people into a given public space, which may be the church itself, the town square, the municipal office, or any other place used for public gatherings. Located in the town square, churches symbolize communal life per excellence. Hence, the tolling of the church bells serves to reiterate these collective punishments as a communal event, as oppose to a private murder or individual vengeance. Although the use of church bells does not necessarily indicate that a lynching is grounded on religious beliefs or conflicts, in some cases religion is indeed present. This is clearly the case of the 1968 lynching of five university workers in San Miguel Canoa. In that occasion, the five workers were attacked following rumors that claimed they were actually communist students who were planning to kill the priest and steal the image of the patron saint from the church. The priest had himself become instrumental in the makings of these rumors when, days before, he warned churchgoers that his life was at risk because communists were coming to town. Although he denied authorizing the ringing of the bells, the testimony of some of the town's inhabitants indicated otherwise.[74]

In the case of lynchings that are not motivated by religion, church bells are equally instrumental as both signs of warning and symbols of communal solidarity. Thus, in the lynching of the two alleged kidnappers in Tepatlaxco in 1993 mentioned above, the ringing of the church bells served to alert parents and other members of the community that there

[74] Meaney, Canoa, el crime impune, 217.

were some strange men outside of the primary school planning to kidnap children.[75] More recently, on October 20th of 2010, in the town of Tetela de Ocampo, in the neighboring state of Morelos, five individuals who were driving a van with license plaques from Mexico City were lynched by a large group of people who believed they were kidnappers.[76] After hearing the tolling of the church bells, the lynchers surrounded the men and dragged them into the town square, where they were stripped from their clothes, beaten up, and tied to the flagpole.

Rumors and the ringing of church bells can be both understood as techniques that serve to communicate and convoke a lynching. Other methods include the use of speakers or radio broadcasts to either spread rumors or, more directly, call people into action.[77] In the context of the United States, newspaper articles were used as means to announce the occurrence of a lynching, while the circulation of postcards became a means to publicize and even memorialize a lynching.[78]

In twentieth-century Puebla, newspapers described various cases of lynching at length, including their most gruesome and cruel details. However, images did not play a prominent role in the newspapers' narration of lynching until the 1970s, an indication of both the unpremeditated character of the attacks as well as the type of newspapers used by this research.[79] Nonetheless, over the last twenty years, other techniques to publicize and incite mob violence have emerged. These include the use of banners announcing that "criminals

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[75] "Ustedes destripan niños nos gritaba la gente," March 31 1993, *La Jornada de Oriente*'; see also Fuentes Díaz, "La justicia y la turba..." pp. 91-2.

[76] Héctor Raúl González, "Salvan a 5 de linchamiento en Tetela," *Excélsior*, October 20th, 2010.

[77] An example of this was the lynching of two men, accussed of kidnapping children in Huejutla Hidalgo on March 1998. "Por radio incitaron a sacarlos de la cárcel; desoyeron al gobernador," March 27th, 1998, *La Jornada.*

[78] Garland, "Penal excess and surplus meaning," 45.

[79] The newspapers analyzed by this research were not as graphic and crime-focused as *nota roja* newspapers. This may explain the relative lack of images. For an in-depth analysis of *nota* roja news in Mexico, see Piccato, "Murders of Nota Roja…"

will be lynched" if caught in flagrante (see image 1),[80] the circulation of pictures on social media, and the use of videos that circulate on the internet and are even sold on street markets.[81]

Image 1. Banner in San Martín Texmelucan, Puebla. The message reads: Organized Neighbors! Thief: if we catch you we wont take you to the authorities. We will lynch you!

Photo credit: Cecilia Espinoza

[80] Cecilia Espinoza, "Advierten que lincharán a delincuentes en colonias de Texmelucan," Municipios Puebla, February 7th, 2014, available at: http://municipiospuebla.com.mx/nota/2014-02-07/san-mart%C3%ADn-texmelucan/advierten-que-linchar%C3%A1n-delincuentes-en-colonias-de-texmelucan
[81] Isaín Mandujano, "Queman vivos a tres presunto violadores en Chiapas; venden DVD del linchamiento," *Revista Proceso*, June 11, 2013. To see some examples of the uses of these videos, see Monsivais, "Justicia por propia mano," 13-4.

As these examples suggest, lynching are highly communicative events. Their aim is not only to punish the particular offense that triggered the incident (a robbery, an accusation of child theft or witchcraft), but also to exert social control over those individuals whose conducts are regarded as deviant, offensive or threatening. Thus, while the lynching of a particular robber is meant to exemplify that crimes against property are not to be tolerated by a given community, lynchings against socialist teachers signaled the rejection of socialist ideologies as well as the defense of catholic practices. Stated in more "positive" terms, lynchings serve to delineate the social, moral, and political boundaries of a given community. They allow members of these communities to construct and project a sense of solidarity and cohesion vis-à-vis so-called transgressors even when, in reality, these communities are often internally fragmented along religious, political, and economic lines.

The body of the so-called offender is perhaps the most dramatic "instrument" that the lynch mob uses to communicate its intention to punish those individuals whose conducts are considered threatening or offensive. The particular cruelty used against victims of lynching confirms that their purpose is not only to neutralize a particular offender but also to utilize his or her body as a warning: this is how transgressors will be treated. By mutilating and torturing the body of the lynched person up to the point that he becomes unrecognizable, the victim of lynching looses his or her individuality. His body is dehumanized, objectified, and reduced to a marker of boundaries that ought not to be crossed. In the context of the United States, scholars have argued that by torturing and disfiguring alleged black offenders, white Southerners aimed not only at deterring a given crime but at humiliating, terrorizing, and ultimately, controlling black members of given communities.[82] A similar logic can be observed in twentieth-century Puebla, wherein Evangelicals, communists, witches, and so-

[82] Fuji, "The Puzzle of Extra-Lethal Violence;" Garland, "Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning…,"

called criminals have been, at different points of time, exposed and terrorized by lynch mobs. Beaten up, burned, hanged, or disfigured by machete blows, the body of these lynch victims emerges as a clear reminder of the types of conducts that are not to be tolerated.

Beyond its symbolic and instrumental uses, it is possible to situate lynching and the particular methods used to execute and torment lynch victims within Mexico's historical trajectory. Execution by hanging and burning, for instance, can be traced back to the colonial times, in the context of the New Spain's inquisition (circa 1520-1820).[83] In the nineteenth century, execution by hanging continued to be used by both royalist and insurgents during the war of independence.[84]

During the 1910 Mexican revolution and the brutal civil war that ensued, public hangings became a means to terrorize opponents, punished so-called bandits, and establish control of given territories.[85] Insurgents Francisco Villa and Emiliano Zapata and their followers resorted to particularly gruesome forms of violence that included: "cutting off prisoners' ears, gouging out eyes, even removing ears, tongues, and 'other parts of the body.'" Moreover, in the midst of revolutionary turmoil, popular violence broke out in the form of riots and the lynching of army officers, landowners, and foreigners, particularly Spanish, Americans, and Chinese.[86] During the Cristero war (1926-1929), both revolutionary agraristas and counter-revolutionary *cristeros* engaged in rather explicit forms of cruelty, including hangings and public executions (see Image 2).[87]

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[83] Moreno de los Arcos, "New Spain's Inquisition for Indians…"
[84] Van Young also documented popular forms of resistance that involved lynching, mutilations, and beatings. He suggests the use of clubs, stones, and knives over pistols or a more swiftly form of killing might be explained in regards to the communal nature of these attacks. See Van Young, *The Other Rebellion*, 630, n. 73; 108-10; 390-402.
[85] Knight, The Mexican Revolution: Counter-revolution and reconstruction.
[86] Knight, "War, Violence, and Homicide in Mexico," 24; Gómez Izquierdo "El movimiento antichino en Sonora"
[87] Meyer, "An Idea of Mexico: Catholics in the Revolution," 288-91.

Image 2. Catholics hanged along railroad tracks in City Guzmán, Jalisco; circa 1926. "*Cristeros colgados de postes de luz en Jalisco*," Museo Nacional Cristero

In some cases, the connection between revolutionary and post-revolutionary forms of violence is quite evident. Cutting off ears, for instance, became a distinct method to punish socialist teachers during the 1930s (see image 3). Enrique Rodriguez alias El Tallarín, one of the most prominent vigilantes to terrorize teachers in this period, was a former Zapatista militant.[88] The use he made of this peculiar technique of punishment was most probably grounded on his experience during the revolution. The cutting of ears can also be interpreted as a way to denounce the government's "deafness" towards those that opposed the socialist

[88] Salinas, "Untangligh Mexico's Noodle…"

education or as a means to mark the teachers' bodies in order to send a message to a broader audience.[89]

LLEGARON LAS MAESTRAS A QUIENES LES CORTARON LOS ALZADOS LAS OREJAS

contra ellas y contra su padre, por un

Image 3. Teachers Micaela and Enriqueta Palacios
"Llegan las maestras a quienes les cortaron los alzados las orejas" *Excélsior*
Sunday, November 24th, 1935.

[89] For instance, when on November of 1935 two "de-eared" teachers from Jalisco travelled to Mexico City to demand protection from president Lázaro Cárdenas, the circulation of their picture in the national newspapers served to publicize an attack that would have otherwise remained within the confines of local newspapers. "Llegan las maestras a quienes les cortaron los alzados las orejas" *Excélsior,* Sunday, November 24th, 1935.

Whereas the cutting of ears receded after the series of attacks against socialist teachers, hangings, burnings, and the disfigurement of the victim's body through beatings, stoning, and machete blows, has persisted up until today. As stated before, the level of brutality of lynching varies from case to case. Expressive violence is most present in those lynchings that acquire a more ritualized and public character. In this sense, variations in the levels of cruelty might be better explained in terms of the performative function -the publicity, duration, and size of the lynch mob- rather than merely in terms of the offense that precipitates the lynching. Accusations of witchcraft, for instance, have led to both "private lynchings"[90] organized by smaller groups as well as to more public attacks orchestrated by larger crowds. It is the later case where lynching seems to acquire a more cruel character.[91]

As stated before, the cases of lynching collected by this research present a particular geographical distribution within the state of Puebla. In order to discuss the geography of lynching, I will first situate Puebla in relation to the national level. I will do this by comparing the frequency of lynchings in this and other states during the 1980s-2010s period based on three different studies. Next, I will discuss the social and historic characteristics of those regions and towns of Puebla where most cases of lynching between 1930-2000 were documented.

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[90] Following Brundage, we can describe a private lynching as those collective killings were carried out behind doors and that lack the public and performative character of communal lynchings. See: Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 28.

[91] For instance, the lynching of Clara Fonseca in Tecamachalco on 1944 was carried out by a large group of neighbors who dragged her outside of her house and beat her to death with stones and clubs in the top of a nearby hill. Her corpse presented at least seventy injuries. In contrast, on November of 1945 in Cholula, five men broke into Delfina Hernández' house and shot her in the chest and stomach, killing her instantly; no other form of torment was used against her . See: "Linchamiento espantoso en un poblado," July 24th, 1944, *La Opinión;* "Otro salvaje crimen en Calpan," November 25th, 1945, *La Opinión.*

Geography of Lynching

Drawing on data collected from local and national newspapers during the 1980s-2010s period, three different recent studies suggest lynchings are concentrated in the center and southern regions of Mexico (see Map 1 and Table 2). [92] All three studies single out Mexico City, State of Mexico, Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Puebla amongst the states with higher number of lynchings at the national level. Mexico City and the State of Mexico are ranked as the first or second localities with the highest number of lynchings in the country, a fact that is not surprising considering that these are the two most populated states in the country.[93] If we arrange these states according to lynch rate, however, the ranking changes. Based on lynch rate, the state of Morelos, the State of Mexico and Hidalgo, respectively, are listed as the most prominent case in each of these three studies.[94]

With the exception of the northern state of Chihuahua, which figures prominently in one of the studies, lynch rates confirm the geographical concentration of lynching in the center and southern regions of Mexico. Furthermore, the state of Puebla, based on lynch rate, is consistently ranked within the seven states with greatest intensity of lynching.

As can be observed in map 1, Puebla shares its eastern and western borders with five of the states with higher incidence of lynching in the country: State of Mexico, Morelos, Guerrero, Hidalgo and Oaxaca. The geographical proximity between these states may help explain the discernable similarity between the sequence of events- tolling the bells, gathering

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[92] Fuentes Díaz, "Violencia y Estado, mediación y respuesta no estatal,"117; Guillén et al, "Linchamientos: recuento de un periodo largo," 57; Gamallo, "Crimen, Castigo y Violencia Colectiva," 92.

[93] According to the National Institute on Statistic and Geography (INEGI) in 2000 the total of population in the State of Mexico was 13, 083, 359, while in Mexico City it was 8, 891, 309. INEGI, *Indicadores Sociodemográficos de México*, 11.

[94] The second state with greater intensity of lynching in each study is Chiapas (in Fuentes Díaz), State of Mexico (Rodríguez Guillén et al) and Mexico City (Gamallo), respectively.

on the town's square- characterizing the more ritualized lynchings taking place in these localities.[95]

Map 1. Map of Mexico

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, México; www.cuentame.inegi.org.mx

Table 2. Total of Lynching* and Lynch Rate** Per State at the National Level
Different studies

	Fuentes Díaz (1984-2003)	**Rodríguez Guillén et al (1988-2014)**	**Gamallo (2000-2011)**

[95] See: Fuentes Díaz, Fuentes Díaz, "Violencia y Estado, mediación y respuesta no estatal,"138-9; Gamallo, "Crimen, castigo y violencia colectiva,"124-5.

	State	Total of incidents	Lynch rate	State	Total of incidents	Lynch rate	State	Total of incidents	Lynch rate
1	State of Mexico	33	0.80	State of Mexico	109	0.83	State of Mexico	111	0.84
2	Mexico City	69	1.14	Mexico City	54	0.62	Mexico City	87	1.01
3	**Puebla**	**27**	**0. 53**	**Puebla**	**38**	**0.74**	**Puebla**	**21**	**0.41**
4	Morelos	21	1.35	Morelos	33	0.83	***	***	***
5	Oaxaca	39	1.13	Oaxaca	27	0.78	Oaxaca	21	0.58
6	Chiapas	45	1.14	Chiapas	19	0.48	Chiapas	20	0.56
7	Guerrero	15	0.48	Guerrero	16	0.52	***	***	***
10							Hidalgo	33	1.47
9							Chihuahua	18	0.59
8	Other states	82		Other states	70		Other states	91	
Total of cases per study		331			366			403	

Source: Elaborated by author based on studies by Fuentes Díaz, Guillén et al, and Gamallo
*All studies include lynchings and attempts of lynching in their calculation
** Lynch rate calculated by author based on 2010 population data from INEGI[96]
***Indicates that those states are not amongst the top seven states in Gamallo's study

An analysis of the possible reasons behind the geographical concentration of lynching in these particular states goes beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, three general observations about their historic and current demographic characteristics can be made. First, as mentioned before, most of these states belong to the central and southern regions of the country. Characterized by a strong racial stratification system during the colonial times, these states remained divided between large estates and small agrarian villages where many Indians lived landless and impoverished.[97] During the 1910 Mexican Revolution, central Mexico became one of the most important bastions of the armed struggle, particularly of the Zapatista agrarian uprisings.[98] In the following decades of the twentieth century, these states

[96] INEGI, Indicadores Sociodemográficos de México, 11.
[97] Nutini and Issac, *Social Stratification in Central Mexico*, 3, 46-52; Powell, "Priests and Peasants in Central Mexico…,"297.
[98] La France, *Revolution in Mexico's Heartland;* Lewis, "The Nation, Education, and the "Indian Problem" in Mexico," 177-9.

witnessed the emergence of some of the most prominent armed rebellions led by peasants and indigenous communities.[99] Moreover, they have been the locus of communal and indigenous systems of justice as well as of organized groups of vigilantes and self-defense forces.[100]

Secondly, in terms of their current demographical makeup, these states enclose some of the municipalities with highest levels of marginalization in the country;[101] the exceptions here being Chihuahua, Mexico City, and Morelos. Although this data corresponds to the present context, it is indicative of deeper structural challenges that have a longer historical trajectory.[102] Furthermore, most of these states are within the top ten states with highest percentage of monolingual indigenous-speaking populations.[103] Rather than suggesting a correlation between indigenous communities and lynching,[104] this can be taken as another proxy of marginality, particularly as monolingual populations experience great difficulties to

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[99] Examples include the Jaramillista movement in Morelos (c.1943-1958), the guerrillas led by Lucio Cabañas, Genaro Vázquez and the Ejército Popular Revolucionario (EPR) in Guerrero (1960s-present), and the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas (1994-present).

[100] Examples include the Juzgados Indígenas in the Sierra Norte of Puebla, the Juntas de Buen Gobierno of Zapatista communities in Chiapas, and the Policía Comunitaria in Guerrero. More contentious and recent examples include the self-defense forces in Guerrero, some of which have been accused of being partially funded by drug-trafficking organizations. See: Sierra, "Indian Rights and Customary Law in Mexico;" Sierra, "Construyendo seguridad y justicia en los márgenes del Estado;" Johnson, "When the Poor Police Themselves…"

[101] Based on the 2010 marginality index of the *Consejo Nacional de Población* (CONAPO). The marginality index is based on education levels, income, living conditions (access to electricity, running water, etc) and degree of urbanization or population density. The index and the map of the municipalities with greatest levels of marginalization can be access here:
http://www.conapo.gob.mx/en/CONAPO/Indices_de_Marginacion_2010_por_entidad_federativa_y_municipio

[102] Nutini and Issac, for instance, argue that most of these states were characterized by a rigid class structure throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that resulted in greater levels of economic, cultural, and political marginalization. See: Nutini and Issac, *Social Stratification in Central Mexico*, 3, 46-52

[103]This data is based on the 2010 census by INEGI. Monolingual means an individual speakes only an indigeneous language and not Spanish. The top 10 monolingual states include: Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca Nayarit, Durango, Hidalgo, Chihuahua, Puebla, Michoacán, and Veracruz. INEGI, *La población indígena en México,* 22.

[104] Several studies on lynching in Mexico and Latin American countries such as Guatemala, Bolivia, and Ecuador have demonstrated that, despite media and official accounts, Indian communities are not more prone to lynching than mestizo ones. More importantly, Indian customary laws do not sanction lynching. See: Handy, "Chicken Thieves, Witches, and Judges…;" Sierra, "The Revival of Indigeneous ," Snodgrass Godoy, "When Justice is Criminal;" Goldstein, *The Spectacular City*; Krupa, "Histories in Red…"

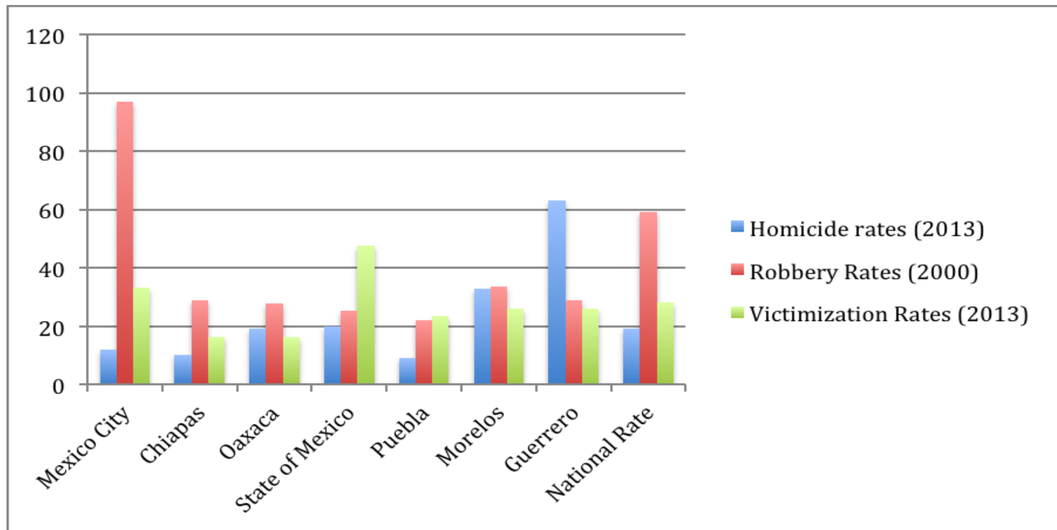
integrate into the economy and are particularly susceptible to discrimination by the justice system.[105]

Third, based on contemporary statistics on crime, most of these states have robbery rates, homicide rates, and victimization rates below the national average (see Graph 4). Nonetheless, there are important exceptions. Mexico City's robbery rate surpasses the national rate by 64%. Guerrero's homicide rate more than triples the national average, whereas the homicide rate of Morelos, State of Mexico and Oaxaca are either slightly above or equal to the national rates. Furthermore, the victimization rates of the State of Mexico and Mexico City are both above the national rate. Thus, although scholars have argued that lynching are more a response to fear of crime than to actual levels of crime,[106] an important body of literature suggests that victimization can be an important predictor of support for extralegal violence and vigilantism.[107]

Graph 4. Homicide Rates (2013)[108], Robbery Rates (2000),[109] and Victimization Rates (2013)

[105] See Sierra, "Indian Rights and Customary Law in Mexico..." 232-3.
[106] Snograss Godoy, "When Justice is Criminal," 628
[107] Osorio, "Support for torture…"; Ribeiro and Wood, "Quality of Democracy, Victimization, and the Resilience of Political Culture in the America;" Cruz and Santamaría, "Crime and Support for Extra Legal Violence in Latin America."
[108] INEGI, Boletín de Prensa Núm. 201/14, 7.
[109] Rates calculated based on 2000 population data from INEGI. Piccato "Estadísticas del crimen en México: Series históricas, 1901-2001,"
INEGI.http://www.columbia.edu/~pp143/estadisticascrimen/EstadisticasSigloXX.htm

National Rate and Selected State Rates



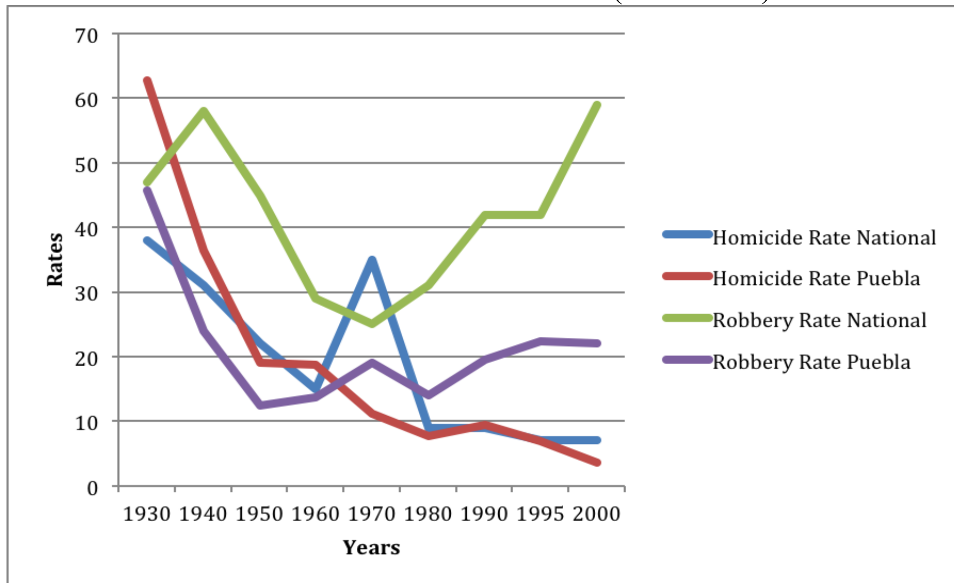
Source: Elaborated by author based on INEGI (homicide rates); Piccato, *Estadísticas del Crimen* (robbery rates) and ENVIPE (victimization rates)

The state of Puebla is below the national rate on the three indicators: homicide, robbery rates, and victimization. This confirms the trend in homicide and robbery rates, based on total of indicted cases, which has characterized the state over the last seventy years (see Graph 5). Since the 1930s, Puebla has consistently shown robbery rates below the national rate. The state's homicide rates were higher than the national rate up until the 1950s, but this tendency changed drastically in the following decades. Since the 1970s, Puebla has had a homicide rate of less than 12 homicides per 100 thousand inhabitants.[110] Following this characterization, it can be argued that Puebla has historically been amongst those states with either lower or average levels of lethal violence. Nonetheless, robbery rates did experience a considerable increase between 1980 and 1995, going from 14 per 100 thousand inhabitants to

[110] Even when homicide rates increased at the national level between 2007 and 2011, going from 8 to 24 homicides per 100 thousand inhabitants, Puebla's homicide rate remained relatively low, going from 5 to 7 homicides per 100 thousand inhabitants. INEGI Boletín de Prensa Núm. 201/14, 7.

22.[111] The same trend, with higher and more pronounced spikes, can be observed at the national level. As argued in Chapter 3, this sudden increase in robberies may account for the seeming increase of perceptions of crime and the rise of lynching against so-called criminals.

Graph 5. Homicide and Robbery Rates Based on Total of Indicted Cases National and Puebla (1930-2000)

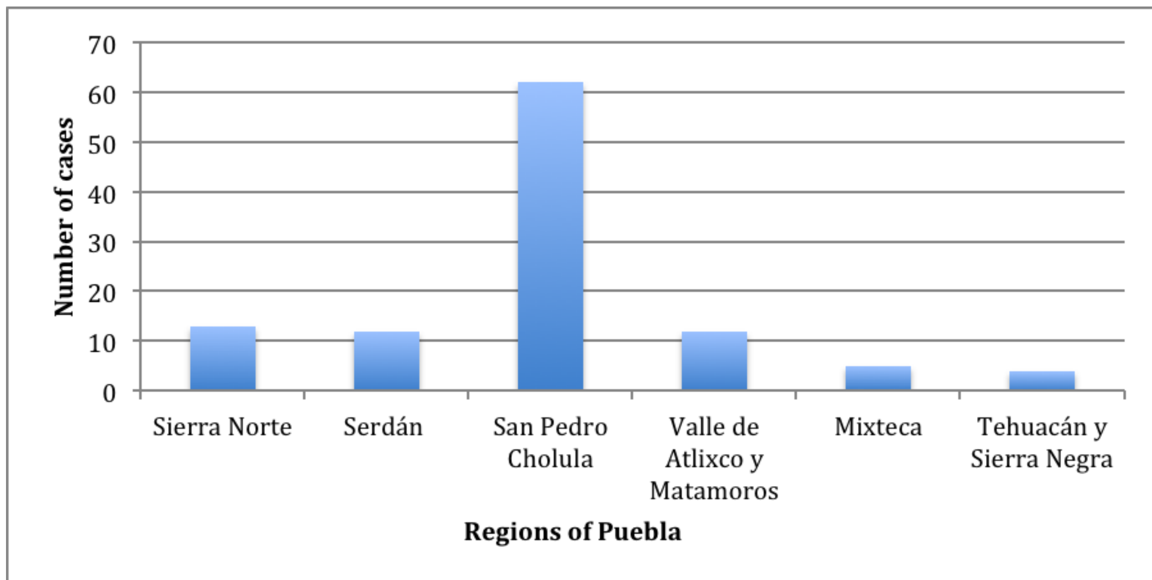


Source: Elaborated by author based on Piccato "Estadísticas del crimen en México: Series históricas, 1901-2001"

The geographical distribution of lynching within these different states, either by region or municipality, has not been examined by any of the three studies mentioned above. My research does offer an approximation as to the geography of lynching within the state of Puebla. This is based on the cases included in this research's database.[112] As mentioned earlier, most cases documented by this research are concentrated in four regions of Puebla: San Pedro Cholula (62), Sierra Norte (13), Valle de Atlixco (12), and Serdán (12) (see Graph 6).

[111] Calculation based on Piccato "Estadísticas del crimen..." and INEGI population data.
[112] As with the frequency of lynching, a more extensive revision of newspaper reports and other sources would be necessary in order to further establish the geography of lynching.

Graph 6. Distribution of cases within Puebla's different regions



Source: Elaborated by author based on database

These regions are located in different points of the state and share borders with different states of Central Mexico (see map 2). Whereas the Sierra Norte region borders with Hidalgo and the northern part of Veracruz, the regions of San Pedro Cholula and Valle de Atlixco are located next to the states of Tlaxcala, Estado de México, and Morelos. The eastern region of Serdán, on its part, shares a long border with the state of Veracruz and a smaller borderline with Tlaxcala.

Map 2. Regions of Puebla

Source: INAFED, Enciclopedia de los municipios y delegaciones de México
http://www.inafed.gob.mx/work/enciclopedia/EMM21puebla/index.html

Shaped by long-term historical processes, each of these regions has a distinct social and political character. This character has, at different points of time, informed ideologies and predispositions behind lynching and other expressions of collective violence in these regions.

For instance, The Sierra Norte region was scenario to some of the most violent attacks-both organized by vigilantes and lynch mobs- against the socialist education promoted by Lázaro Cárdenas government. Hostility was driven by the perception of teachers as both intrusive and disruptive of local beliefs and customs. Local landowners and priests further stirred these animosities, and which were driven by their rejection of both the agrarian and anti-clerical character of the socialist education.[113] Amongst those resisting the

[113] Kay Vaughan, Cultural Politics in Revolution, 121-3.

socialist education were members of the Ávila Camacho family,[114] who had resided for many years in the town of Teziutlán, in the Sierra Norte. Teziutlán together with Zacatlán, Huachinango, Naupan, Pantepec, and Chignahuapán, were some of the towns in the Sierra Norte where teachers were victimized. Next to this overt hostility towards socialist teachers, my research further documented the existence of tensions and antagonism towards Evangelicals during the 1950s in the Sierra.[115] Hostilities against Evangelicals would be, nonetheless, more prominent in the region of Serdán.

With this in mind, the Sierra Norte has historically been characterized by a rooted sense of autonomy. During the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century, the region was the stronghold of important indigenous cacicazgos such as that of Juan Francisco Lucas (c. 1834-1917) and Gabriel Barrios (c. 1888-1964).[116] The relation between Sierra communities and central authorities has been one of strategic cooperation and militant resistance, underpinned by a firm defense of local autonomy. Indigenous soldiers from the Sierra Norte supported both the liberal wars and the Mexican Revolution. In both occasions, it was an interest in retaining local autonomy rather than the defense of a national agenda what drove Sierra communities into armed struggle.[117] The agrarian reform was weak in the Sierra Norte, which meant that mestizo landowners and *hacendados* continued to dominate

[114] The Ávila Camacho family was highly influential at the regional and national levels. It included Maximino Ávila Camacho, governor of Puebla (1937-1941) and Minister of Communications and Public Works (1941-1945) and Manuel Ávila Camacho (president of Mexico 1940-1946) .

[115] For instance, in Hueytamalco, a town next to Teziutlán, a crowd of Catholics attacked the house of Evangelicals with stones and pistols in 1958; furthermore, in Tlatahuiquetepec, also in the Sierra, an Evangelical minister was murdered with the support of the local priest and the local authorities. See: Telegram to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortínez signed by Antonio García and Tomás Martínez, August 11, 1958; Fondo Presidentes, Conflictos Religiosos, Exp. 571.1/167; Telegram to President Adolfo López Mateos, signed by Antonio Cabrera Valdez , December 26, 1958, Fondo Presidentes, Homicidios, Exp. 541/8

[116] La France and Thomson, "Juan Francisco Lucas: Patriarch of the Sierra Norte;" Brewster, *Militarism, Ethnicity, and Politics in the Sierra Norte*.

[117] Brewster, Militarism, Ethnicity, and Politics, 30-6; La France, *Revolution in Mexico's Heartland*, 40-7. According to La France Serranos kept a close alliance with the Constitucionalistas or Carrancistas during the Mexican Revolution..

the social and political organization of indigenous communities during the post-revolutionary period.[118] Ethnographic studies suggest Sierra communities have retained a strong social stratification, based mainly on class and ethnicity.[119] They also suggest Indian villages are regulated by communal forms of organization, with customary law being observed in parallel to formal mechanisms of access to justice.[120]

Located in the northeastern part of the state and neighboring the state of Veracruz, Serdán was also a hotbed of assaults against socialist teachers.[121] The robust presence of *agraristas* in this region meant that local peasants did not resist the agrarian underpinnings of the socialist education. However, communities rejected secularism and, under the influence of Catholic priests, came to perceive the presence of teachers as morally dangerous. Thus, in towns like Quecholac and Chilchotla teachers were attacked due to their anticlerical and secularizing policies. Catholics also targeted Protestants in the town of Quecholac, in retaliation for their support of the socialist education.[122] Violence against Protestants would intensify in the following decades; albeit less informed by anti-socialism and more by intra-community conflicts such as access to resources and Protestants' reluctance to participate in communal festivities. Vigilantes and lynch mobs targeted Evangelicals during the 1940s and 1950s. In the towns of Acatzingo, Cuyoaco, Esperanza, and Guadalupe Victoria, Evangelicals were lynched, expelled, and their houses burned down by mobs of Catholics.[123] Evangelicals were also collectively attacked by Catholics in Veracruz and in neighboring

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[118] Sánchez Gavi, "La fuerza de lo religioso y su expresión violenta," 153.
[119] Nutini and Issac, *Social Stratification in Central Mexico*, 66.
[120] Sierra, "Indian Rights and Customary Law in Mexico…," 235-6.
[121] For instance, vigilante groups commanded by Clemente Mendoza and Odilón Vega operated in both Veracruz and Puebla. See: Gavi, "La fuerza de lo religioso y su expresión violenta," 143.
[122] Kay Vaughan,*Cultural Politics in Revolutioni, 91*.
[123] AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Manuel Ávila Camacho, Serie Asesinatos/Atropellos, Exp. 542.1/1221

towns such as La Gloria, which borders with Guadalupe Victoria.[124] All these events point at the apparent commonalties between Veracruz and Puebla in regards to trajectories of violence. They also point to the relevance of geographical proximity in explaining particular waves of collective violence.

The towns and municipalities that comprise the region of Serdán had an active participation in the 1910 revolution and were home to strong agrarian movements during the 1920s and 1930s.[125] Thus, in contrast to the Sierra Norte, the agrarian reform did result in a broader distribution of lands amongst the peasantry in this region.[126]The agrarian struggle did not go unchallenged, however. Paramilitary groups hired by local landowners, known as *guardias blancas* (white guards) and *defensas rurales* (rural defense forces), attacked and killed agrarian peasants throughout the 1930s. These groups were supported by Maximino Ávila Camacho, who had been appointed military commander of the state in 1935 and who would govern the state with iron fist from 1937 to 1941.[127] In the neighboring state of Veracruz violence against agraristas was also widespread. Under the command of cacique Manuel Parra, who was a closed ally of Maximino and Manuel Ávila Camacho, a paramilitary group known as "*Mano Negra*" (Black Hand) carried out multiple assassinations against *agraristas*.[128] Similar to Puebla, attacks against agrarian peasants were orchestrated by landowners in conjunction with local authorities. These organized forms of violence

[124] De la Luz García, "Ciudadanía, representación y participación cívico-política..." 21-2.
[125] Pansters, *Power and Politics in Puebla*, 39.
[126] Vaughan, *Politics in revolution* , 77; Pineda Franco, "La formación de la liga de comunidades agrarias…"
[127]Letters addressed to the president on behalf of peasants from municipalities such as Tlachichuca and Chilchotla illustrate the extent to which state and local authorities were complicit with the extrajudicial violence exercised against defenders of the agrarian reform. See: " La Confederación Campesina Mexicana se queja del asesinato de los citados (Castulo Guerra y Fernando Sanchez)", Galería 5, Serie Asesinatos, Caja 52, 2/012.2(18)92; " Quejas contra Isidro Gonzaley y Zenon Fabián," Galería 5, Serie Asesinatos, Caja 52, 2/012.2(18)1640, Exp. 66. Pineda Franco also describes how in the municipality of Chalchicomula, nearly 50 houses of peasants were destroyed and set on fire with the support of federal forces. Pineda Franco, "La formación de la liga de comunidades agrarias…" 40-1.
[128] According to one estimate 2,000 peasants were killed by the Mano Negra during the 1930s decade. See: Santoyo, "La Mano Negra en defensa de la propiedad y el orden,"94.

contributed shaping the politics of mob violence, as illustrated by the lynching of Simon García in the context of ongoing conflicts over access to communal lands in the town of Quecholac.[129]

Geographical proximity is also relevant to understand the politics underpinning collective violence in the region of the Valle de Atlixco. Situated next to Morelos, the Valle de Atlixco was an area susceptible to the actions of Enrique Rodríguez alias El Tallarín. As mentioned above, El Tallarín was a former Zapatista who joined the uprising against the socialist education in the second half of the 1930s. In this region, agrarian peasants opposed the socialist education, based on their interest to uphold local autonomy *and* popular forms of Catholic religion.[130]In addition to violence against socialist teachers, the Valle de Atlixco region provided the scene for lynchings against state authorities (from mayors to health inspectors) as well as of mob killings that involved the participation of state authorities.

The Valle de Atlixco was connected to the Zapatista insurgents during the 1910 revolution and was, like the east region of Serdán, a solid ground of agrarian mobilizations.[131] Regarded by Puebla elites as the *"tierra caliente"* (hot land) of the state and as a region prone to violence and revolts, the Valle de Atlixco witnessed some of the most violent confrontations amongst peasants and workers from different political affiliations.[132] It was in this region, in the Chietla valley, where the controversial William O. Jenkins

[129] Letter addressed to President Lázaro Cárdenas signed by Albina Hernández and Francisca García, Documentación de la Administración Pública, Serie Asesinatos, Caja 52, 2/012.2(18)113/2, Exp 39.
[130] Sánchez Gavi, "La fuerza de lo religioso," 154.
[131] La France, *Revolution in Mexico's Heartland*, 37;
[132] Salient amongst these confrontations were the violent encounters between agrarista peasants and those working as "encasillados" within the sugar mills, as well as the conflict between independent and official unionized workers. Gomez Carpiteiro, "La modernidad contendida," 105, 112. Pansters, *Política y poder en* Puebla, 119-20.

established an agrarian industry based on the production of sugar and alcohol.[133] It was also in this region where textile industry workers from Atlixco, organized in two antagonistic unions, one independent and one coopted by the government, would engage in a series of vicious clashes that claimed the lives of dozens of workers during the 1930s.[134]

The region of San Pedro Cholula plays host to most of the cases of lynching collected by this research. It comprises lynchings organized against state officials, witches, decapitators (*degolladores)*, communists, and so-called criminals. The region includes the city of Puebla, the greatest urban center of the state and the historical nucleus of the aristocracy and the business elite.[135] In 1900, Puebla was considered the second most important city in the country after Mexico City, based on its population.[136]Moreover, it was amongst the top twelve cities with the highest numbers of haciendas and aristocratic families.[137] In the context of the Mexican Revolution, urban elites opted for a pragmatic and moderate agenda that would allow them to retain their autonomy and economic privileges, and to promote a capitalist and modern form of development.[138] Characterized by a conservative mentality, elites also sought to maintain their traditional alliance with the higher ranks of the Catholic Church, with whom they shared an interest in defending private

[133] Jenkins (1878-1963) was a former consult of the United States in Puebla who managed to become millionaire based on his astute political skills and his connections to local and regional politicians. Using repression and cooptation, Jenkins managed to neutralize agrarista peasants and control large extensions of land at the height of the agrarian reform in Mexico. Quintana, "The President Who Never Was," 122.
[134] The two antagonistic unions were the independent Federación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos (FROC) and the official Confederación Regional Obrera de México (CROM). The later was supported by Maximino Ávila Camacho, while the first was highly critical of his rule and thus became the target of systematic repression on behalf of his government. Gauss, "Masculine Bonds and Modern Mothers," 67-70; Pansters, *Política y poder en* Puebla, 119-22; Pineda Franco, "La formación de la liga de comunidades agrarias…" 83.
[135] Gómez Carpinteiro, "La modernidad contendida," 105.
[136] Hernández, "Espacio urbano y la modernización…"
[137] Nutini and Issac, *Social Stratification in Central Mexico*, 100-2.
[138] La France, *Revolution in Mexico's Heartland*, xix-xx.

property and so-called traditional values.[139] Urban dwellers regarded themselves as the vanguard of the government's efforts to modernize the country and yet their attitudes towards lynching, as revealed by newspaper editorials during the 1930s, were ambivalent. Whereas lynching driven by so-called mythical fears were regarded as expressions of the ignorance that persisted amongst rural populations and lower class urbanites, lynchings driven by criminal conducts such as rapes and homicides were perceived as exemplary punishments and as a means to attain justice. It was in this region where lynchings and private vendettas against witches were documented with greatest frequency during the 1940s and 1950s. Geographical proximity offers once again a possible explanation for this, as various towns in this region and in the Sierra Norte shared a deep-seated belief on witchcraft with the neighboring state of Tlaxcala, at least until the 1960s.[140]

During the 1980s, the city of Puebla as well as other towns and cities throughout the state witnessed a surge in levels of crime, particularly robberies.[141] This context, together with the deterioration of the economy, made so-called criminals the main target of lynching. This trend has continued up to the present, as suggested by the various cases of lynching that involve the victimization of robbers and kidnappers.[142]As will be explained in Chapter 3, lynchings against so-called criminals are the latest iteration of a longer history wherein Puebla communities have, at different points of time, decided to punish and eliminate individuals considered dangerous or threatening.

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[139] Peralta, *Las santas batallas*, 17-20.
[140] Romero and Pech, " La muerte violenta de los niños por las brujas en Tlaxcala;" Nutini and Roberts, *Bloodsucking witchcraft*, 118.
[141] Binford, "A failure of normalization…," 131-2.
[142] See, for intance, "Intentan linchar a plagiarios en Puebla," *La Jornada de Oriente,* August 18th, 2008; "Se salvan de linchamiento tres presuntos ladrones en Cuayucatepec," *La Jornada de Oriente*, February 2nd 2015; "Frusta la policía el linchamiento de un presunto ladrón de ganado en Azumbilla," *La Jornada de Oriente*, April 9th, 2015.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the sources, methods, and concepts informing my research. It has also presented the main characteristics of lynching and provided an ideal typical definition of this practice, based on historical patterns and sociological observations. It situated Puebla within the present-day national context (1980-2010) and examined thereafter the geographical distribution of lynching within the state during the 1930-2000 years. As will become evident in the following chapters, lynchings are shaped by political and religious conflicts, as well as by shifting conceptions of deviance and danger. As such, despite their short-lived character, the occurrence and organization of lynchings needs to be situated within long-term historical processes. Their anatomy and geography is thus a result of a broader history of state formation, criminality, and religion in twentieth-century Puebla, which the next chapters will attempt to elucidate.

CHAPTER 2

Crooked Officials, Vigilantes, and the Lynch Mob:

Lynching and State Formation in Post-Revolutionary Puebla

On February 23 of 1940, Albina Hernández and Francisca García addressed the president of Mexico in order to denounce the lynching of Simón García in Quecholac, Tecamachalco.[143] In their letter they described how Simón, Albina's son, Francisca's brother, had been lynched by a mob of thirty people in what they described as an *auto de fé*. According to both women, the mayor had instigated the attack. After asking Simón to come to his office, the mayor allegedly accused him of giving away people's communal lands to the ranch of "El Carmen" and then turned him over to the crowd. The lynch mob, which was already waiting for him armed with sticks, daggers, and machetes, killed Simón. It then dragged his corpse through the streets of the town.

In the letter, the women explained that Simón had indeed returned the lands, but only because the commissioner of the communal land (*ejido*) had ordered him to do so. They further stated that the mayor had no right to "have sentenced Simón García to be lynched by the people." They asked the president for justice, as local authorities had done nothing to correct this "heinous crime." On account on their protest, their lives were now under the threat from both neighbors and local authorities.

[143] Letter addressed to President Lázaro Cárdenas signed by Albina Hernández and Francisca García, Documentación de la Administración Pública, Serie Asesinatos, Caja 52, 2/012.2(18)113/2, Exp 39.

Situated in Tecamachalco, a municipality that had actively participated in the 1910 Revolution and in the agrarian reform that ensued,[144] the lynching of Simón García illuminates the intricate connection between politics, extrajudicial violence, and the lynch mob in twentieth-century Puebla. Occurring in the 1940s, this lynching was not an isolated event. Indeed, I have documented at least 25 cases of lynching during the same decade in Puebla. Provoked by varying circumstances motives, whether political and religious conflicts or the desire to punish an alleged wrongdoing or crime, the lynchings square poorly with dominant characterizations of this period. Mexico's historiography had, up until recently, depicted the 1940s as a moment of steady political consolidation, social pacification, and economic development.[145] The state of Puebla, in particular, has been portrayed in similar terms. After experiencing significant social and political turmoil during the 1920s and 1930s, the state was thought to have enjoyed a period of social and political stability.[146] This change was attributed to Maximino Ávila Camacho, the feared caudillo that governed the state through cooptation and repression (1937 to 1941), and whose influence would be felt years after his governorship through the cacicazgo *Avilacamachista*.[147]

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[144] Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in the Revolution*, 83-5.
[145] As stated by Gillingham, the 1940s were interpreted as the moment wherein "a successful elite" was able to tame the disorder of the previous years and govern under a bureaucratic mode of domination. Gillingham, "Maximino's Bulls,"176. For further critiques of this historiography, see: Padilla, *Rural resistance in the land of Zapata,* 7-9.
[146] Puebla's political elites were highly divided and the state was subject to constant conflicts between conservative and revolutionary factions that defended the agrarian reforms and workers' rights. For instance, from 1911 to 1933, the state had a total of 27 governors. None of them were able to finish their period. See: Quintana, "The President that Never Was:...", 82; Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla,* 107-8.
[147] The cacicazgo *Avilacamachista* refers to the political network built by the Ávila Camacho family in the state of Puebla and at the national level. It included the brothers Maximino (governor of Puebla 1937-1941 and Minister of Communications and Public Works 1941-1945), Manuel (president of Mexico 1940-1946) and to a lesser extent Rafael (mayor of Puebla city 1939-1941 and then governor in the 1950s). According to Pansters, the network was characterized by a high degree of discipline and unity and it included President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz (1964-1970) and governor Antonio Nava Castillo (1965-1966). Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla*, 117. See also Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 77; Quintana, "The President that Never Was,"192.

How can we explain the presence of lynching,[148] a public, illegal, and particularly cruel form of collective violence, at the height of Maximino's political control over the state of Puebla? Furthermore, how can we make sense of the presence of the lynchings in Puebla, and in Mexico as a whole, throughout the twentieth century despite of the country's apparent process of modernization and democratization? As noted in Chapter 1, this dissertation has documented cases of lynching in Puebla for all the decades covered by the study (1930s-1990s), including those decades often considered more stable and less violent (1940s-1950s). Moreover, according to studies carried out at the national level, lynchings actually increased during the 1980s-2010 period. Fuentes Diaz argues the number of lethal lynchings increased from an average of 10 cases per year in the 1980s to more than 40 by the second half of the 1990s.[149] By the same token, Rodriguez Guillén documented an increase in the number of lynching, from a total of 107 between 1988 and 1999 to 129 between 2000 and 2010.[150] In both accounts, Puebla is listed amongst the top seven Mexican states, out of a total of 31, with the highest incidence of lynching in the country.[151]

Focusing on the1930s through the 1970s period and based on the regional history of Puebla, this chapter seeks to understand the impact of Mexico's post-revolutionary process of state formation[152] in the persistency and ongoing legitimacy of lynching.[153] Concentrating on

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[148] As stated in Chapter 1, in the context of Mexico, lynchings involve the torture, mutilation, burning or hanging of the victim in prominent public spaces. As in other Latin American countries, a lynching may or may not result in the victim's death. See Huggins, *Vigilantism and the State in Modern Latin America,* 1-18.
[149] Fuentes Díaz, *Linchamientos, Fragmentación y Respuesta en el México Neoliberal*, 83.
[150] Rodríguez Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social: los linchamientos en México," 48-9.
[151] Other states with relatively higher intensity of lynching include Mexico City, Oaxaca, Estado de Mexico, Morelos, Guerrero, Veracruz and Chiapas, all located in the center and southern regions of the country.
[152] By state formation I am referring to the ongoing process of institutionalization and legitimization that allows the state to be recognized by citizens as the ultimate source of authority, sovereignty, and legitimate use of violence. The "weight" of the state on citizens' lives involves both the material capacities of the state (to collect taxes, wage war, measure and control people and territories) as well as on its symbolic power (to be perceived as legitimate, through cultural politics, discourse, and ideology). See Knight, "Weight of the State in Modern Mexico;" Scott, *Seeing like a State;* Loveman "The Modern State and the Primitive Accumulation of Symbolic Power."

state formation seems pertinent in light of this process' expected effect, at least under its classical Weberian conception, on the monopolization of the legitimate use of physical force and in the eventual decline of other actors' claim to the "right to use violence."[154] Understood as a non-linear process, rather than as a *fait accompli,* the monopolization of violence depends both on the material and institutional capacities of the state, as well as on the cultural and symbolic aspects that render the state's use of force legitimate, desirable and sovereign in the eyes of the governed.[155] In this sense, the decline on public forms of violence and the pacification of everyday life depends both on the emergence of a more centralized authority, as well as on the development of a set of cultural norms that privilege civil behavior and self-restraint in social interactions.[156]

Nonetheless, as scholars working of Latin America have argued, the process of state building may help to "de-pacify" social relations. The incursion of modernizing and centralizing states into previously autonomous communities, particularly in the form of census-taking, military conscription, taxation, and secularization campaigns, gave rise to various forms of popular and violent resistance in twentieth-century Latin America.[157] Furthermore, the presence of political elites and state actors who were willing to bend the law or exercise illegal forms of violence to pursue their own private interests, contributed to the

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[153] As explained by Black, lynchings and other acts of self-help are not considered a criminal conduct in the eyes of perpetrators but are seen as a legitimate form of crime control or as a way to punish deviant behavior. The fact that lynchings are carried out in visible public spaces indicates that perpetrators do not consider their actions illegitimate. Black, "Crime as Social Control," 34-45.
[154] Weber, "Politics as Vocation."
[155] Loveman, "The Modern State and the Primitive Accumulation of Symbolic Power."
[156] According to Elias, elites were central in the development of this *civilizing process.* Based on the historical trajectory of Western Europe, Elias describes how elites transitioned from a class of knights to a class of courtiers thanks to a dual process of social interdependence and social differentiation that rendered the use of violence amongst elites unnecessary and undesirable. Elias, *El proceso de la civilización...,*232-4.
[157] See: Loveman, "Blinded like a State..."; Joseph and Nugent (eds.), *Everyday Forms of State Formation...*; Mallon, *Peasant and Nation..."*

perpetuation of violence and the undermining of the rule of law in the region.[158] As argued by Pearce, in Latin America, elites have traditionally privileged the use violence as a means to preserve authority and retain economic privilege. As such, they "have neither themselves come to abhor and reject violence, nor have they contributed to state-building where violence is legitimately monopolized."[159] As a consequence of this, civil society actors have also come to embrace violence as a legitimate means to resist political rule and contest notions of citizenship and justice.[160]

Literature on Mexico's state formation during the twentieth century has also pointed at the ways in which the politics and policies of this process contributed to the de-pacification of social relations.[161] So-called modernization projects were at the heart of the post-revolutionary state and included the incorporation and control of previously autonomous communities that attempted to negotiate, resist, and at times subvert, the encroachment of the state.[162] Moreover, political elites added to blurring the lines between legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, forms of violence, through practices of corruption, repression, and the establishment of "parainstitutional forms of social and political control."[163] By using

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[158] O'Donnell, "On the State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems;" Auyero et al. "Violence and the State at the Urban Margins," 108; Pearce, "Perverse State Formation and Securitized Democracy in Latin America."

[159] Pearce, "Perverse State Formation and Securitized Democracy in Latin America," 298.

[160] Goldstein and Arias (eds.), *Violent Democracies in Latin America...*pp. 4-5.

[161] I am aware that Mexico's process of state formation has a longer genealogy. In particular, the reforms and modernization projects promoted by nineteenth-century political elites, which included conscription, taxation, and secularization campaigns, contributed shaping the politics of state building in the twentieth-century. Nonetheless, given the temporal scope of this project and my focus on post-revolutionary politics, my references to the nineteenth century will be rather limited. To see more on Mexico's state formation during the nineteenth century at the national level and in Puebla in particular see: Thomson and LaFrance, *Patriotism, Politics, and Popular Liberalism*; Van Young, *The Other Rebellion*; Hale, *The Transformation in Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico*; Bazan, "La Iglesia, el Estado y la sublevación conservadora de Puebla en 1856," Mallon, *Peasant and Nation.*

[162] Rath, "Que el cielo un soldado en cada hijo te dio;" Bantjes, "Saint, Sinners, and State Formation;" Kay Vaughan, "Nationalizing the countryside…"

[163] Pansters (ed). *Violence, Coercion, and State-Making*, 24. See also Padilla, *Rural resistance in the land of Zapata*; Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements*.

the military and the police in order to secure their rule and advance their interests, governing elites promoted a politicized and partial understanding of justice and security provision in post-revolutionary Mexico.[164] This understanding would eventually feed into the emergence and proliferation of non-state actors, from armed vigilantes to lynching mobs, which claimed the right to exercise violence as their own. In other words, Mexico's process of state building itself contributed to the advent of a plural and decentralized exercise of violence.[165]

As suggested by these approaches, the process of state formation involves both "civilizing" and "de-civilizing" forces.[166] Accordingly, lynchings are not to be understood as an aberration of this process, but rather as an expression of the different forces shaping Mexico's process of state building. In light of this, the argument of this chapter is three-fold. First, I argue that, particularly during the 1930s, lynching can be read as an expression of the discontents and divisions produced by the post-revolutionary state project. That is, lynchings signal how, despite authorities' efforts to gain the hearts and minds of local communities, the presence of the state remained fragmented and contested in regards to its legitimacy to decide over matters such as education, religion, and access to resources. As such, lynching targeted the so-called modernizing forces of the state, including secular teachers, health inspectors, and public engineers in charge of developing public works. Secondly, I argue that lynchings

[164] Müller, *Public Security in the Negotiated State,* 32-4; Davis, "Policing and Regime Transition;" Bailey, *The Politics of Crime in Mexico*, 13-28; Gillingham and Smith, *Dictablanda*; Rath, "Que el cielo un soldado en cada hijo te dio;" Gillingham, "Who killed Crisping Aguilar?"

[165] It should be noted that, in the Latin American context, Mexico had been traditionally considered a strong and centralized state, particularly when compared to the revolutions and coup d'états taking place in Central and South American countries throughout the twentieth century. This image only started to be seriously questioned during the last ten years, after the DTOs, gangs, and vigilantes took center stage.

[166] As conceived by Elias, the civilizing process is not unilinear but is historically contingent and can be reversed.
See on this point: Elias, *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*; Dunning and Mennell, "Elias on Germany, Nazism and the Holocaust..."

were part of a broader repertoire[167] of private, decentralized, and illegal forms of violence through which communities, individual citizens, and public officials sought to respond to alleged threats, resolve conflicts, and uphold the status quo. These expressions of violence resulted in a citizen ethos that regarded the law as uneven, partial, and therefore subject to being negotiated, altered, and privately appropriated.[168] This decentralized exercise of violence, which can be traced back to the revolution[169] and became part of the institutional fabric of the state of Puebla under Maximino Ávila Camacho, contributed to establishing lynchings as a legitimate means to resolve conflicts and respond to alleged threats. Finally, I claim that lynchings constituted a reaction against state officials whose behavior was perceived as corrupted, abusive or unjust. Directed mainly at the police, these attacks denote the state's inability to claim the legitimate monopoly over the exercise of punishment and social control.[170]

Historically speaking, there are two main changes that this chapter will address. First, whereas lynchings against the so-called modernizing forces of the state (i.e. health inspectors, secular teachers) seem to have receded during the 1950s, those targeting security

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[167] This repertoire included the actions of pistoleros, bandits, private militias, self-defense forces, as well as of police and military personnel motivated by private or political interests,

[168] See Müller's notion of the "negotiated state" in regards to the provision of security in Mexico (*Public Security in the Negotiated State);* Dormandy's discussion on the uneven and conditional application of the law in Mexico (*Primitive Revolution*...9-10); and Domingo's analysis of contemporary perceptions of the legal system as synonym of impunity and partial access to injustice ("Rule of Law, Citizenship, and Access to Justice in Mexico").

[169] Although the plural, decentralized and politicized use of violence did not originate in the revolution, we can argue that the revolution enhanced it by politicizing the role of security officials and by creating incentives for different groups to arm themselves. The revolution also contributed to the diffusion of crowd violence, including riots and lynchings, as the moment of political revolt allowed for the sudden reversal of the social and political order of the *Porfiriato*. Knight, "Habitus and Homicide," 114; Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation*, 11. Davis "Detective Story, Tracking the City Police.." Knight, "War, Violence, and Homicide in Mexico," 24. For a longer genealogy of crowd violence and politicized exercise of public authority, situated in the nineteenth century and turn of the century Mexico, see: Van Young, *The Other Rebellion*; Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police and Mexican Development*; Piccato, *City of Suspects.*

[170] As explained by Migdal, "state social control" implies the "successful subordination of people's own inclinations of social behavior…in favor of the behavior prescribed by state rules."Migdal *Strong Societies and Weak States,* 22.

officials have persisted up until today. This can be interpreted, on the one hand, in light of the capacity of the post-revolutionary state to render its modernizing project as legitimate in the eyes of given communities. Conversely, it can be understood as a result of the ongoing weaknesses of the state's security institutions, as expressed in the entrenched and persistent levels of corruption and citizen distrust characterizing them.[171] Secondly, while lynching during the 1930s signaled a critique of the socialist underpinnings of the central government, in the period from the 1940s to the 1970s, lynchings were in fact in tune with the conservative ideology promoted by the *Avilacamachista* regime. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, when informed by politics, lynchings articulated in both periods a reactionary and conservative conception of social order.[172]

I will illustrate these arguments by focusing on cases of lynchings perpetrated against state officials and by presenting evidence of extrajudicial killings that involved the direct participation of politicians and state actors, including some cases of "quasi-lynching." A few cases driven by religious ideologies and practices will also be analyzed, insofar as they allow us to underline the politics behind extralegal forms of violence during the 1940s-1970s

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[171] According to the 2014 victimization poll carried out by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), 93.8 of crimes go underreported in Mexico due to lack of trust on state institutions. Moreover, according to the 2014 Latin American Public Opinion Poll (LAPOP) only 36.5 of Mexican citizens considered that the judiciary will punish those who are guilty of a crime. See: INEGI, *Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública*, Zechmeister, *The Political Culture of Democracy in the Americas 2014*, 88.

[172] This is a characteristic shared by the history of lynchings in the American South as well as by the trajectory of necklacing in contemporary South Africa. As argued by Garland, lynchings driven by racial hostility constituted a reaction to the changes brought about by the end of slavery and the beginning of a new system of racial segregation (Jim Crow laws). In other words, lynching was a means to reassert the status and authority of Whites within the new social order. By the same token, in South Africa's post-apartheid era the practice of necklacing expresses a rejection towards the new system of rights brought about by democracy; which is perceived as an enabler of immorality and insecurity as it grants, in the eyes of perpetrators, "too much rights" to criminals. See: Garland, "Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning," 799-800; Smith, "New Situations Demand Old Magic."

period.[173] The reference to cases of lynching in parallel to, and at times conflated with, extrajudicial killings perpetrated by public officials may deserve some clarification. My aim in discussing these different forms of violence concurrently is to specify the context of abuse and impunity underpinning lynching. Furthermore, I am interested in pointing at the conspicuous resemblance between lynching and extrajudicial killings as well as in delineating the plausible impact of state forms of abuse on the legitimation of lynching. Although contemporary cases of lynching (1980s onwards) in Mexico and the rest of Latin America are rarely if ever described in connection to extrajudicial killings perpetrated by the state,[174] I believe that analyzing them together is central to understanding the persistency and ongoing legitimacy of lynching.[175]

The chapter will be divided into two sections and will follow a chronological order. The first section will focus on the 1930s, a key moment in both the development of the post-revolutionary project as well as a moment of resistance and contestation against the cultural, political and economic policies promoted by the state at the local level. The second part of the chapter will center on the 1940s-1970s period, which witnessed the expansion and decline of *Avilacamachismo*, as well the emergence and downfall of the so-called "golden years" of stability and economic prosperity.[176]

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[173] Although these cases are not the only type of lynchings registered during this period (there were also cases motivated by mythical beliefs and fear of crime) focusing on these examples will allow me to highlight the interaction between the state and local communities as well as the particular ways in which political elites contributed to pacify or de-pacify social relations.

[174] This contrasts with literature on lynching in the United States, where lynchings and vigilante forms of justice are often analyzed in tandem with the extrajudicial violence exercised by public officials (from mayors to sheriffs and police officers) and understood as a continuum of racial violence. Carrigan and Webb, "The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent;" Waldrep, "War on Words: The Controversy over the Definition of Lynching," 82; Garland, "The Peculiar Forms of American Capital Punishment."

[175] According to a 2014 survey carried out in Mexico at the national level 47.7% of respondents claimed that they approved or very much approved communities lynching criminals whenever authorities failed to capture them. Schedler, "Ciudadanía y violencia organizada en México," 65.

[176] The term "golden years" or "Golden Age" has been used by Mexico's historiography to refer both to the economic growth and alleged social and political stability that the country experienced from the 1940s up to the

The Post-Revolutionary Project and Its Discontents: Lynching during the 1930s

Often committed in opposition to what was perceived as an intrusion and potential threat on behalf of state officials, the occurrence of lynchings during the 1930s signaled the tense and even explosive relationship between state representatives and local communities in Puebla. Time and again did federal inspectors, rural teachers, tax collectors, soldiers, police officers, and engineers in charge of developing public works fall victim to people and communities who opposed and distrusted their presence. The 1930s were marked by the central government's efforts to create a more cohesive and stable political reality at the national level.[177] The 1910 revolution and the Cristero civil war (1926-1929) had revealed the multiple and divergent forces driving the country's local and regional development; thus, post-revolutionary *politicos* aimed at introducing social and institutional reforms that would enable the central state to gain a greater presence at the local and regional levels. Cultural politics, capitalist development, and the incorporation of teachers, workers, and peasants into a network tightly controlled by the newly founded *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR), afterwards *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), were be central elements to this endeavor.[178]

The transformations promoted by the central state, especially under Lázaro Cárdenas presidency (1934-1940), aimed at modernizing the countryside through secularization, sanitation and literacy campaigns, as well as through the promotion of an agrarian reform

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last years of the 1960s. The characterization of this period has been revised and brought into question by a recent body of literature that has pointed at both the economic inequality as well as the repressive and contested nature of the PRI's rule during these years. See: Rath, *Myths of Demilitarization*; Gillingham and Smith (eds) *Dictablanda*; Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata.*

[177] Vaughan, *Cultural politics in revolution*.

[178] Knight, *The Weight of the State*; Vaughan, *Cultural politics*

that would grant peasants one of the revolution's key promises: access to land. They were also aimed at "taming" and "bureaucratizing" regional caciques and caudillos through the structure of the dominant party, PNR, and through the de-politicization of security forces.[179] The 1910 revolution had opened up the possibility for various armed groups to act with a great deal of autonomy. This led to the mobilization of different factions in Puebla, who saw the revolution as an opportunity to assert their right to self-rule as well as to gain economic benefits.[180] In order to pacify the country, the central elites sought to attain a greater degree of control over caciques and caudillos,[181] and over paramilitary and self-defense forces[182] that had consolidated their influence at the local level during the civil war years.

These transformations faced both support and resistance in Puebla, reflecting communities' long-standing attitudes towards the intervention of the central state. In addition, they signaled the political divides underpinning the nineteenth-century struggles between liberals and conservatives and the 1910 revolution conflict between "Constitucionalistas" and "Convencionistas."[183] For instance, communities of the Sierra Norte of Puebla upheld a strong sense of local autonomy and Catholic identification during

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[179] Quintana, "The President that Never Was."
[180] LaFrance, *Revolution in Mexico's Heartland*, xv-xviii; Quintana, "The President that Never Was," 59, 75.
[181] For Quintana, both the cacique and the caudillo are characterized by authoritarians forms of rule. But, whereas the cacique's authority is often limited to a community or small region and relies mainly on kinship, the caudillo's influence can reach the regional and national levels and is based on charisma and clientelist networks. In the context of Puebla, Gabriel Barrios in the Sierra Norte of Puebla exemplifies the cacique while Maximino Ávila Camacho embodies the caudillo. Quintana, "The President that Never Was," pp. 4-9; Brewster, *Militarism, Ethnicity, and Politics.*
[182] This included the *defensas sociales* (responsible for defending, in principle, the agrarian reform and the revolutionary project), *guardias blancas* (armed groups organized by landowners and local caciques) and *agraristas* (organized peasants who claimed or sought land). Rath, *Myths of Demilitarization*, 36; Knight, "Habitus and Homicide," 114.
[183] According to LaFrance, there were two main forces shaping Mexico's revolutionary process in Puebla: the "Constitucionalistas" and the "Convencionalistas," with the later group including the Zapatistas. Whereas the former wanted to promote the transformation of Puebla into a "modern, capitalistic, secular, outward-looking entity;" the latter privileged a vision based on a "largely agrarian, inward-looking, religious, mostly self-sufficient political and socioeconomic system." LaFrance *Revolution in Mexico's Heartland*, 89.

the nineteenth century liberal uprisings and the 1910 Mexican Revolution.[184] During the 1930s, these same communities took center stage in the violent reactions organized against secularization campaigns and public schooling programs promoted by the central government.[185] By the same token, the two main forces shaping Puebla's political landscape- one secular and progressive, and another religious and conservative- underpinned the social and political tensions that continued to divide the state in the 1930s and also in the 1940s-1970s period.[186] The politics behind lynching and extrajudicial forms of violence in 1930s Puebla expressed these contentious dynamics. I focus below on episodes of collective violence against socialist teachers, extrajudicial killings that targeted *agrarista* peasants, and lynching directed at police and other security officials.

Between 1934 and 1938 a series of attacks against so-called socialist teachers took place within various rural communities in states like Puebla, Sonora, Michoacán, Jalisco, Veracruz, and Chiapas. The attacks involved the hanging, burning, shooting, mutilation, and rape of approximately 200 female and male teachers, most of them young, at the hands of organized armed groups and spontaneous mobs.[187] The victims were part of the government's official campaign to secularize and modernize the countryside through what became known as the socialist education project. The project sought to promote the modernization of rural and indigenous communities and their integration into the national economy. The establishment of the Ministry of Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*) in 1921 had set the basis for a nationwide education policy that involved the formation of

[184] Brewster, *Militarism, Ethnicity and Politics,* 35; La France, *Revolution in Mexico's Heartland,* 38-9; Bazant, "La iglesia, el estado y la sublevación conservadora en Puebla;" Mallon, *Peasant and Nation*, 24-5.
[185] Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in the Revolution*, 121-3.
[186] Arrazola Cermeño, *La oscura sombra del cardenismo*, 38-44.
[187] See: Jean Meyer "An Idea of Mexico: Catholics in the Revolution," 291; Raby, "Los maestros rurales y los conflictos sociales."

schools in rural communities.[188] However, the goals of socialist education would be more ambitious and, ultimately, more contentious. With the project, the federal government attempted to subsume and control existent rural schools by, for instance, replacing local teachers with federal teachers. It also sought to undermine the influence of the Catholic Church at the local level through the implementation of cultural missions that were overtly secular and even anticlerical.[189] Moreover, socialist teachers were to be the bearers of the agrarian reform promoted by the government. Thus educators became particularly entangled with local and intra-community politics.[190]

Given the secular, pro-agrarian, and anti-clerical character of the socialist education, socialist teachers encountered resistance from villagers who considered their presence intrusive. They also incurred the open hostility of priests and local elites.[191] In July of 1936 a group of villagers of the town of Cuatlancingo tried to burn the school and killed both the teacher and the federal inspector after the priest had urged them to get rid of the dangers brought about by the socialist education.[192] A year earlier, a teacher was tortured and tied to a rock in the municipality of Zacatlán; the perpetrators had also hanged the mayor and the president of the agricultural commission in protests against socialist education.[193]

Throughout 1935 various teachers were forced to abandon different towns of the state of Puebla in the face of threats of lynching and other forms of violence.[194] Other states to the east and west of Puebla experienced similar dynamics. In the western state of Michoacán,

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[188] Lerner, *La educación socialista*, 13.
[189] Lewis, "A Window into the Recent Past in Chiapas;" Vaughan, "Nationalizing the countryside…"
[190] Salinas, "Untangling Mexico's Noodle," 487.
[191] According to Vaughan, priests and elites contributed to spread rumors about teachers seducing wives or having boys and girls getting undressed in classes of sexual education Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 122.
[192] "Fue detenido un Sr. Presbítero," July 2nd 1936, *La Opinión.*
[193] "Mayor hanged in Mexico," June 2nd, 1935, New York Times.
[194] *La Opinión*, April 2nd, 1935. See also Sánchez Gavi, "La fuerza de lo religioso," 147; Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 123.

historian Marjorie Becker documented the hanging and killing of several teachers, many of them by lynch mobs. In one case, a professor was lynched in retaliation from having attempted to expel a local priest who "continued to celebrate Holy Week" in violation of official regulations. [195]On July 19th of 1938, the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* estimated that one socialist teacher was killed every ten days in Mexico.[196]

Whilst some of the attacks consisted of spontaneous mobs, others took the form of groups organized by former Cristeros and hired vigilantes.[197] Some of the most well known armed leaders operating in Puebla included Clemente Mendoza, Odilón Vega (alias el "desorejador de maestros"), Leodegario Cortés, Enrique Ramírez (alias *El Tallarín*) and Julio Mondragón. Clemente Mendoza, who was eventually caught and killed by federal troops, collaborated with the priest and landowners of the town of Teziutlán in Sierra Norte, including Maximino Ávila Camacho's mother, a fervent conservative Catholic.[198] Attacks orchestrated by these organized vigilantes included the killing of teacher Roberto Candanedo on September 1936 in Zacatlán;[199] the assassination of teachers Alberto Durán and Arnulfo Sosa by the infamous cristero Odilón Vega;[200] and the kidnapping and murder of teacher Silvestre Martinez and the mayor of Huachinango.[201]

Similar to more spontaneous lynchings, these attacks also took place in plain sight and involved the torture, mutilation, or hanging of both female and male teachers by groups

[195] Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire*, 125-6, see particularly footnote 36.
[196] "Un maestro es asesinado cada diez días en el país," *El Diario de Puebla*, July 19th, 1938.
[197] Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*, 6. See: Sánchez Gavi "La fuerza de lo religioso y su expresión violenta," 130.
[198]Vaughan, *Cultural Politics,*123; Arrazola Cermeño, *La oscura sombra del cardenismo,* 96. See also: Serie Asesinatos, Documentación de la Administración Pública, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter, AGN), Caja 53, 2/012.2(18), Exp. 62.
[199] Serie Asesinatos, Documentación de la Administración Pública, AGN, Caja 54--2/012.2(18)20533-Exp 40
[200] Telegram to the Ministry of Interior by Fausto Molina. Serie Asesinatos, Documentación de la Administración Pública, AGN, Caja 54, 2/012.2(18)24674, Exp. 54
[201] Letter to General Andres Figueroa by Engineer Clicerio Villafuerte, August 26th 1936; Serie Asesinatos, Documentación de la Administración Pública, AGN, Caja 54--2/012.2(18)19832, Exp 37.

of men that overwhelmed the victims. In July 11th of 1936, for instance, newspapers reported an attack against teacher Manuel Hurtado in Chilchotla, in the center-east of the state. Hurtado was beaten and severely injured by a group of fifteen men armed with clubs and pistols that left him unconscious on the road between Guadalupe Victoria and Chilchotla.[202] Two years later *El Tallarín* and his men killed teacher José Ramírez Martínez and two local officials in the southwest town of Tochimilco.[203] The men were allegedly shot and then hanged by a group of neighbors from a tree in front of the mayor's office.[204]

Teachers from Puebla and various other states organized protests in Mexico City demanding reparations for their attacks and asked central authorities to guarantee their rights and to allow them to take up arms.[205] Moreover, letters and urgent telegrams were sent to the Minister of the Interior as well as to the president himself denouncing the killings and condemning the negligence and complicity of state and local authorities.[206] For instance, on March 31st of 1938, a group of unionized teachers sent a letter to the president denouncing the abovementioned lynching of teacher José Ramírez Martinez. In the letter they openly condemned the attitude of governor Maximino Ávila Camacho, who had ignored their urgent

[202] "Fue asaltado un maestro rural cerca de Chilchotla," July 11th, 1936, *La Opinión*. For similar cases reported by the press, see: "Profesor rural federal víctima de un brutal asalto en el que se quiso matarlo," July 18th, 1936, *La Opinión*; "Maestro atacado a machetazos en Xicotlán, Chiautla," May 27th, 1937.

[203] "Otros asesinatos de la banda que manda el criminal Tallarin cometidos anteayer," *La Opinión*, March 2nd of 1938.

[204] Letter to the president signed by Jesus Ceja, Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Enseñanza. Serie Asesinatos, Documentación de la Administración Pública , Caja 55, 2/012.2 (18), exp. 30; see also Sánchez Gavi, "La fuerza de lo religioso y su expresión violenta," 136, footnote 56.

[205] "Unificación del magisterio nacional. Se instaló la convención de maestros," *El Universal*, December 9th, 1935; "Los maestros rurales ante el presidente Cárdenas,"*El Universal,* December 5th, 1935.

[206] Letter to the president signed by Prof. Jacobo Acebedo, July 16th, 1935. Serie Asesinatos, Documentación de la Administración Pública, AGN, Caja 53. 2/012.2(18); Unión Federal de Maestros Rurales de la 11va Zona del Estado de Puebla, November 17, 1935. AGN, Documentación de la Administración Pública: Caja 53, folio 2/012.2(18); Letter to Minister of Interior by Investigative Commission signed by Rafael Ponce and Antonio Mayés. Serie Asesinatos, Caja 52, Documentación de la Administración Pública, 2/012.2(18)114.

petitions to stop religious fanatics and had instead blamed teachers for provoking such attacks against them by engaging in "subversive activities" (*labores sediciosas)*.[207]

The teachers were right about doubting Maximino's commitment to protecting them. Since the moment he was appointed as military commander of the state, Maximino adopted a critical stance towards socialist education and built alliances with conservative groups in Puebla, including ranchers, landowners, and members of the Catholic Church. [208] Furthermore, he used rural defense forces (*defensas rurales)* as a means to fight *agraristas*[209] and paramilitary units to repress peasants and workers.[210] As a governor, he made it clear that the anti-clerical undertones of socialist education would not be supported or even tolerated, and he promoted a policy of reconciliation towards armed groups who opposed socialist education.[211] For instance, Leodegario Cortés and *El Tallarín* were granted amnesties, while Cortés was allowed to settle in the Chietla Valley with permission to use arms.[212] Although these measures can be interpreted as a strategic means to pacify the state and to try to demobilize so-called cristeros,[213] in practice they led to impunity and established a clear precedent that indicated that violence, even when illegal, would be partially sanctioned.

As these series of vigilante attacks suggest, the discontent towards the post-revolutionary project did not stem only from local communities. Rather, it was also

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[207] Letter to the president signed by Jesus Ceja, Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Enseñanza. Serie Asesinatos, Documentación de la Administración Pública, Caja 55, 2/012.2 (18), exp. 30.
[208] It is interesting to note that during the Cristero War (1926-1929) Maximino served as military zone commander in Jalisco, Colima, Zacatecas. In that context, he fought with brutality against the Cristeros who defended Catholic religion and opposed the secular state. He also sold arms to them, thought. See Gillingham, "Maximino's Bulls," 182; Quintana, "The President that Never Was," 79-80.
[209] Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 87.
[210] Quintana, "The President that Never Was," 105.
[211] During his political campaign, Maximino promised Puebla would be freed from communism and promoted a discourse based on unity and reconciliation and against the ideology of class struggle. Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla*, 140-1.
[212] Letter to president Cárdenas signed by Leodegario Cortés; letter to Secretario de Gobernación signed by Maximino Ávila Camacho, June 1938. Serie Asesinatos, Documentacón de la Administración Pública, AGN, Caja 54, 2/012.2(18)16739; Arrazola Cermeño, *La oscura sombra del Cardenismo*, 96-7.
[213] Arrazola Cermeño, *ibid;*

articulated by what would become the dominant political elite by the end of the 1930s. Despite the discourses that circulated in the press at the time, which claimed that violent reactions towards the post-revolutionary project were driven by the ignorance and religious fanaticism of peasants and indigenous people,[214] archival sources and the historiography of the period suggest otherwise. Conservative political elites, landowners, and Catholic priests, contributed to legitimate and in some cases helped organize these extralegal forms of violence. In order to understand how a conservative and pro-clerical elite established itself in Puebla at the same time that the central government promoted a socialist and secularizing ideology at the national level, we need to highlight Maximino's particular relationship with President Lázaro Cárdenas.

Maximino's appointment as Puebla's military commander had allowed Cárdenas to secure his influence over the state and against opposing factions within the PRI party. Moreover, in 1935 Maximino and his brother, Manuel, who would become president of Mexico (1940-1946), helped Cárdenas suppress an insurgency organized against him.[215] In exchange, Cárdenas supported Maximino's fraudulent election as governor of Puebla and tolerated the conservative and repressive policies he implemented in the state against unionized workers and *agrarista* peasants. As argued by Quintana, Maximino represented a new generation of caudillos, whose politics and abusive use of force would be tolerated as long as they contributed to consolidate the party's influence.[216] In terms of Mexico's process of state building this meant that the taming of caudillos privileged party discipline over the observance of the rule of law.

[214] See: Santamaría, *The Publics of Lynching Violence in 1930s Puebla.*
[215] Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla*, 112-3; Quintana, "The President that Never Was," 102-5.
[216] Quintana mentions other caudillos like Gonzalo N. Santos in San Luis Potosía and Saturnino Osornio in Querétaro. Quintana, "The President that Never Was," 57.

Extrajudicial killings perpetrated against *agrarista* peasants illustrate the extent to which Maximino and local public officials, such as mayors, were able to able to bend the law in order to advance their own political interests. Similar to communities' responses to socialist education, reactions to the agrarian reform were not homogeneous and were shaped by local politics as well as by the relation between peasants, landowners, caciques, and local priests. However, because Maximino privileged the interests of landowners[217]and promoted the organization of militias (*defensas rurales)* and paramilitary forces (*guardias blancas)* in order to control *agrarista* peasants, violence against the latter group was particularly pernicious and went largely unpunished.[218] Letters of complaint are illustrative of the dynamics that prevailed at the local level. On January 3rd of 1930, Candelaria Osorio addressed the president in order to ask for justice for the assassination of her son, Ambrocio Nieto, by the chief of the social defense forces of the town of Chimalhuacán. Together with a group of men, the chief beat her son and left his body hanging next to the cemetery. The killers were still free because, so alleged, they enjoyed the protection of the local cacique, Mr. Miguel Barbosa.[219]

Although letters of complain did not refer to extrajudicial killings against *agrarista* peasants as lynching, their public, illegal, and particularly cruel character points to the similarities between state and non-state forms of violence in 1930s Puebla. On September 7th of 1934, a letter signed by the president of the local committee of the PNR demanded justice for the murder of a group of *agraristas* who were hanged by their fingers and testicles by a group of armed men under the command of a man referred to as A. Tolomeco. A year later,

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[217] Maximino did distribute land, but this distribution was limited to those communities that supported him or that could contribute expanding his political influence. Pineda Franco, "La formación de la liga de comunidades agrarias...", 66; Quintana, "The president that never was," 135.

[218] Pineda Franco, "La formación de la liga de comunidades agrarias..." 62-4.

[219] Documentación de la Administración Pública, Serie Asesinatos, Caja 51, 2/012.2(18)53

on April 10 of 1935, the president of the agrarian committee, together with other peasants of the town of Xilocuautla in Huachinango, addressed President Cárdenas in order to demand justice for the abuses perpetrated by the mayor, Rafael Craviato. According to their letter, acting with the mayor's authorization, the local police broke into their houses, tortured them, and hanged two of them.[220] Similarly, on May 13th of 1937, a group of peasants denounced a series of killings organized by *defensas rurales* in collaboration with the mayor, which involved the torture and hanging of members of the agrarian committee of Cueyaplan, Naupan.[221]

As these cases show, the presence of irregular armed forces and the political use of security officials did little to advance the monopolization of the legitimate use of violence. Instead, they contributed to politicize the provision of security and to undermine public officials' sense of accountability, as the latter could deny their responsibility in extrajudicial killings by blaming bandits, political enemies, or irregular armed forces that operated in a gray zone between legality and illegality. Despite this, irregular armed forces were promoted by federal and state authorities, either to compensate for the lack of federal troops or police corps in given communities, or to gain the political loyalty of armed men who could otherwise threaten their control and influence.

In Puebla, Maximino countered the use of extralegal violence only partially and based on his political interests. He eliminated caciques that opposed his power and fought bandits that threatened his interests and those of the agrarian and business elite that supported him.[222] In parallel, however, he promoted the presence of irregular forces and informal power brokers (including caciques) that were willing to expand his influence within given

[220] Serie Quejas, Caja 139, 2.012.8(18)/100 , Exp. 37.
[221] Documentación de la Administración Pública, Serie Asesinatos, Caja 54 2/012.2(18)22656, Exp 48.
[222] Pansters, *Política y poder*, 112-3.

communities. He also promoted a politicized and partial understanding of security provision by enabling security officials to repress workers and peasants considered subversive. For instance, in April 1935 a group of unionized workers addressed President Cárdenas and complained about the killing of two of their members by federal troops acting under the command of Maximino Ávila Camacho.[223] The same year a peasants' organization in Chilchotla asked the president to intervene to punish paramilitary groups (*guardias blancas)* who, disguised as municipal police, had perpetrated various crimes in that town.[224] On January 12, 1936, Nicolás Gutiérrez addressed President Cárdenas in order to denounce the assassination of his nephew by Cholula's police chief, Vicente Jimenez, in the town's plaza. Gutierrez demanded justice and stated that Jimenez enjoyed impunity thanks to the fact that he served as the *pistolero* (or armed gunmen) of a local congressman and enjoyed the protection of the governor of the state.[225]

In addition to citizens' grievances, the local press offers a useful site to elucidate the extent to which security officials, at times acting under the orders of local deputies or mayors, contributed to a political climate dominated by illegality and impunity. Despite the existence of press censorship concerning "high politics", such as elections, party disputes and the actions of the president and governor,[226] crime news and press coverage about abuses perpetrated by local officials or "petty bureaucrats" were notorious for their apparent

[223] Documentación de la Administración Pública, Serie Asesinatos, Caja 52, 2/012.2(18)1101, Exp. 56. The central government turned a blind eye to this and other abuses carried out by Maximino against unionized workers who were not part of the official *Confederación de Sindicatos Obreros y Campesinos* (CROM). See Arrazola Cermeño, *La oscura sombra del cardenismo*, 158-9; Bortz, "The Genesis of the Mexican Labor Relation System..."
[224] " Quejas contra Isidro Gonzaley y Zenon Fabián," Documentación de la Administración Pública, Serie Asesinatos, Caja 52, 2/012.2(18)1640, Exp. 66
[225] Documentación de la Administración Pública, Serie Asesinatos, Caja 54, 2/012.2(18)120006, Exp. 15
[226] Maximino controlled the local press through tactics of intimidation and cooptation. This was the case of *La Opinión*, which after being critical of Maximino's election as governor, adopted an uncritical stance towards his rule. In parallel, Maximino supported the creation of *El Diario de Puebla,* which would become "his government mouthpiece." Quitana, *The president that never was*, 125; Arazola Cermeño, *La oscura sombra*, 18-9.

openness.[227] For instance, on May 24th of 1938, newspaper *Diario de Puebla* reported a "bloody disturbance" in the town of Axocopan between neighbors and police members.[228] The incident was initially caused by a brawl between Pablo Castillo and Aaron Tufiño, who owned competing transportation companies in the town. After the fight, and taking advantage of the fact that his brother was a local deputy,[229] Castillo mobilized the police (including the chief of the police himself) and led an attack against Tufiño's house. With machetes and axes, the policemen killed Tufiño and severely injured his wife. Castillo and his accomplices paraded Tufiño's dead body through the town, causing outrage among neighbors and provoking violent confrontations between them and the policemen. In narrating the same event, newspaper *La Opinión* stated that the crime had "…all the tragic and bloody characteristics of past times, when motivated by the Mexican revolution, there were gangs who organized themselves in order to assault, rob, and carry out personal vengeances."[230]

The cruel and spectacular character of these violent episodes suggests that public officials and law officers were far from purveyors of a "civilizing process." In fact, the press acknowledged the blurred lines between the "lynch mob" and the violence performed by public officials. For instance, on May 11th of 1930, the press reported a "triple lynching" perpetrated in the town of Tepetzala against three men who were confused with a group of criminals that had robbed a house days before. Far from preventing the attack, the town's mayor instigated the lynching by ordering the tolling of the church bells and by having the

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[227] As has been argued by Piccato "crime was a theme that allowed critical ideas about the government to be published with little or no censorship" in twentieth-century Mexico. Piccato, "Murders of nota roja...", 196.
[228] "Tremendo zafarrancho en Axocopan," May 24th 1938, *Diario de Puebla.*
[229] His brother was Antonio Castillo, a former textile worker turned union leader and then local deputy. Antonio Castillo was known also for using violence and bending for his personal use. See: Bortz, "The Genesis of the Mexican Labor Relation System..." 53.
[230] "Los esbirros del Dip. Castillo cometen un bárbaron crimen en el pueblo de Axocopan," May 24, 1938. *La Opinión.*

three men hanged from a tree, at the main plaza, right in front of the municipal offices.[231] Seven years later, another article reported that four men accused of robbery had been lynched in a school's patio in the town of Huitzilan in Tetela.[232] The article stated that the local authorities were responsible for the attack since they had apprehended the men and then turned them into the "*chusma*" (the mob) so they could take justice into their own hands. It also suggested an alternative interpretation: that the authorities may have hired the so-called perpetrators in order stage a lynching and be able to attribute the killing to the "pueblo."[233]

Whereas the two quasi-lychings described above were allegedly responses to criminal conduct, other cases were clearly motivated by private vendettas or political interests. This is evident in the quasi lynching of a group of alcohol inspectors sent by the federal government to the town of Nopalucan on August of 1939. The town's mayor, who was apparently drunk, had convoked villagers by tolling the church bells and managed to assemble a "town's rabble" (*una chusma pueblerina*) of thirty armed men who nearly lynched the inspectors. The newspaper stated the mayor had incited the attack in order to continue benefiting from an illegal distillery, which operated in the town without the federal government permission. It is important to note that the sequence of events and the "staging" of these lynchings were strikingly similar. These included the tolling of the church bells, the gathering of people in the main town's plaza, and the ensuing torturing of the victims.

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[231] "Un triple linchamiento fue perpetrado en el pueblo de Tepetzala ayer," May 11th 1930, *La Opinión*. Three months later, in the same town and also under the orders of the mayor, two men were hanged by a group of drunken men in the main plaza. The mayor had convoked town villagers by ringing the church bells and then had the men beaten up and hanged in an already agonizing state. "Prodigiosos crímenes en Santa Isabel Tepetzala," August 12, 1930, *La Opinión*

[232] "Exigirán responsabilidades a quienes lyncharon a 4 hombres en Huitzilan," May 21 1937, *La Opinión.*

[233] Authorities were suspected of "staging" a lynching decades before to cover up an assassination carried out by the police. The "fake" lynching was perpetrated against Arnulfo Arroyo, a man accused of attacking President Porfirio Díaz in 1897, while under police custody. See: Claudio Lomnitz, "Mexico's First Lynching: Sovereignty, Criminality, Moral Panic." *Critical Historical Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): 85-123.

Lynchings against security officials need to be read against the backdrop of these dynamics of abuse and corruption. In contrast to socialist teachers, who were attacked as a reaction to the modernizing policies promoted by the post-revolutionary state, police and military personnel were lynched in retaliation for transgressing their expected or official behavior. For instance, on September 24th of 1930, three policemen were almost lynched by a group of three hundred people armed with pistols in the town of San Luis Tehuiloyocan in Cholula, in the center west of the state.[234] The policemen were trying to arrest Cristobal Segundo, who faced criminal charges for having murdered a man, Luis Merlo, in the neighboring town of Chipilo. When the policemen arrived with the local judge at Cristobal's house in order to take him into custody, they suddenly heard the tolling of the church bells and saw a crowd gathering around them. After being beaten, the policemen and the judge were taken to the mayor's office, who was apparently drunk and did nothing to defend them. The men were not released until they signed a letter that cleared the mayor of any responsibility. Seven years later, in a poor neighborhood of Puebla city, the policeman Manuel Osorio was attacked by a “heartless horde” of nearly one hundred men. Osorio was trying to arrest a drunken man that was causing trouble, but a large crowd tried to stop him, taking his weapon and badge, and inflicting severe injuries upon him.[235] A newspaper article stated: “this black page of our social life…highlights one of the characteristic diseases of our people, amongst which appetites run free, barbarism is promoted, and people love pulque and fighting…”

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[234] "Seis personas iban a ser fusiladas sin formación de causa en Teohuiloyocan," *La Opinión*, September 24th, 1930, p. 1.

[235] "Gendarme víctima de brutal atentado por una horda de desalmados en el barrio de S. Matías," *La Opinión*, September 27th, 1937, p. 1.

Soldiers were subjected to similar torments on behalf of villagers who objected to their presence. On July 20th of 1939, in La Resurección, a *junta auxiliar* of the city of Puebla, soldiers Francisco Espinosa y Pedro Díaz were nearly lynched when they were caught cutting firewood in preparation for a barbecue.[236] A group of neighbors attacked them, breaking Espinosa's arms and fracturing Díaz's rips with machetes. Although in this case the soldiers were not wearing uniforms, and were thus probably confused with common bandits, in 1936, two uniformed soldiers suffered a similar attack in Huejotzingo, a town next to Cholula. They were lynched by a group of eight people; one of them was mutilated with machetes and the other one was beaten with stones and then hanged from a tree.[237]

As will be analyzed in the next section, lynchings against law officers and extrajudicial killings organized with the complicity of public officials continued into the 1940s, despite Maximino's fierce control of state politics and the establishment of *Avilacamachismo* at the regional and national levels.

Lynchings and Collective Violence under *Avilacamachismo* "Golden Years" (1940-1970s)

Episodes of lynching taking place during the 1940s-1970s need to be situated against the backdrop of the politics of state formation characterizing this period. The post-revolutionary state had managed to expand its presence and influence through the various modernizing initiatives it promoted throughout the 1930s. The project envisioned by the revolutionary elites, however, did not remain unaltered. Communities' antagonistic reactions towards some of the policies promoted by the state resulted in a more moderate approach to

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[236] "Soldados a punto de ser linchados ayer," July 20th 1939, *La Opinión*, p. 1.
[237] "Dos miembros del ejército fueron asesinados," December 1st 1936, *La Opinión,* p. 1.

questions of land holding and religion. This change was also enabled by the rise of a more conservative elite within the PRI party, which embraced anti-communism, reactionary forms of nationalism, and even a closer relationship to the Catholic Church. When informed by politics, lychings mirrored these newly established strands of conservative ideology. Lynchings also reflected the persistence of private and decentralized expressions of violence that were, in many cases, tolerated or even promoted by political elites.

By the end of the 1930s and beginning of the 1940s, Maximino had managed to undermine the influence of independent workers unions, such as the *Frente Regional de Obreros y Campesinos* (FROC). By supporting unions loyal to his government and by using extrajudicial violence to control dissenters, he was able to suppress radical labor politics. He had also weakened *agraristas* in the countryside through repression and co-optation and had contributed to the consolidation of a closely knitted agrarian and industrial elite.[238] Moreover, in 1940, Maximino's younger brother, Manuel Ávila Camacho, would become president of Mexico. With his brother in the presidency, Maximino was able to expand his political influence beyond Puebla. He was appointed Minister of Communications and Public Works in 1941, a position that allowed him to promote the interests of the PRI conservative factions and accumulate considerable wealth through corruption.[239]

Under the presidency of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) and his successor, Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-1952), the country deepened the model of capitalist development promoted under Cárdenas and shifted towards a conservative ideology and practice.[240] The government fostered foreign investment, industrialization via import-

[238] Gómez Carpinteiro, "La modernidad contendida,"127-9; Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla*, 120-30.
[239] Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 288-9; Paxman, "William Jenkins, Business Elites...", 264-4, 289-90.
[240] As summarized by Knight, "by the 1950s, the PRI looked more institutional than it did revolutionary," as a result of generational and ideological changes. Knight, "The End of the Mexican Revolution,...", 56.

substitution, and the creation of monopolistic businesses.[241] These policies, facilitated by the advent of the World War II and the opportunities opened for Mexico in the global market, derived in Mexico's so-called "economic miracle:" a GDP growth of 6.4 percent with low inflation rates from 1940 to 1960.[242]

Politically speaking, the new president distanced himself from the more progressive policies promoted in the 1930s, including the agrarian reform and the promotion of peasants' and workers' rights.[243] Instead, he promoted a message of unity, reconciliation, and discipline based on an anti-communist, nationalistic, and conservative ideology disseminated by a state-controlled press as well as by a film and television industry with clear links to the dominant political elite.[244] In contrast to the first post-revolutionary governments, which had either openly embraced anti-clericalism or defended socialism, Manuel Ávila Camacho proclaimed himself a believer ("*soy creyente"*) and opened channels of communication and collaboration with the Catholic Church, eliminating the socialist clause that characterized Mexico's model of education in article 3 of the Constitution.[245]

This narrative of macro-economic growth and social unity was, however, contradicted by the realities of growing inequality, social unrest, and political protests. Macroeconomic

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[241] Joseph and Zolov, *Fragments of a Golden Age,* 8-9; Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s,* 89. In Puebla, this model of capitalist development in alliance with foreign investors was already in place during the 1920s and 1930s. The case of William O. Jenkins, a United States consul turned agro-businessmen in the Southeast of Puebla is particularly illustrative of this trend. Through a process of political alliances with president Cárdenas and Maximino Ávila Camacho (*Jefe Militar* and then Governor of Puebla) Jenkins was able to develop a powerful agribusiness based on a virtual monopoly of the sugar production. Moreover, Jenkins was able to use the existent intra and inter community conflicts over access to land and water to his advantage. See Gomez Carpinteiro, "La modernidad contendida."
[242] Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices*, 19
[243] Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 89.
[244] In Puebla, Maximino had supported the creation of *El Sol de Puebla* and of other newspapers across the country founded by the businessman José García Valseca in 1945. The Valseca newspaper empire promoted an anti-communist and conservative ideology. The film industry, on the other hand, was controlled by Maximino's long-term ally, William O. Jenkins. See Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla*, 132-4; Paxman, "William Jenkins, Business Elites, and the Evolution...,"300-4.
[245] It also enabled the re-opening of the Catholic schools that had been closed down under the previous post-revolutionary governments. Camp, *Cruce de espadas,* 48-9; Dávila Peralta, *Las santas batallas,* 91-2.

growth benefited mostly a small economic elite comprised of foreign investors, domestic bankers, and industrialists that enjoyed the protection and support of the government. In contrast, the real incomes of both rural and urban workers declined; the peasantry was economically and politically marginalized; and urban workers were continuously repressed.[246] Puebla's economic development, in particular, was curtailed by a textile industry in crisis, a stagnant rural economy, and by high levels of unemployment during the 1940s and up to the 1960s.[247]In turn, armed mobilizations and protests in different rural and urban areas of the country grew stronger and deeper, revealing that the "golden age" of stability constituted, in fact, a period of "steady progression of social unrest."[248]

Urban mobilizations included the active participation of teachers, students, electricians, railway workers, and rioters, who protested against food shortages, price increases, political repression, and corruption.[249] In the countryside, resistance towards the government gave rise to peasant movements, popular protests, and even armed rebellion.[250] Popular discontent led to lynching and organized forms of resistance against the conscription campaigns promoted during the 1940s.[251]They furthermore resulted in attacks against police officers, health inspectors, and "crooked politicians."[252] For instance, on August 4th, 1942, a group of people assailed a police commander in the Belisario Domínguez neighborhood, in

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[246] The so-called law of "social dissolution," for instance, was used as a means to control political dissent amongst unionized workers. The law was introduced by Manuel Ávila Camacho in the Federal Criminal Code in the context of World War II to punish foreigners or nationals who disrupted the social order and national sovereignty. In practice, it became a means to exercise social and political control against "internal enemies". See: Herrán, "Bandits, Rebels, and Outlaws."
[247] Puebla continued to be predominantly rural during the 1960s. It would be until the 1980s where the state experienced a greater process of urbanization, with 56.75% of the population considered urban versus 39.19% in the 1960s. Quiroz Palacios, *Las luchas políticas en Puebla*, 14; Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla*, 168-72; Paxman, "William Jenkins, Business Elites, and the Evolution...," 365-71.
[248] Padilla, *Rural Resistance,* 7
[249] Gillingham, "Maximino's Bulls," 202-4; Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices,* 23-5.
[250] Padilla, *Rural Resistance…*
[251] Rath, "Que el cielo un soldado en cada hijo te dio," 517.
[252] Gillingham and Smith, *Dictablanda,* 12.

the city of Puebla, in retaliation for having harassed a local street vendor who was known for selling illegal products.[253] Years later, peasants from Jolalpan, Izúcar de Matamoros, a town located in southwest Puebla, attempted to lynch a group of health inspectors in charge of implementing a foot-and-mouth disease vaccination. According to a local newspaper, peasants blamed inspectors for the death of their livestock and thus decided to actively resist their presence in the town.[254]

In Puebla social and political unrest grew stronger in the 1950s. Different organizations challenged the authority of *Avilacamachistas* and their allies in the Catholic Church and the business sector. University students catalyzed popular discontent by building alliances with peasants and unionized workers who, despite levels of repression, continued to organize and struggle against state sponsored unions.[255] In 1961, a demonstration in support of the Cuban Revolution organized by students from the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (UAP) ended in a riot and the burning of the conservative and pro-government newspaper, *El Sol de Puebla*.[256] During the following months, violent confrontations between communist and anti-communist students would become a vivid reflection of Puebla's deep political polarization. In 1964, students, milk producers, and workers from the independent union *Central Campesina Independiente* (CCI), protested against a state law regarding the pasteurization of milk. Many believed the law would benefit the governor, Antonio Nava

[253] "Comandante policíaco sufre una paliza," *La Opinión*, August 4th, 1942.
[254] “Brigada anti-aftosa iba a ser linchada,” August 13th, 1949, *La Opinión.*
[255] Confrontations between the "official" union, CROM, and members of other unions such as the *Federación Regional de Obreros y Campesinos* (FROC) and the *Confederación de Trabajadores de México* (CTM) continued throughout the 1940s and until the mid-1950s, when an agreement amongst these organizations was reached in order to stop the long-term hostilities amongst them. Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla*, 185.
[256] Pansters, "Social movement and discourse..." 91.

Castillo, as he co-owned a pasteurization plant. The pressure exercised by these protests was such that Nava Castillo was forced to resign.[257]

As these examples suggest, the notion that the so-called golden years corresponded to a period of uninterrupted stabilization is historically inaccurate.[258] Moreover, the image of a passive and subordinated civil society is also highly contestable. Violent and non-violent forms of resistance continued to surface, despite the government's increasing capacity to co-opt and repress social and political demands through the party machinery,[259] and despite the elites' efforts to disqualify these protests as radical, threatening, and even anti-patriotic[260] Conversely, underneath the image of a centralized state authority persisted a coercive apparatus that, as argued by Rath, "remained multi-tiered, de-centralized, occasionally blended with the 'private' violence...and of distinctly patchy legitimacy."[261] For instance, the so-called "*ley fuga*," which entailed the extra-judicial killing of a criminal upon his alleged attempt to escape from the authorities, continued to be a common practice during the 1940s. Although it constituted an abuse of force by authorities, the *ley fuga* ultimately signaled the state's incapacity to provide justice through procedural means as well as the authorities' reliance on the fluctuations of public opinion, which would deem some criminals too dangerous or too vicious to deserve a legal trial.[262] Moreover, the state continued to promote

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[257] "El gobernador exhorta al orden," *El Sol de Puebla,* October 15th, 1964; "Nava Castillo solicitó licencia...," *El Sol de Puebla*, October 31, 1964; See also: Paxman, "William Jenkins, Business Elites, and the Evolution...,"
[258] For a critique of this period's traditional characterization, see: Gillingham and Smith, *Dictablanda;* Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements*; Gillingham, "Maximino's Bulls;" Padilla, *Rural Resistance;* Rath,"Que el cielo un soldado en cada hijo te dio."
[259] This increasing capacity resulted from the organization, during the 1930s decade, of peasants and workers under a structure that was subordinated to the PRI party. Knight "The Weight of the State in Modern Mexico;" Vaughan, *Cultural politics in revolution.*
[260] Communism in particular would be constructed as an anti-patriotic ideology that threaten national unity and that promoted the infiltration of foreign ideas and interests. Dávila Peralta, *Las santas batallas.*
[261] Rath, "Que el cielo un soldado en cada hijo te dio," 516.
[262] Piccato, "Ley fuga as justice," Gillingham, "Who killed Crispin Aguilar?..." 101.

the use of *defensas rurales*, whilst caciques and local politicians loyal to the PRI kept using *pistoleros*[263] and private militias in order to uphold their power.[264]

Similar to the extrajudicial killings perpetrated by militias and paramilitary forces during the 1930s, abuses committed by *pistoleros* allow us to illuminate the background of abuse and impunity underpinning the occurrence of lynching in Puebla. Letters of complaint and newspaper reports shed light on the ongoing presence of *pistoleros* in the state throughout the 1940-1960s period. On October 18th of 1956, more than a dozen men from Huauchinango described in a three-page letter addressed to the president, how a group of *pistoleros* under the orders of former congressman Alberto Jimenez Valderrábano, in collaboration with local politicians and the municipal police, kept their town under constant thereat, carrying out assaults and assassinations with impunity.[265] Cases of policemen turned *pistoleros* were also common, particularly in the context of the ongoing labor conflict amongst rival unions. On May 15th of 1956, a group of peasants described how the mayor of Tochimilco, Margarito Tufiño, had formed a municipal police formed by pistoleros who responded only to his personal orders. The signees claimed the police continuously harassed them for not having joined the official union, CROM, and demanded the disintegration of the municipal police and of the removal of the mayor.[266] In a similar case, a group of peasants from the town of Azuchitlan in Tehuitzingo denounced the assassination of their *compañero*

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[263] *Pistoleros* were private armed men hired by politicians and public officials in order to carry out "dirty jobs" (extrajudicial killings). As argued by Piccato, the term "pistolero" would become "a ubiquitous figure in the realm of crime, police, and politics" during the 1940s, although it "did not exist in criminological taxonomies." Piccato, "Pistoleros, Ley Fuga, and Uncertainty," 329.
[264] Rath, "Que el cielo un soldado en cada hijo te dio;" Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements*, 380-2; Hernández Rodríguez, "Strongmen and state weakness."
[265] The letter describes how *pistoleros* carried out robberies, assaults, assassinations, and were even responsible for running a prostitution business in the town AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez, Serie Homicidios, Expediente 541/804
[266] AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez, Serie Homicidios, Expediente 542.1/1184.

Crisoforo García in plain sight by a group of *police-pistoleros* from the town of Tejalpa. They demanded the disarmament of the police in order to prevent further crimes.[267]

Crimes committed by *pistoleros* were highly publicized by the press and, as has been argued by Piccato, they "expressed the state's limited monopoly of legitimate violence and the ample impunity of those associated with powerful actors."[268] For instance, on August 10th of 1960, in an attempt to respond to the public outrage generated by the assassination of a young businessman in the city of Puebla by a *pistolero*,[269] the military commander of the state, Ramón Rodríguez Familiar, declared that there would be no tolerance towards *pistoleros* and announced an imminent campaign of disarmament (*despistolización*).[270] He added that "specially now that Mexico has achieved a steady institutional development" to guarantee public order, citizens were not justified to bear arms illegally.[271] Citizens, however, seemed to disagree, as *pistolerismo* and various forms of vigilantism persisted in Puebla well into the 1960s and beyond.[272]

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[267] AGN. Documentación de la Administración Pública, Serie Asesinatos, AGN, Caja 50, 2/012.2(18)35.

[268] Piccato, "Pistoleros, Ley Fuga, and Uncertainty," 329.

[269] The victim was a young and successful businessman, Marco Antonio Esma Brito. The *pistolero* worked allegedly for the union leader Filemón Pérez Cazares. Similar to other cases that involved a member of the "respected" Poblano family, the killing of Esma Brito gained a great deal of attention and was closely followed by local newspapers, which attributed the actions of *pistoleros* to the "ineptitude" of Puebla's police. "La sociedad poblana condena el salvaje asesinato del joven M. Antonio Esma Brito," *La Opinión*, August 9th 1960; "Joven industrial asesinado a balazos," *El Sol de Puebla*, August 7th, 1960; "Poco interés de la policía por deter al matón," *La Opinión*, August 11th 1960.

[270] "No habrá contemplaciones con el pistolerismo," *La Opinión*, August 10th 1960.

[271] Paradoxically, just one year before, Puebla's attorney general had announced the creation of a "peasants' police" (*policía campesina)* to fight cattle rustling in the countryside, as neither the municipal police nor the military had the capacity to do it. "Creación de una policía campesina para combatir el abigeato, ponencia del procurador de Puebla," *La Opinión*, June 24th, 1959.

[272] Just a few days later, an editorial claimed that the state was in the hands of *pistoleros* and criminals due to the ineptitude of the police ("Puebla está a merced del hampa," *La Opinión*, August 27th, 1960). Moreover, as late as the year 1978 the local press reported the murder of the mayor and three more local officials in the town of San Nicolás de los Ranchos by a group of *pistoleros* in the context of the labor conflict between CROM and the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC) ("En San Nicolás de los Ranchos, 4 asesinatos por causas políticas," *La Opinión*, October 5th 1978). And in 1981, newspapers announced another campaign of *despistolización* carried out by the police to prevent *pistolerismo* ("Intensiva campaña de despistolización," *La Opinión,* July 21 1981). A basic electronic search reveals that the word "pistoleros" continues to be used by the Mexican press to

As stated before, lynchings reflected the political and social tensions characterizing the state of Puebla during these decades. Nonetheless, in contrast to social movements, student activists, and organized workers, lynchings did not represent a progressive political agenda and were hardly driven by a coherent, democratic critique of the government. On the contrary, lynchings stood closer to the conservative, anti-communist, and nationalistic ideology privileged by the political elites during this period. The following cases of lynching against Evangelicals and so-called communists illustrate this point.

In May of 1945, inhabitants from the town of Actipan de Morelos in the municipality of Acatzingo addressed the president in order to denounce a series of attacks perpetrated by a group of *Sinarquistas*, led by Esteban Mendez, a resident of the same town.[273] The term *Sinarquistas* refers to members of the National Sinarquista Union (*Unión Nacional Sinarquista)*, an organization founded in 1937 that expanded its presence in the state of Puebla during the 1940s. Driven by the political and religious underpinnings of the Cristero movement, the Sinarquistas incorporated the defense of fascist and ultra-nationalist ideas and a fierce commitment to fight communism.[274] The signees, on their part, described themselves as Mexicans, peasants, and Evangelicals. In their letter, they explained the assailants had broken into at least seven homes and then proceeded to torture, threaten and even kill members of their church. Leonardo Tamariz, the local minister, was forced outside of his house in the middle of the night and was shot in the town's plaza. They also broke into the house of Doctor Juan V. Montiel. When they did not find him, they decided to kill Enrique Aguilar, a young man who worked for Montiel. Aguilar was killed with machetes

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refer to henchmen hired by local politicians such as mayors, local caciques or, more recently, by drug trafficking organizations.

[273] AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Manuel Ávila Camacho, Serie Asesinatos/Atropellos, Exp. 542.1/1221

[274] Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*, 145; Dávila Peralta, *Las santas batallas*, 82-7.

and sticks, while Montiel's wife was undressed and forced out of her house. The signees asked the president to intervene as local authorities supported the Sinarquistas and had not done anything to protect them. Two telegrams were sent the following days to the president and the state governor stating Sinarquistas had surrounded them and had threatened to burn their houses and kill them unless federal troops were sent during the next 72 hours.[275]

On July of 1945, a group of Sinarquista perpetrated another attack, this time in the town of Esperanza, in the center-east of the state. In an urgent telegram sent to the president, members of the Committee for the Defense of Evangelicals urged federal authorities to intervene as a large group of Sinarquistas had surrounded their church and had already killed many of their members.[276] A month after this incident, in the same town, a group of Catholics tried to burn the houses of all Evangelical families and tried to lynch four Evangelicals, including Melquiades Lezama and three young women who were able to find shelter inside of a school.[277]

The analysis of similar cases in the state of Puebla and the historical trajectory of Protestant religions in Mexico suggests at least two reasons as to why Evangelicals were victimized by Catholic and conservative groups during this period. First, Protestants in Mexico have historically been more inclined to side with secularism and so-called modernizing forces,[278] as well as to adopt progressive or leftist ideas, including socialism and communism.[279] In Puebla, for instance, Protestants defended the agrarian reform and the

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[275] Luis María Martínez, Archbishop of Mexico from 1937 to 1957, was central in reestablishing the domain of the Catholic Church in the country by supporting the nationalistic and anti-communist discourse promoted by the government. See: De la Luz García, "Ciudadanía, representación y participación cívico-política..."
[276] AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Manuel Ávila Camacho, Serie Asesinatos y Atropellos, Expediente 547.5/22
[277] Informe de Ing. Carlos Reyes Retana, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DGIPS), AGN, Caja 98, Exp. 20.
[278] Besides secularism, Protestants have been more inclined to support literacy campaigns, break away with communal practices and adapt themselves better to social change. See: Gross, "Protestantism and modernity."
[279] Bastian, *Los disidentes: sociedades protestantes y revolución en México*.

implementation of the socialist education during the 1930s and were attacked by Catholics for doing so.[280] Secondly, Protestantism has been associated with the threat of "foreign infiltration" since the nineteenth century. For many Mexican Catholics, Catholicism was the only authentic "national" religion. Protestantism represented the interest of foreigners, capitalists, and imperialists, particularly from the United States.[281] This notion would be revitalized during the 1940s, with the advancement of Sinarquistas and the development of ultra-nationalist ideologies that resisted urban modernization and cultural change.[282]

The close relationship that existed between the Catholic Church and various local authorities meant that these attacks went largely unpunished. On July 3rd of 1949 in the town of Coronago in the municipality of Cholula, a group of more than twenty people assailed a family of Evangelicals, with the support of the mayor, the police commander, and the president of the *comisario ejidal*.[283] Armed with machetes and pistols, they broke into the family's house and left several of them injured. The incident was driven by religious differences between Catholics and Evangelicals that had for many years kept the town divided, but it was also caused by the attempt of Vicente Torres, the father of the family, to introduce electrification into the town.[284] A similar case took place in Mexico City in 1948, when a group of Catholics supported by the local authorities killed Antonio de la Cruz

[280] Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 91-2.
[281] Trejo, "La introducción del protestantismo en México..."; De la Luz García, "Ciudadanía, representación y participación cívico-política..." 12.
[282] Dormady, *Primitive Revolution*, 17; Meyer, "La iglesia católica en México," 75; Campbell, *La derecha radical en México*.
[283] The *comisario ejidal* was elected by members of the general assembly of the *ejido* (or communal land) and was in charge of overseeing the administration of the ejido. An intermediate figure between state institutions and the community, the position of *comisario ejidal* was often held by local bosses. See: Nuijten, *Power, Community and the State*...48-50.
[284] According to local newspapers, Torres had recently received from the federal government the amount of $10,000 pesos to make electricity available in the town. Torres was probably not just a regular local but may have been either active in politics or businesses; otherwise, it would not make much sense for him to have received such amount of money. A later article suggests that the mayor and the police commander may have wanted to steal the money from Torres. "Tremendo zafarrancho en un pueblo," *La Opinión*, July 7th, 1949; "Se averigua un nefando crimen," *La Opinión*, July 13th, 1949.

Carmona and kidnapped Espiridión Carmona, both Evangelicals.[285] Years before, on December 30th of 1944, in the municipality of Huatlatahua in Puebla, a group of Evangelicals wrote President Manuel Ávila Camacho to condemned local authorities who, together with so-called social defense forces, had broken into their homes, assailed them, and imprisoned them merely for practicing their religion.[286]

Despite the various letters and telegrams sent to President Manuel Ávila Camacho and Miguel Alemán, the central government neither condemned these attacks publicly nor provided an effective protection to these citizens. As a result, attacks against Evangelicals continued to occur with considerable frequency until the 1970s,[287] with more isolated cases persisting over the last three decades.[288] For instance, on September 4th of 1963, in the municipality of Ixtepec, Puebla, Evangelicals were arrested by the mayor and then beaten up by a group of policemen because they refused to contribute to the renovation of the town's Catholic Church and to give donations to the local patron saint.[289] Five years later, newspapers reported that inhabitants from San Juan Tepulco in Acajete had been forced to flee their town after hundreds of Catholics had burned their houses and injured various members of their church.[290]

Violence against Evangelicals and other Protestant religious minorities during the so-called golden years was not limited to Puebla. Cases were reported in other southern and center states of Mexico including Oaxaca, Veracruz, Guerrero, Chiapas, Michoacán, Hidalgo

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[285] AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Miguel Alemán, Serie Homicidios, Expediente 541/502

[286] AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Manuel Ávila Camacho, Serie Asesinatos/Atropellos, Exp. 542.1/1221

[287] See also Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DGIPS), AGN, Caja 1505C, Exp. 10- 11 for lynchings and attempts of lynchings taking place in Toluca and Oaxaca in the years 1979 and 1980, respectively.

[288] According to Fuentes Diaz, from the total of 294 cases of lynching that he documented between 1984 and 2001, 5 were organized against Evangelicals. The cases took place in indigenous communities of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Puebla.

[289] "Alcalde inquisidor," *El Liberal Poblano*, September 4th, 1963

[290] "Persecusión de evangelistas," September 20th, 1968, *Novedades de Puebla.*

and Mexico City.[291] Evangelicals and Protestants were lynched, expelled from their communities, had their homes and churches burned, and were even deprived from burying their dead.[292] For instance, in San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, dozens of indigenous families that had converted to Protestantism had their homes burned and were forced to flee while "the municipal authorities 'looked the other way'" in 1967.[293] These episodes of violence helps us bring into question the notion that the stabilization of Church-state relations that resulted from political elites' "conservative turn," somehow helped pacifying social relations on the ground.[294] The Catholic Church had certainly been able to secure a place for itself within Mexico's political landscape by supporting the government's anti-communist and conservative agenda; however, this did not result in the "taming" of so-called militant Catholics. Even when the influence of organizations such as the *Sinarquistas* declined by the end of the 1940s, other Catholic and anti-communist organizations such as the the *Frente Universitario Anticomunista* (FUA) and the *Movimiento Universitario de Renovadora* (MURO) strengthened their presence during the 1950s and 1960s, in the context of student mobilizations at both the local and national levels.[295]

Extralegal and collective forms of violence driven by anti-communism would continue throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, both in the city and in the countryside. Young people in general and university students in particular were depicted as prone to communist

[291] De la Luz García, "Ciudadanía, representación y participación cívico-política..." 18.
[292] "Persecusión de evangelistas," September 20th, 1968, *Novedades de Puebla*; De la Luz García, "Ciudadanía, representación y participación cívico-política..." 22.
[293] As explained by Collier, animosity towards Protestants in Catholic-dominated communities in Chiapas is informed by Protestants' refusal to participate in Catholic festivities and to consume alcohol (sold and controlled by civil-religious authorities) as well as by their alliance with political parties that threaten the PRI presence in the state. Collier, "The New Politics of Expulsion," 37-9.
[294] For instance, Soledad Loaeza has argued "In 1940 Mexico entered a long period of social stability as a result of the consolidation of the political system created by the 1910 Revolution and of a steady process of economic development." Loaeza quoted in Dávila Peralta, *Las santas batallas,* 84.
[295] Pensado, "To Assault with the Truth;" Dávila Peralta, *Las santas batallas*.

and "foreign" ideas and were therefore regarded as a potential source of social disorder. In Puebla, newspaper reports about juvenile gangs assaulting individuals and their families gained visibility during the 1950s, whilst both media and official discourses depicted university students as communists, socially deviant, and as having no respect for national values.[296]

On September 14th of 1968, in the town of San Miguel Canoa in Puebla, hundreds of members of the community (official records refer to 800) lynched five university workers from the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (UAP), after having accused them of being communist students. The case, analyzed at length in the chapter on lynchings and religion of this dissertation, signals the impact that these public discourses and representations could have at the local level. More importantly perhaps, it further reveals the intricate connections that existed between Catholic religion, anti-communism, and politics in the state of Puebla. As in previous cases, the close relationship between the priest and local authorities contributed to the impunity of this lynching. Although 16 people were found guilty of homicide, damage against property, and illegal possession of arms, amongst other charges,[297] none of the people arrested served time in prison.[298]

Writing more than a decade after the lynching in Canoa, Mexican investigative reporter Manuel Buendía published in his column "Red Privada," an article describing how various Catholic organizations were inciting, through the use of pamphlets, the lynching of a group of communist leaders, including Valentín Campa and Demetrio Vallejo.[299] According to Buendía, organizations from Mexico City and Guadalajara had published the names and

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[296] Zolov, *Refried Elvis*; Carey, *Plaza of sacrifices.*
[297] Meaney, *Canoa el crimen impune,* 216-7.
[298] Chrisman, "Community, Power and Memory," 72.
[299] Campa and Vallejo led a series of railroad strikes in 1959. See: Manuel Buendía, "Red Privada," *Excélsior*, September 4th, 1980.

pictures of these communist leaders so militant Catholics could identify them and take justice into their own hands.

In contrast to lynchings driven by conservative and reactionary politics, lynchings against the so-called modernizing forces of the state (i.e. tax collectors, literacy campaigns, alcohol and health inspectors), seem to have receded during the 1950s.[300] This might be interpreted in light of the process of negotiation, contestation, and adaptation that characterized local communities' interactions with state authorities.[301] The transformation undergone by socialist education during the 1930s is illustrative in these regards. As a result of the opposition that the anticlerical and antireligious character of this policy generated at the local level, central authorities opted for a more moderate approach towards religion, discouraging the use of iconoclastic practices and emphasizing the economic aspects of the socialist education.[302] In turn, local communities were more willing to participate in public schooling and to endorse literacy campaigns. A similar process of negotiation and adaptation may have prevented further attacks against tax collectors as well as against alcohol and health inspectors. As central elites became more capable of "reading" local sensibilities,[303] and learned how to build on communities' own social and political organizations to

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[300]The last case against so-called modernizing forces I documented took place on August of 1949. On that occassion peasants from Jolalpan, Izúcar de Matamoros, a town located in southwest Puebla, attempted to lynch a group of health inspectors in charge of implementing a foot-and-mouth disease vaccination. In the following decades, I documented two more cases against *comisarios ejidales* or individuals in charge of distributing land. These can also be read as a form of resistance towards the modernizing project of the post-revolutionary state. However, local politics and intra-community conflicts probably had a key role in the triggering of lynching. See: "Brigada anti-aftosa iba a ser linchada," August 13th, 1949, *La Opinión; "*Fue aprehendido el autor de un horrendo crimen," *La Opinión*, July 20th 1957; "Iban a linchar al Pdte. del C. Ejidal de Tecaltzingo," *La Opinión*, September 10th, 1982.

[301] Vaughan and Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin;* Joseph and Nugent, *Everyday Forms of State Formation.*

[302] Vaughan, "El papel politico," 176.

[303] For a sociological discussion on political elites capacity or incapacity to "see" the population it seeks to govern or modernize, see Loveman, "Blinded Like a State..."

implement state policies,[304] the modernizing policies promoted by the state might have become less intrusive or more legitimate in the eyes of local communities.

Nonetheless, lynchings and collective forms of violence against state officials and local politicians did not wither away. Attacks against police officers and security officials, in particular, continued throughout the last three decades of the twentieth century. According to a study based on the years 1988 to 2010, lynchings against police officers in response to their actions or their omissions[305] constitute the fourth most common cause of lynching at the national level, preceded only by robberies, rapes, and murders.[306] Similarly, based on cases taking place from 1984 to 2001, another study identifies lynchings against public officials and members of the police is the fourth most important cause of lynching.[307]

Present-day attacks against police officers and public officials are, as in the 1930s, driven by people's distrust or rejection of their authority. In this sense, they denote the ongoing weaknesses and challenges of the state's security institutions. Moreover, they echo the current experience of countries like Bolivia and Guatemala, where lynchings against police officers and state authorities are organized as a reaction to the alleged inefficacy, corruption, or suspected criminality of these actors.[308]For instance, in 1987 a group of street vendors attacked with stones and sticks inspectors of the municipal police that were trying to

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[304] For a discussion on the cultural politics and the everyday interactions that may have enabled the eventual acceptance of the state's modernizing projects, see: Vaughan and Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin.*

[305] The author refers to both abuse of authority (*abuso de autoridad*) and impunity as probable causes behind lynchings against police officers. Rodríguez Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social," 55.

[306] From the total of 232 cases documented by Rodríguez Guillén, 98 were in response to robberies, 28 in response to rape or attempt of rape, 23 in response to a suspected murder, and 19 due to "abuse of authority" (against police officers). Rodríguez Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social."

[307] From the total of 289 documented by the author, 28 were perpetrated against state officials and police officers in response to their abuse of force, corruption, or arbitary detentions. The first three drivers of lynching were robberies, assaults and rapes. Fuentes Díaz, *Linchamientos: fragmentación y respuesta*, 94-5.

[308]For Guatemala, see Snodgrass Godoy, "When Justice is Criminal;" for Bolivia, Goldstein, "In oour own hands…"

confiscate one of the vendors' merchandise.[309] The inspectors were severely injured, with one of them loosing an eye. On June of 1996, in San Miguel Canoa, a group of people nearly lynched three men who they mistook for members of the state police that had imprisoned various villagers for illegal tree felling days before the incident.[310] On August of 2000 the mayor of Tecamachalco was nearly lynched by a group of five hundred people who attacked him with stones and poured gasoline over his body with the intention of burning him alive. The attempt of lynching was driven by the mayor's decision to send two alleged kidnappers to be prosecuted in the city of Puebla instead of having them being judged in the municipality.[311] A group of police officers were also attacked, as they tried to stop the lynching of the mayor.[312]

One of the most publicized cases of lynching in contemporary Mexico also involved an attack against police officers. It took place on November 23, 2004 in the borough of Tláhuac in Mexico City and was directed against three men who had been seen outside a local school taking pictures of children and were thought to be part of a criminal gang of kidnappers. The men, who turned out to be police officers of the Federal Preventive Police (PFP, by its Spanish acronym), were beaten and burned alive; only one of them survived. The event was videotaped by one of the witnesses of the lynching as well as by reporters of one of the largest TV networks in the country, Televisa, whose personnel managed to arrive two hours before the local and federal police forces. Two of them stated before the cameras that they were federal cops working undercover in a security operation to detect drug-trafficking

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[309] "Zacapela entre inspectores y vendedores ambulantes," *La Opinión,* July 1st 1987.

[310] "Dos reporteros y un chofer a punto de ser linchados en Canoa", *La Jornada de Oriente*, June 6th, 1996. See also: Vilas, "(In)Justicia por mano propia," 22.

[311] "Intentaron linchar a alcalde," *La Jornada*, August 2, 2000.

[312] In 2007, members of the state police were beaten and severely injured by a group of people, also in Tecamachalco, when they tried to arrest three local doctors who faced criminal charges. The perpetrators of the attack argued that the police officers were, in fact, criminals who were trying to kidnap (*levantar)* the doctors. Rivas, Francisco "Libran policías linchamiento en Puebla," *El Norte*, April 18th 2007, 10.

activities in the area. Their statement, however, did not dissuade the group of attackers, which according to media accounts, included more than 300 people.[313] As argued by Nancy Churchhill in reference to this event, even if Tlahuac villagers believed the men were federal police officers, that would not have dispelled the rumors regarding their criminal involvement. After all, various police officers and politicians had been involved in criminal scandals just a few years before.[314]

In contrast to the so-called modernizing forces of the state, which were able to establish their legitimacy within given communities, citizens continued to perceive state actors in charge of providing security and justice as partial, illegitimate, and unjust. As will be explained in Chapter 3, the centrality of crime – particularly of robberies- as a driver of lynching during the last three decades of the twentieth century has further exposed the state's incapacity to protect citizens. It has also made of the police a central target of lynch mobs that blame this institution and its members for the levels of impunity and insecurity impacting the everyday lives of citizens and communities alike.

Conclusion

In examining cases of lynching taking place in contemporary Mexico, most scholars have suggested that these events signal a moment of crisis within an otherwise stable process of state formation. This crisis is often attributed to a truncated process of democratization that went hand in hand with the adoption of a market-oriented economy during the 1980s and

[313] "Turba quema vivos a dos agentes de la PFP; otro en estado grave" *La Jornada,* November 24, 2004
[314] Salient amongst these scandals was the involvement of the governor of Morelos and members of the Morelos state police in protecting a kidnapping ring ran by the infamous "Mochaorejas," (the Ear Hacker) in the mid-1990s. The "Mochaorejas" was known for cutting an ear of his victims and sending them to their families in order to expedite the ransom. See: Churchhill, "Lynching and States of Fear in Urban Mexico..."

1990s.[315] According to this narrative, the corporatist and centralized nature of the post-revolutionary state was replaced by a neoliberal and decentralized exercise of authority that, paired with increasing levels of crime and weakened institutions, made it possible and necessary for people to take justice into their own hands.

An analysis of cases of lynching taking place during the 1930s and up to the 1970s in the state of Puebla allows us to recalibrate this interpretation. Rather than expressing a moment of crisis that crystallized in the course of the last two decades of the twentieth century, lynchings are part of a longer historical trajectory characterized by plural, decentralized, and privatized expressions of violence. Lynchings exemplify vividly the contested character of the state's authority as well as communities' propensity to resolve internal divisions and conflicts outside of the law. They further illuminate how the state, as manifested in the practices of mayors, police officers, and other public officials, contributed to undermine the rule of law at the local level. Lynchings were part of a broader repertoire of extrajudicial, collective, and public forms of violence exercised by both state and non-state actors. Taken together, the occurrence of these forms of violence serves to problematize the notion that violence was exercised in a top-down manner or that it irradiated from a center that could claim the legitimate monopoly of violence. As such, lynchings do not constitute an aberration but a symptom of the de-civilizing processes that have underpinned Mexico's process of state formation.

[315] Davis, "Undermining the rule of law...," Fuentes Díaz, *Linchamientos, Fragmentación y Respuesta*; Binford, and Churchill, "Lynching and States of Fear in Urban Mexico," Rodríguez Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social..."

CHAPTER 3

Lynching and Social Control:

Witches, Impious, and Criminals in Twentieth Century Puebla

If there is one agreement amongst sociologists working on lynchings,[316] it is that these acts constitute a form of social control aimed at excluding, punishing and potentially expelling individuals whose conducts are considered threatening or offensive by members of a given community.[317] As stated in the introduction, these communities are not homogeneous. Rather, they are internally fragmented along divisions motivated by religious affiliation, political ideologies, levels of wealth, even age differences. In this sense, lynchings are not an outward expression of the homogeneity or integrity of a given community. Rather they are the very instrument to project a sense of homogeneity over an otherwise divided community. For the purposes of this chapter I will refer to "communities" or "the community" interchangeably.[318]

Whereas the social function of lynching as social control can be envisioned as stable, a historical analysis of this phenomenon reveals that conducts eliciting lynching in fact vary across different periods of time and that these variations can be explained in light of shifting conceptions of danger and deviancy. Literature dealing with lynchings and the practice

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[316] See Senechal de la Roche, "Why is Collective Violence Collective?," 127; Black, "Crime as Social Control;" Garland "Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning," 798.

[317] These communities should not be regarded as homogeneous but as facing internal divisions that have to do with religious affiliation, political ideologies, levels of wealth, and even age differences. In this sense, lynchings are not an outward expression of the homogeneity or integrity of a given community but an instrument to superimpose such a sense of homogeneity over an otherwise divided community. For the purposes of the chapter, I will refer to "communities" or "the community" but the reader should keep in mind that I am not assuming these groups are undifferentiated.

[318] The reader should keep in mind that either term is not to be understood in ways that would define these groups or towns as essentially undifferentiated or homogenous.

known as "necklacing" in the United States and South Africa, respectively, is illustrative in these regards. In the United States lynchings transitioned from a form of frontier or vigilante justice that targeted alleged criminals indistinctively of their race during the antebellum period, to an instrument of racial domination aimed at restituting white supremacy in the midst of a new segregation system.[319] In South Africa, the practice known as necklacing was used primarily against political enemies accused of collaborating with the apartheid system during the 1980s and 1990s, whereas in the post-apartheid period it has been mainly directed against so-called criminals and witches accused of being responsible for the levels of crime and economic inequality affecting the country today.[320] In both contexts, these changes have been explained in light of communities' evolving understanding of whom and what constituted a threat to the status quo.

Most literature dealing with the occurrence of lynchings in Latin America has interpreted these acts as a response to increasing levels of crime and insecurity. This is coupled with unequal access to justice on the one hand, and persistence of deeply corrupted security apparatuses on the other hand.[321] Drawing on evidence from the last thirty to forty years, these works have focused mostly on cases of lynching directed against so-called criminals accused of robberies and violent crimes, such as rape, kidnapping, and homicide. In each of these cases, lynchings have been squarely understood as a means to respond to contemporary levels of crime and fear of crime.

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[319]Brundage , *Lynching in the New South,* 4-8; Evans, *Cultures of Violence*; Garland "Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning;" Pfeifer, *Rough Justice,* 13-31.

[320] Comaroff and Comaroff, "Policing Culture, Cultural Policing..."; Harnischfeger, "Witchcraft and the State in South Africa;" Smith, "New Situations Demand Old Magic."

[321] Díaz, *Linchamientos, Fragmentación y Respuesta*; Snodgrass Godoy, "When 'Justice' is Criminal;" Binford, "A failure of normalization…;" Binford and Churchill, "Lynching and States of Fear in Urban Mexico;" Holston and Caldeira, "Democracy and Violence in Brazil;" Handy, "Chicken Thieves, Witches, and Judges...;" Risor, "Twenty Hanging Dolls and a Lynching;" Davis, "Undermining the Rule of Law...;" Goldstein *The Spectacular City.*

An examination of the historical trajectory of this practice as manifested in twentieth-century Puebla reveals, however, that lynchings against so-called criminals are part of a wider range of conducts and individuals targeted by this expression of violence. It also suggests that lynchings cannot be attributed merely to present-day dynamics of crime and insecurity. Rather, they ought to be understood in context of deep-seated cultural and political dynamics within given communities. Be this the observance of a conservative, traditionalist conception of social order, or the propensity to reject social change and so-called "modernizing forces." These modernizing forces include the state's regulation of communities' social and political life, through processes of secularization, capitalist development, and what has been termed late capitalism.[322] In addition to so-called criminals, lynchings have targeted a large spectrum of social conducts; be it by the mythological depiction of certain individuals as witches and decapitators, branding people simply impious or hostile to Catholic beliefs and practices, or by marking political dissidents, such as socialists and communists, as outsiders. Lynchings have also been directed against public officials such as police officers, health inspectors, or federal teachers, whose actions are perceived as illegitimate or as infringing upon communities' sense of autonomy. As this chapter will show, lynchings express a proclivity to punish conducts and individuals that threaten to disrupt established social and political orders, through the use of communal and exemplary forms of retribution.

The aim of this chapter is to analyze conducts that have given rise to lynchings in twentieth-century Puebla. Based on the analysis of a series of cases taking place from the 1930s to the 2000s, the argument of this chapter is two-fold. First, I will argue that lynchings

[322] Late capitalism (or neoliberal capitalism) is characterized by structural adjustments, the increasing importance of globalized flows and markets, the weakening of the welfare state, and flexibilization of labor. See: Goldstein, "Flexible Justice," 392-6.

have consistently targeted individuals considered marginal, deviant, or outcasts, and whose social behavior or political ideas and actions destabilize the putative moral, political, and economic integrity of a given community. Although victims of lynching are in some cases foreign to given communities; in others, they are active members of the community that are nevertheless considered outsiders based on their ideologies, religious identity, or so-called deviant behavior. In this sense, interactions between perpetrators and victims of lynching are marked by the type of relational distance sociologist Senechal de la Roche ascribes to this and other forms of collective violence.[323] Secondly, I will argue that lynchings against so-called criminals are not a recent phenomenon. I have documented cases of lynching against rapist, robbers, murders, and kidnappers throughout the decades covered by this study.[324] Nevertheless, the crystallization of the criminal as the *most prevalent* victim of lynching does present a recent configuration, which can be traced back to the last three decades of the twentieth century. This historical transformation can be partially attributed to the sudden increase in crime rates in Puebla, particularly robberies, in the 1980s. It can furthermore be explained through the lenses of citizens' rising perceptions of crime and the ensuing emergence of "the criminal" as the most important threat to community's security and wellbeing. In other words, it can be understood as a result of shifting perceptions of insecurity and danger.[325]

[323] Senechal de la Roche argues that the collectivization of violence depends on strong partisanship amongst the perpetrators as well as on a weak partnership towards the victim: "partisan support occurs when third parties are socially close to one side and remote from the other and when at least one adversary has high status." Senechal de la Roche, "Why is Collective Violence Collective,"128-9.
[324] From the total of 136 cases selected for my database, a total of 49 were organized in reaction to a given crime (i.e. robbery, rape, kidnapping, and murder). See Chapter 1.
[325] In Chapter 4 I will also discuss why, in parallel to the increasing importance of crime, the weight of religion in the organization of lynching declined during the same period. I will refer specifically to the potential impact that secularization and modernization had in this shift.

The chapter will be divided into three sections. The first will focus on cases of lynching against mythical beings, such as decapitators and witches. The second will discuss cases driven by iconoclastic or anticlerical acts, particularly the defilement of religious images and churches and threats against Catholic priests.[326] The third will analyze lynchings aimed at punishing violent crimes and crimes against property. To do so I will divide these offenses into five subcategories: rape, car accidents, child theft, murder, and robberies. Each section (and subsections) will present the cases chronologically and will draw comparisons between these and similar cases taking place in other states of Mexico, particularly those located in the center and southern regions. When pertinent, the chapter will also refer to examples taking place in other Latin American countries as well as in the United States and South Africa. This will allow me to situate lynchings in Puebla within a broader global perspective. Lastly, it should be noted that lynchings against public officials and religious minorities such as Evangelicals will be discussed in greater detail in the chapters on state formation and religion of this dissertation, therefore, they will be mentioned only briefly in this chapter.

Lynchings and mythical fears

On April 25th of 1930, local newspaper *La Opinión* reported the brutal lynching and killing of Edgar Kullmann, a Norwegian geologist who was visiting the town of Amozoc as part of his larger exploration of the state of Puebla. The newspaper article described at length the lynching of Mr. Kullmann, who was beaten and injured with stones, machetes, and knives, and then dragged by a rope around his neck and thrown into a dwell by a "crowd of

[326] For a broader discussion on lynching driven by Catholic religion, see Chapter 4.

fanatics" numbering nearly three hundred people.[327] Because the lynching took place on a "Holly Thursday," the newspaper called the lynching of Kullmann a "sacrifice," a "calvary," only comparable to that suffered by Jesus Christ. The lynching was triggered by a fantastic legend that attributed the disappearance of various children to a wicked aviator who would abduct them, behead them, and then extract their body fat in order to power his airplane. Kullmann, who had been seen talking and playing with some children earlier that day, was suddenly surrounded by a large group of people who accused him of being the *degollador*, the children's decapitator. Despite showing the group an official permit, signed by Puebla's governor, which granted him authorization to explore and research the whole state, Kullmann was beaten, stoned, and murdered by the crowd. The legend itself and its probable factual origins are worth exploring further.

The legend behind Kullmann's lynching has an uncanny resemblance to the mythical figure of the *pishtaco*, which origins can be traced back to colonial Peru. The pishtaco is represented as a tall and white man who beheads and dismembers his victims, most of them children, in order to extract their body fat and sell it "...for the lubrication of machines of the modern world or to pharmacies to cure certain types of diseases."[328] The myth is attributed to the usage, by some Spanish colonizers, of Indians' body fat in order to cure wounds or broken bones.[329] Although the practice declined amongst Spaniards, the fear associated with it outlived in the form of the myth of the pishtaco. [330] The use of body fat or "*unto*" was also present during Mexico's colonial period. Spanish chronicler Bernal Díaz del Castillo

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[327] "La leyenda de los degolladores motiva un horripilante asesinato," April 25th of 1930, *La Opinión*.
[328] Oliver-Smith, "The Pishtaco: Institutionalized Fear in Highland Peru," 363.
[329] *Ibid*.
[330] The myth has persisted in contemporary Peru and serves to articulate fears and anxieties regarding the stealing of children's body fat or organs. It has also led to cases of lynching. On December 9th of 1988, for instance, in a Lima shantytown, three French tourists (all men) were almost lynched after being accused of kidnapping twenty children. The men were thought to be either pishtacos or a recent iteration of this mythical figure called "sacaojos" (the one that pokes the eyes out). See Williams, "Death in the Andes," 273-4.

described how Spanish soldiers cut up Indians' corpses and used their fat to alleviate their wounds and those of their horses.[331] Although the practice did not give rise to a figure as distinct as that of the pishtaco, Kullmann's case and other similar myth-like fears in Mexico indicate that it was not entirely absent. In her study about the cultural and educational policies promoted in Puebla's countryside during the 1930s, for instance, historian Kay Vaughan refers to the circulation of rumors that claimed the government was kidnapping children in order to be "...sent to the United States and turned into oil for planes."[332]

The myth of the *degollador* was also present in other states of central and southern Mexico. In March 29 of 1955, a U.S. newspaper reported that 52 people had been arrested in connection to the lynching of two road engineers by a group of villagers in the state of Querétaro. According to the report "...the villagers were told the engineers were stealing children and extracting their blood to be sent abroad to make serum."[333]In his work on Indigenous (tzotzil) communities in contemporary Chiapas, anthropologist Bortoluzzi identifies an analogous incarnation in the myth of the "*cortacabezas*" or "decapitator." Imagined as an outsider, foreigner, or rich man who decapitates or mutilates the bodies of Indians, the *cortacabezas* uses body parts either to "sustain" the construction of large public works such as bridges or to sell their body parts to the United States.[334] Similar to the story that led to Kullman's killing, these beings were made responsible for the abduction of children or for using body parts (including body fat) to power modern machinery or build modern constructions.

[331] Conklin, *Consuming Grief.*
[332] Kay Vaughan, *Cultural politics...*, 122.
[333] "Arrest 52 in Lynching of Mexican Engineers," March 29 1955, *Chicago Tribune.*
[334] Bortoluzzi, "Crisis social y orden narrativo. La figura del "degollador" en Perú, Bolivia y México."

As these works point out, these mythical beliefs articulated anxieties regarding processes of modernization and industrialization, often attributed to foreign forces. These anxieties can be clearly identified in the case of Kullmman's lynching. A week before the incident, newspapers narrated how the mysterious and recent disappearance of various children had caused the propagation of an absurd story amid Puebla's towns.[335] The story was that of a fantastic airplane whose engine could only operate by using children's body fat. The airplane would fly every night provoking the fear of parents who would run to hide and protect their children whenever they heard the sound of the strange machine. Newspapers explained that the fantastic airplane was actually that of renowned pilot Pablo Sidar, who was performing flight tests every night in preparation for what would become the first direct trip from Mexico to Argentina. The flight of Sidar had raised great expectations in the local press and it was celebrated as an exemplar of Mexico's modernity and progress.[336] Against the backdrop of this story of modernity, the legend of the fantastic airplane powered by children's body fat emerged as one of disgraceful superstition and barbarism. The press urged the authorities to prevent the further propagation of such a fantastic story and to prosecute those responsible for creating a sense of alarm amongst parents.[337] Just a few days after the legend was made public, Mr. Kullmann, a Norwegian man who was neither a pilot nor the feared mythical figure, would be brutally assassinated.

The lynching of Kullmann was attributed to the ignorance of indigenous people and describe as an embarrassment by a public opinion comprised by a predominantly urban and

[335] "Ha despertado temor entre los timoratos una fábula," April 18th of 1930, *La Opinión.*
[336] "Pablo Sidar será el primero que vuelo a Buenos Aires,"April 11th 1930, *La Opinión.*
[337] "Ha despertado temor entre los timoratos una fábula," April 18th of 1930, *La Opinión.*

economically privileged readership.[338] The press demanded the prompt punishment of perpetrators, who included Balbina de la Rosa, alias "La Borrega," responsible for spreading the false rumor that led to Kullmann's tragic killing.[339] An editorial published on April 27th lamented the killing as well as the backwardness and superstition that the "natives" had inherited from their "ancestors;" and concluded that perpetrators of this act did not deserve to be treated like rational beings.[340] The outrage generated by Kullmann's lynching was such that, more than one year after the lynching, the newspaper condemned the insufficient punishment the authorities decided to apply to three of the perpetrators.[341] Sentenced to two years of prison for the crime of "covert murder" (*homicidio clandestino*) the article announced readers that the investigation would remain until a satisfactory and exemplary punishment was reached for the rest of the instigators.

Kullmman's was certainly not the only case of lynching motivated by mythical beliefs in twentieth-century Puebla. Accused of harming, abducting, or killing people from the community, people identified as witches also fell victim to this form of violence. Sought after and feared by people due to their mystical powers, witches occupied an ambiguous position within communities. Although they were described as all-powerful and fearful, when considered guilty of an evil deed, they were subjected to cruel and swift extralegal punishments and were thus particularly exposed to the wrath of the community.

Consistent with literature on witchcraft in other regions of Mexico as well as countries such as Guatemala, the United States, and South Africa, most people identified as

[338] Newspaper readership was limited to an educated and mostly urban political and economic elite. In 1930, only 21% of the population could read and write in Puebla; the percentage was 26.22% in 1940. See: INEGI, Censo de Población y Vivienda 1940, available at: http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/ccpv/cpv1940/. Last accessed: December 14, 2014.
[339] "Todo el peso de la ley caerá sobre los asesinos de Van Edgard Kullman," April 26th 1930, *La Opinión.*
[340] "A través de la semana," April 27th 1930, *La Opinión.*
[341] "Una condena mínima se aplicó a los asesinos del profesor Kullman," August 31th 1931, *La Opinión.*

witches were adult or elderly women.[342] Children and infants, on the other hand, were often described as the main victims of witchcraft, a characteristic that has been explained by the belief on witches' need of children's "more invigorating" blood and organs.[343] The insidious harm caused by a witch is often attributed to her voraciousness or to her need of bodily fluids to prepare potions.[344] Nonetheless, as explained by anthropological studies on witchcraft in the Sierra Norte of Puebla and the neighboring state of Tlaxcala, witches are not necessarily conceived as inherently evil, as they can use the same magic to harm or to cure.[345] Similar to the myth of the pishtaco, the figure of the witch can be traced back to colonial Mexico and the Inquisition in Spanish America. Although, as other constructs of good and evil introduced by Christian thought, the belief in witches was both adopted and transformed by different indigenous cultures and acquired autochthonous, pagan, and pre-Hispanic elements.[346]

The following examples illustrate the type of accusations that led to the lynching or attempt of lynching of so-called witches. On August 2nd of 1930, just a few months after Kullmman's death, Isabel León, a "mysterious woman" held to be a witch, was nearly lynched by a group of neighbors in a sordid quarter in the city of Puebla.[347] According to the news, the woman had been seen offering candies and toys to a little boy named Gaspar. They boy's mother, Leonor Rojas, felt uneasy about the woman's "real intentions." When the boy went missing one afternoon, she decided to look for him at Leonor's house. What she found

[342] Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives;* Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 57-65; Harnischfeger, "Witchcraft and the State in South Africa;" Comaroff and Comaroff, "Policing Culture, Cultural Policing..."; Nutini and Roberts, *Bloodsucking witchcraft,* 55.
[343] Nutini and Roberts, *Bloodsucking witchcraft,* 61.
[344] Nutini and Roberts, *Bloodsucking witchcraft*; Comaroff and Comaroff, "*Police Culture, Cultural Policing...*;" Douglas, "Witchcraft and Leprosy..."
[345] Both studies are based on Nahua indigenous communities of Puebla and Tlaxcala. See: Signorini and Lupo, "The Ambiguity of Evil Among the Nahua of the Sierra," 81; Nutini and Roberts, *Bloodsucking witchcraft,* 55-6. According to Nutini and Roberts, for instance, locals describe the *tlahuelpuchi"* (bloodsucking witch) as having no control over her powers as she is "... born with a curse that neither God nor the devil can erase."
[346] Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives,* 59-60; Signorini and Lupo, "The Ambiguity of Evil...;"Nutini and Issac, *Social Stratification in Central Mexico*, 181.
[347] "Una hechicera iba a ser linchada el día de ayer," August 2nd, 1930, *La Opinión.*

there was a horrid spectacle: "she saw her son, firmly tied to a bed, and the strange woman extracting a large amount of blood with an old and dirty syringe, that would surely be used to prepare a potion or some mysterious beverage." Terrified and outraged by such sight, Leonor called a group of neighbors and, with them, tried to lynch the woman, whose killing was prevented by the police.

Another case took place in the town of La Purísima in the municipality of Tecamachalco on July of 1944.[348] An influential family had asked Clara Fonseca, a local healer known for her mystical powers, to cure their three-year-old son, who was dying of meningitis. The boy's father had told Clara that if she were a real healer, she would cure the boy; if she did not cure him, however, they would know she was an evil witch. The boy died; alas, Clara was declared guilty of his death. As the news spread, a group of people went looking for her, dragged her outside of her house, and beat her to death armed with stones and sticks. A year later, another woman was killed, this time in what may be seen as a "private lynching"[349] in the town of San Andrés Calpan in Cholula.[350] On the night of November 23rd of 1945, five men broke into the house of Delfina Hernández, a woman who was considered a witch by the town's locals. Armed with pistols, the men shot Delfina in the chest and stomach while she was sleeping and injured her daughter, who was able to survive the attack. The newspaper added, "...it has become a common thing in certain towns that continue to observe centuries-old traditions to make allegations of witchcraft against women

[348] "Linchamiento espantoso en un poblado," July 24th, 1944, *La Opinión.*
[349] Brundage describes a private lynching as those collective killings that were carried out behind doors and lacked the public and performative character of communal lynchings. See: Brundage, *Lynching in the New South,* 28.
[350] "Otro salvaje crimen en Calpan," November 25th, 1945, *La Opinión.*

who prepare mysterious potions to cure troubles..."[351]Informed often what private vendettas, this research documented at least three more cases involving the killing or attempt of assassination of so-called witches in the years 1944, 1950, and 1959.[352]

Although less common, accusations of witchcraft could also led to the collective killing of men. In Aljojuca, Chalchicomula, a man who was believed to have a pact with the devil was found death, his body severely wounded with machetes on August of 1945.[353] Once known and respected for his healing powers, the so-called witch was now feared and despised by his fellow townsmen, who thought he had poisoned some and deceived others with his evil magic. In the state of Querétaro, two brothers, Alfredo and Martiano Sánchez, were hanged by a mob after being accused of witchcraft on March of 1955. Thirty persons were reportedly arrested.[354] Similarly, on November 5th of 1996 a whole family (four adults and three children) was lynched in the indigenous community of Duraznotla in the southeast Puebla, due to accusations of witchcraft made against the family's father, Eduardo Quiahua.[355] Amongst those responsible for the attack were Florencio Chipahua and his wife Sebastiana Calihua who, after being apprehended by the police, stated that Eduardo was a witch who had casted an evil spell on their daughters and thus deserved to die with the rest of his family.[356]

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[351] "Se vuelve cosa normal entre los habitantes de poblados que conservan todavía gran parte de sus costumbres de hace siglos, el que se acuse de 'brujería' a mujeres que se dedican a preparar misteriosos brebajes para curar determinados males..." "Otro salvaje crimen en Calpan," November 25th, 1945, *La Opinión.*

[352] See: "Tres brujas fueron detenidas por la policía," July 6th, 1944, *El Sol de Puebla;* "Creyeron que era hija de un hechicero," August 19th, 1950, *La Opinión*; "Una 'bruja' asesinada a tiros," June 28th 1959, *La Opinión*.

[353] "Por creerlo brujo, fue asesinado un hombre en Jalapaxco, Aljojuca," August 6th, 1945, *La Opinión.*

[354] "2 Brothers Lynched in Mexico," March 30, 1955, *New York Times.*

[355] "Matan en Puebla a siete miembros de una familia por practicar brujería," November 4th, 1996, *La Jornada de Oriente.*

[356] On August 24th of 1976, newspapers reported a brawl between two men produced by similar accusations. In that case, Cirilo Luna shot and killed Ramón Gallegos because, he believed, the later was a witch who had caused the death of his sister. Both men were reportedly drunk. "Dos ebrios se balancearon al acusar uno al otro de brujo," *La Opinión*, August 24th, 1976.

As these examples suggest, the abduction and victimization of children was a recurrent theme in narratives of witchcraft in Puebla. The following anthropological studies can help us understand further the characteristics of these mythical fears and their relation to collective violence. According to Romero and Pech, during the 1970s and 1980s, in the town of Cuatlancingo in Puebla and in the neighboring state of Tlaxcala, the disappearance and sudden death of a number of newborn was attributed to the presence of witches.[357] Imagined as a female shape-shifter who could turn her human body into that of an animal, generally a bird or *totola*, the legend claimed these witches came at night by train to feed on the blood of small children.[358] In the voice of one of their informants: "In the threes across the house they stood, to be able to suck the children. She killed them; she sucked their necks. She swallowed the blood and the boy was death! When the mom would woke up, [the infant] would be very death..."[359] As argued by Romero and Pech, malnutrition or sudden infant death syndrome were probably the actual causes of these fatalities; and yet, the legend of the bloodsucking witches offered a more feasible explanation to parents and members of the community. Although the authors do not account for any case of lynching, they do recount how groups of peasants went out at night, armed with machetes and shotguns, to protect their newborn against witches.[360]

Situated a few years before, Nutini and Roberts' study on bloodsucking witchcraft in Tlaxcala points at a similar pattern.[361] The death of nearly fifty infants from 1960 to 1965 in

[357] Romero and Pech, "La muerte violenta de los niños por las brujas en Tlaxcala."
[358] As argued by Few, the notion of witches as shape-shifters was already present in colonial Mexico and Guatemala. Birds, particularly turkeys, were often described as the animal that served as the host of witches. Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives.* 57-9.
[359] Romero and Pech, " La muerte violenta de los niños por las brujas en Tlaxcala," 115.
[360] Romero and Pech, " La muerte violenta de los niños por las brujas en Tlaxcala," 117.
[361] Tlaxcala is relevant for our understanding of witchcraft in Puebla. As pointed out by Nutini and Roberts, the Nahuatl- speaking indigenous communities of the Sierra Norte and the Malinche region of Puebla have a system

various rural communities of Tlaxcala with signs that included "bruises, acchymoses, and purple spots on the chest, back or neck," was attributed to the presence of *tlahuelpuchis* or bloodsucking witches.[362] The authors suggest that the deaths were most probably caused by asphyxiation, provoked accidentally by the mother while sleeping with the newborn next to her at night.[363] Nonetheless, parents rationalized their infant's death through the legend of the bloodsucking witches. According to Nutini and Roberts this offered a more suitable explanation, as it echoed the community's system of beliefs and provided a means for parents to cope with grief and feelings of shame or guilt.[364] The legend also attracted the solidarity and support of the community towards the affected household. The authors state the killing of *tlahuelpuchis* was rare, as they would attack at night and enter the houses silently in the form of a turkey, preventing people from seeing them. Still, at least one *tlahuelpuchi* was killed during their fieldwork.[365] Her assassination, which followed the method allegedly dictated by tradition, is illustrative of the types of torments so-called witches could be subjected to:

> "First of all, when a person has been singled out as a tlahuelpuchi...she is swiftly put to death. The mob quickly runs to the house of the tlahuelpuchi, immobilizes her...so she cannot transform herself into an animal, and on the spot she is clubbed and/or stoned to death. Once she is dead, two men with knives symbolically kill her again by depriving her of her physical sense organs. The two chosen men drag the naked body

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of beliefs (what they call, "anthropomorphic supernaturalism) that is closely related to that of Tlaxcala. Nutini and Roberts, *Bloodsucking witchcraft*, 118.

[362] Nutini and Roberts, *Bloodsucking witchcraft*, 180-1.

[363] *Nutini and Roberts, Bloodsucking witchcraft*, 238

[364] This argument resonates with various anthropological studies on witchcraft. In his now classical study on the Azande people in Sudan, for instance, Evans Pritchard claimed that witchcraft provided an explanation for unfortunate events that could not be easily attributable to the person's carelessness or moral misconduct. In his view, witchcraft provided a means to make sense of events that would otherwise seem too random. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande, 63-5.

[365] The case took place on August of 1961 in the municipality of San Diego, Tlalocan. Nutini saw the corpse of the *tlahuelpuchi,* which had all the bones broken and the face completely disfigured. Her ears, tongue, and nose had been severed. Nutini and Roberts, *Bloodsucking witchcraft*, 74.

of the tlahuelpuchi to a deserted spot where she is left to rot, for she cannot be buried..."[366]

The incident bears all the hallmarks of a lynching and allows us to shed light on the ways in which mythical beliefs may contribute sanctioning violence. Similar to the literature on necklacing and collective killings against witches in Africa, the authors concede that accusations against *tlahuelpuchis* may be underpinned by personal vendettas, enviousness, and scapegoating.[367] The extent to which the myth is truly believed by parents and members of the community or simply used in order to justify murder remains uncertain. However, scholars agree that in order for an accusation to be effective, the "right circumstances" need to be in place. As explained by Mary Douglas, "To be successful an accusation should be directed against victims already hated by the populace..."[368]In reference to post-apartheid South Africa, Comaroff and Comaroff explain that older women who are thought to possess conspicuous amounts of wealth are the most vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft, as perpetrators (often younger men) blamed them for their economic misfortunes.[369]

Although it is difficult to determine the sociological traits of people identified as witches in Puebla, the cases analyzed here suggest that while some of the victims were indeed known for practicing witchcraft (although not necessarily for "evil" purposes), others were made to bear the blame for the "inexplicable" death or sickness of a child or infant due

[366] Nutini and Roberts, *Bloodsucking witchcraft*, 75.
[367] Nutini and Roberts, *Bloodsucking witchcraft*, 76; Douglas, "Witchcraft and Leprosy...;"Comaroff and Comaroff, "Policing Culture, Cultural Policing...;"Harnischfeger, "Witchcraft and the State in South Africa," 102.
[368] Douglas, "Witchcraft and Leprosy...," 726.
[369] Comaroff and Comaroff, "*Police Culture, Cultural Policing...*,"525. Harnischfeger expands this argument, as he claims that the poor suspect the rich have accumulated wealth through evil means, whilst the rich believe the poor must regard their success with evil intent and use witchcraft against them. See: "Witchcraft and the State in South Africa,"103.

to some personal vendetta. In all, however, we can argue that lynchings targeted women that were already marked as outsiders or deviant, even if they were part of the same communities.

The Lynching of the Impious

As illustrated by the cases analyzed above, lynchings are often directed against people that are considered outsiders or that become outcasts after violating a given norm. They are furthermore informed by intra-community conflicts, which often reflect the contentious character of communities' encounters with so-called modernizing forces. The lynching of people accused of desecrating a religious image or site, or of threatening the authority of a priest, further confirms this trend. It also highlights the contentious relationship between the state and local communities. On September 26th of 1931 a group Cholula inhabitants attempted to lynch engineers Emilio Cuevas and Ignacio Herrera.[370] According to local newspaper *La Opinión*, the two engineers were sent by the Ministry of Public Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*) to clean and repair a pre-Hispanic pyramid located in the town. An important archeological site, the pyramid laid underneath the *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios* church. Built during colonial times, the church was considered a sanctuary and constituted a place of pilgrimage for Catholics. When the engineers started to repair the site, a group of people who believed the engineers were planning on destroying the church, surrounded the place and armed with machetes and pistols attempted to lynch them. The newspaper reported that the authorities had been able to save the engineers from the "ignorance of these locals," who did not understand the economic benefits that the site's restoration would bring to their town.

[370] "En Cholula iban a ser linchados dos ingenieros por el populacho enfurecido," September 26th 1931, *La Opinión.*

Despite the newspaper's depiction of the event, this incident cannot be explained as an expression of the so-called ignorance of Cholulans. Rather, it should be analyzed in light of the deep-seated conflict that underpinned the relationship between Catholics and state authorities, during both the nineteenth-century liberal reforms and the twentieth-century Mexican revolution. This conflict, as we shall see, often took the form of bitter disagreements over the place that Catholic beliefs, practices, and symbols could and should have in the country's social and political spheres.

As historians of nineteenth-century Mexico have argued, anti-clericalism was a key element of the liberals' effort to secularize society and free the country from the influence of the Catholic Church.[371] In a country traversed by religious fervor, however, anticlerical measures were often met with resistance at the local level. As argued by Van Young, "the church stood at the heart of the pueblo in both a physical and a metaphorical sense," and thus attacks on religious symbols or festivities were seen as a direct attack upon pueblos.[372] In reference to the Sierra Norte of Puebla, for instance, Thomson describes how the regulations imposed by liberals in the context of the so-called liberal reforms,[373] were often disobeyed and defied by local communities.[374] These regulations included the prohibition of religious festivals, processions, and ceremonies. Another source of popular discontent was the actual or potential expulsion of priests and other religious authorities. For instance, on December 12th of 1855 a group of parishioners assaulted the military barracks of the town of

[371] Hale, "Jose Maria Luis Mora and the Structure of Mexican Liberalism," 218-9.
[372] Van Young, *The Other Rebellion*, 488, 484.
[373] The liberal reforms entailed a series of institutional and juridical transformations that sought to set the basis for the liberal modern state in Mexico and that promoted the emergence of an individualized exercise of citizenship. The reforms materialized in the new Constitution of 1857, which was only formally altered in 1917, in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. See Sinkin, *The Mexican Reform, 1855-1876.*
[374] Thomson, "Bulwarks of Patriotic Liberalism," p. 65.

Zacapoaxtla in the Sierra Norte of Puebla.[375] The attack followed the tolling of the church bells and was organized by local priest Francisco Ortega y García, who used the pulpit to spread the rumor that liberals were planning on arresting and expelling Puebla's bishop, Antonio Labastida. The rumor provoked the anger of locals who were willing to resort to violence as a reaction to what they perceived as an assault on religion.

After receding temporarily under Porfirio Diaz' rule (1884-1911), anticlericalism returned with a vengeance during the post-revolutionary years. During the first three decades of the twentieth century hundreds of churches were closed down, occupied, damaged or destroyed by government officials as part of the de-fanaticization and secularization campaigns promoted by post-revolutionary elites.[376] Presidents Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924) and Plutarco Elias Calles's (1924-1928), in particular, promoted the use of anticlerical measures in order to undermine the influence exercised by the Catholic church and establish a new civil religion based on reason, individual autonomy, and socialist values.[377] The *ley de cultos (*law of religious worship) promulgated in 1926, for instance, limited the number of priests and churches that each town could have and prohibited the public exercise of religion.[378] Moreover, some political elites incorporated the adoption of iconoclastic actions as part of their mission to de-fanaticize. With ideological roots in nineteenth century liberalism, iconoclasm was common amongst military commanders during the Mexican

[375] Banzant, "La iglesia, el Estado y la sublevación conservadora de Puebla en 1856," 101-3.
[376] Although defanaticization campaigns vary considerably from region to region (being particularly strong in states such as Tabasco, Veracruz, Yucatán, Michoacán, and Sonora), they were part of a fairly coherent revolutionary project that was envisioned as a national endeavor. See Bantjes, "Saint, Sinners, and State Formation..."
[377] As explained by Fallaw, the means and ends of anticlericalism were not homogeneous amongst so-called revolutionaries. Whilst some regarded it as a means to reform the presence of the Catholic church and favored a more moderate and tolerant approach to religion; others saw it as an instrument to eradicate both Catholic beliefs and institutions through the use of more radical forms of iconoclasm. Fallaw, "Varieties of Mexican Revolutionary Anticlericalism...." Furthermore, as indicated by Butler, revolutionaries were not necessarily irreligious and some of them promoted anti-clericalism as a means to purify Catholic faith. Butler, "Sotanas rojinegras..."
[378] Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation,* 4.

Revolution and continued to be practiced during the 1920s and 1930s as a means to weaken Catholic beliefs and traditions. By burning and destroying religious symbols and desecrating churches,[379] post-revolutionary politicos sought to assault the symbolic, social, and political influence Catholicism had over given communities.[380]

The enduring authority of the Catholic Church and the strong presence of popular religiosity within rural and urban communities alike meant that these measures faced an important degree of opposition and resistance.[381] Throughout the twentieth century, rumors and accusations regarding the potential expulsion of priests, the closing down of churches, and the alleged robbery or destruction of religious images, prompted riots, lynchings, and other forms collective violence in different regions of Mexico. On August 17th of 1919, in the town of Zaragoza in San Luis Potosí, a group of parishioners lynched a man called Juan Galvan, who had earlier been accused by the local priest of stealing the image of the virgin. According to the newspaper, "The words of the curate inflamed his hearers, who dragged Galvan from his home, built a funeral pyre and upon it tortured the unfortunate man until he died."[382] Parallel incidents took place in Mexico City in the following years. On November 14 of 1921, a man was nearly lynched after being accused of provoking an explosion that had destroyed the main altar of the city's basilica. Although the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe had "miraculously" survived, a group of enraged Catholics tried to lynch the man in

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[379] Some examples of desecration of churches included turning them into government offices and public schools or, in more extreme cases, using them as stables or latrines. Bantjes also mentions the temporary use of convents as brothels in order to mock the nun's mandate of celibacy. Bantjes, "Saint, Sinners, and State Formation...," 488.

[380] Moreno Sánchez, "Quemando santos para iluminar conciencias..." 41; Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire*..., 129. Fallaw, "Varieties of Mexican Revolutionary Anticlericalism...", 485-6.

[381] Bantjes, "Saint, Sinners, and State Formation...," 138.

[382] "First lynching in Mexico: Man Accused of Robbing Image of Virgin Tortured by Mob," *The Washington Post*, August 17, 1919.

retaliation for the explosion.[383] On May 7th of 1936 a riot broke out following the circulation of a rumor that claimed that the government was planning on removing the religious images of the San Miguel Nonoalco church in order to burn them.[384] Newspaper *Excelsior* reported that a large group of people surrounded the church, which had been closed down a few months before, and threatened public official Alfaro Vázquez, who had been commissioned with the extraction of the images. Vázquez tried in vain to ease the crowd by explaining the images were not going to be burned, but were being taken to the Museum of Religious Arts. A year before, another riot took place outside of the Espiritu Santo church in the Santa Maria neighborhood, also in Mexico City. When policemen and officials from the education and interior ministers arrived to the church in order to close down a catholic school operating in the area, a group of Catholics tolled the church bells and defiantly stood outside of the church. Believing the officials were going to close down the church, they assailed three police officers and forced them to leave.[385]

As these examples suggest, Catholics tended to interpret the intentions and actions of state officials through the lenses of the anti-clerical and iconoclastic undertones that characterized liberal and revolutionary policies during the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. As a result of this, they reacted with hostility and defiance towards the presence of state authorities. Socialist teachers were particularly impacted by the antagonistic and distrustful relationship that existed between Catholics and the state. As outsiders and representatives of the state's secularization mission, indigenous and rural

[383] Bantjes, "Saint, Sinners, and State Formation...," 137.
[384] "Una falsa versión originó un tumulto al ser sacadas las imágenes de un templo, "*Excelsior,* May 7th, 1936.
[385] "Dos detenidos en la iglesia de Santa María," *Excelsiór*, November 13th, 1935.

communities regarded teachers as intrusive, immoral and even dangerous.[386] As will be analyzed in the following chapters, from 1934 to 1938, more than one hundred socialist teachers were assaulted by spontaneous mobs and organized vigilantes in reaction to the secularizing and anticlerical measures promoted by the so-called socialist education. In Puebla, in the Sierra Norte alone, at least 17 teachers were killed in a period of 6 years.[387] Although attacks were particularly intense in states such as Michoacán, Jalisco, Veracruz, Chiapas, and Puebla; cases were also reported in the central states of Morelos and Guanajuato. For instance, on November 1934, in Jonacatepec, Morelos, two teachers and the town's federal inspector were threatened by a mob of men and women who gathered around them shouting ¡Viva la Religion! after the church bells had rung in sign of alarm.[388] Two years later, a group of Catholics armed with stones, knives and pistols attacked the teachers of a "cultural mission" in Guanajuato, killing thirteen people and injuring at least twenty-nine.[389]

Collective forms of violence were certainly not the only means used by Catholics to express their discontent towards anticlericalism. Catholics also adopted civil forms of resistance, such as street protests, underground masses, and public petitions addressed to the president.[390] By the same token, anticlericalism and iconoclasm were not only attributed to the actions of government officials. People that supported socialist and communist ideas were also, at different points of time, perceived as actors that threatened the integrity and

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[386] In the town of Cuetzalan in Puebla, for instance, villagers believed teacher Eduardo Ramírez had been sent by the Devil himself in order to "seized their children for the government." Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*, 123.
[387] Vaughan, "El papel politico," 178.
[388] Salinas, "Untangling Mexico's Noodle," 492-3.
[389] "Numerosos muertos y heridos en Ciudad Gonzalez. Zafarrancho sangriento por causa religiosa" *Excélsior*, Tuesday, March 31st, 1936.
[390] Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*; 4-5; Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire*, 129-32; Aspe Armella, *La formación social y política de los católicos mexicanos.*

sacredness of Catholic symbols and practices. On June 16th of 1931, for instance, a German man was lynched by a group of churchgoers in the city of Morelia in Michoacán. The man, who was described by a newspaper as a communist, had provoked the anger of parishioners after interrupting mass and delivering an "antireligious speech from the pulpit."[391] On December of 1934, twenty-year old Ernesto Malda, a member of the Red Shirts created by Tomás Garrido Canabal,[392] was lynched in the neighborhood of Coyoacán in Mexico City. Malda had arrived late to an anticlerical demonstration that had quickly turned into a violent clash between Red Shirts and churchgoers. During the encounter, five Catholics were shot while a crowd lynched Malda in retaliation for the attacks, allegedly incited by the priest Rafael Medina.[393]

Whereas in the case of socialist teachers, victims of lynching were individuals that did not belong to these communities, in other cases, the victims were actually locals who were targeted in retaliation for their socialist ideas. One such a case took place on November 11th of 1934 in the town of Acajete in Puebla. That day Micaela Ortega was lynched by a mob that broke inside her house armed with machetes, stones, and metallic objects.[394] The autopsy revealed she had suffered countless injuries, including machete blows closed to her ears and mouth and second-degree burns around her legs and gluteus. The cruelty used against Micaela reveals attackers wanted her assassination to serve as warning to other villagers: this is how socialist will be punished. According to the report filed by federal inspector Fernando A. Rodríguez, Catholic neighbors resented Micaela's socialists' ideas as

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[391] "German red reported lynched in Mexico," *New York Times*, June 17th 1931.
[392] The Red Shirts were a violent group (*grupo de choque)* formed by the governor of Tabasco Tomás Garrido Carbajal. Integrated by young men, the Red Shirts were known for orchestrating attacks against churches, religious images, and churchgoers. Moreno Chávez, "Quemando santos para iluminar conciencias."
[393] "Churchgoers Shot in Clash with Reds at Mexico Suburb," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 31, 1934; "Mexico holds 40 for killing of five at church,"*Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 4, 1935.
[394] AGN, Fondo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Caja 70, Exp. 11.

well as her connections with a local *agrarista* who had allegedly stolen the harvest that belonged to indigenous' communal lands.[395] Animosity turned into violence when these neighbors found out that she planned to convert the church into a library and burn the image of "Jesus the Father."

In addition to communists, individuals accused of stealing religious images or of trying to assault a local priest could also prompt the anger and violence of churchgoers. On January 28 of 1936 a man was lynched by an infuriated crowd in the town of San Miguel Allende in Guanajuato. The man, who was apparently heavily drunk and was carrying a machete, attempted to killed the priest Juan Godinez inside of the church of San Felipe Neri, just minutes after the priest had finished offering mass. When churchgoers took notice of the priest's assailant, they surrounded the man, disarmed him and beat him up. The man would have been killed if the police had not arrived on time.[396] A few years later, in a small town in the State of Mexico, just a few kilometers away from Mexico City, three men were lynched after stealing various religious ornaments from the church. The police had recently apprehended the three suspects, who were previously identified by a group of churchgoers. Fearing the police would release them, a crowd managed to break inside of the prison and dragged the three prisoners outside. In reference to the event a columnist stated: "The multitude that has so many times been fooled...that does not believe neither in the law nor in justice...beat up the three men, hurt them with all kinds of weapons, deprived them of their lives, and after this, with a dramatic gesture, dumped the shapeless and bloody mass at the feet of the startled officials..."[397]

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[395] See Chapter 4 for further details about this case.
[396] "Escándalo al interior de una iglesia," *Excélsior*, January 28th, 1936,
[397] Carlos Franco Sodi, "¡Linchados!," *El Universal*, November 10th 1941.

In the case of Puebla, communist affiliation and the stealing of religious objects would continue to inform cases of lynching in decades to come. On September 14th of 1968 five workers of the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla were lynched in the town of San Miguel Canoa following a rumor that claimed these workers were actually communist students who were trying to steal the image of the town's patron saint. The workers were also accused of planning to place a red and black flag in the main plaza and of wanting to kill the priest, Enrique Meza. As will be explained in greater detail on the chapter on religion, the factors that triggered this lynching are manifold and need to be understood in light of intra-community rivalries and political conflicts as well as in light of the influence exercised by the priest in the social and political organization of San Miguel Canoa. Although primarily directed at the five university workers, this lynching served also as a means to control and punish those members of the community who did not comply with the expected norms of the dominant group. In particular, the lynching led to the killing of Lucas García, a local who belonged to an independent peasants union with ties to the Mexican Communist Party. Lucas, who had provided shelter to the five men, had openly opposed the authority of the priest and openly supported communist ideas. When the lynch mob came to his house looking for the five "communist students," Lucas was struck in the jugular with a machete and then shot to death.[398]

As discussed in more detail in chapters 1 and 4, the weight of religion as a driver for lynching declined during the second half of the twentieth century in Puebla. This trend is countered by a parallel development during the same period. It is a trend where crime has increasingly taken the center stage in the organization and legitimation of this form of

[398] See Chapter 4 for a more detailed account on the sequence of events leading to the lynching and the killing of Lucas García.

violence. Lynchings driven by criminal offenses are certainly not new. Lynching against alleged rapists, kidnappers, robbers, and murderers have taken place throughout every decades covered by this chapter (1930s-2000s). What is new, however, is the greater visibility and importance that these cases acquired, particularly in the last thirty years of the twentieth century, in part as a result of the relative decline in other drivers of lynching. As in the previous section, cases of lynching against so-called criminals will be presented in a chronological order starting with the 1930s. Additionally the cases will be divided into five subcategories that define the main offense they are meant to punish. The respective categories are: rape, child theft, car accidents, murder, and robberies.

Lynchings Against Criminals: *Rapist and the Lynch Mob*

On July 9th of 1933, newspaper *La Opinión* reported the brutal rape and murder of seven-year-old girl María Juarez in Cholula, a town located in the outskirts of the city of Puebla. According to the report, published on the front page under the title "Infamous crime committed in the person of a little girl,"[399] the two criminals kidnapped María Juarez from her house and, after raping her, dumped her body into a well and hit her head with a stone in order to destroy her skull. The news about the crime quickly spread amongst Cholula inhabitants, causing their outrage and indignation and leading eventually to an attempt of lynching directed against the guilty parties. Although the only testimony against the so-called criminals was that of the girl María Juarez herself who, before dying, "feebly opened her eyes and muttered" the names of the criminals, the newspaper seemed to presume the culpability of the two men. The article opened with the statement: "two inveterate criminals of Cholula, called Manuel Gonzalez and Ramón Fórtiz, kidnapped seven year old María

[399]"Crimen sin nombre se cometió en la persona de una niña," July 9th 1933, *La Opinión*

Juarez, abusing her and killing her." It called then for an "exemplary punishment" of what was described as the "most monstrous crime known to date." Although the authorities prevented the lynching, the unfolding of the case, its press coverage and its relation with similar cases taking place during the same years, make it pertinent to our discussion.

On July 16th, exactly one week after the murder of María Juarez, the newspaper announced that the two criminals had "disappeared" from prison and claimed that, most probably, the criminals had tried to escape, "forcing" the guards to shoot them and to "unintentionally" execute them with the "*ley fuga*."[400] Far from criticizing this extra-judicial killing, the newspaper justified the action of the guards in light of the cruelty of the murderers and their alleged attempt to flee the law.[401] The murder of girl María Juarez and the extra-judicial killing of her alleged murderers resembles the case of girl Olga Camacho and the attempt of lynching in the person of Mexican soldier Juan Castillo Morales, alias "Juan Soldado," who was accused of having brutally murdered and raped "la niña Olga" in Tijuana, in 1938. While under military custody, a group of people demanding justice for the girl assaulted the fort in an attempt to seize and lynch the alleged criminal. The fort was set on fire but Juan Castillo was "saved" by the authorities only to be executed by the military.

In Puebla, cases of rape against girls and young women generated a public demand for expedite and exemplary forms of punishment. During the 1930s, in particular, so-called rapists were exposed to both lynchings and extrajudicial killings by the state authorities. On May 14th of 1930, in the neighborhood of San Baltasar Campeche in the city of Puebla, Maximino Cerezo assaulted thirteen-year-old girl Luisa Aguilar, with the help of his

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[400] The "*ley fuga*" consisted in the extra-judicial killing of a criminal upon his alleged attempt to escape from the authorities.
[401] "¿Se aplicó la ley fuga a los asesinos de una niña?"July 16th 1933, *La Opinión.*

accomplice, Amado López.[402] Brought to the scene by the girl's screams, a group of neighbors gathered around the men and attempted to "take justice into their own hands" by lynching Maximino. A few years later, on July 15th of 1934, a newspaper reported that the "caveman" Fidel Lopez Cortés had raped the girl Leonor Cruz, daughter of Doctor Marcos Cruz y Cazares.[403] The following day, under the headline "He paid with his life the violation of a girl" the same newspaper announced that the criminal had been shot upon his attempt to escape prison and celebrated the steadfast actions of the police agents to prevent the fleeing of the so-called rapist.[404] On August 5th of 1937, a local newspaper reported that the "disgusting rapist" of seven-year old girl Refugio Simo was almost killed in an attempt of lynching produced by his vile actions and the "justified popular rage" it generated amongst people.[405] On June 24th of 1938, in the town of San Martín Tlapala in Atlixco, a report indicated that Lorenzo Gomez had been lynched by a group of people who "were forced" to carry out such an action because the man had raped two young women.[406]

Similar to cases of lynching against alleged sex offenders in the United States, the defense of girls and women's integrity was invoked as a reason to justify the use of extralegal forms of punishment in 1930s Puebla. In contrast to the United States, however, racial dominance did not occupy a central place, at least not in such an overt way, in the organization and legitimization of lynching. As has been extensively documented by the literature on lynching in the United States, particularly that referring to the American South, the defense of white women's honor served to legitimate lynching against alleged black

[402] "Incalificable crimen se cometió con una niña de 13 años," *La Opinión*, May 14th, 1930.
[403] "Una hija del Dr. Cruz Cázarez fue víctima de brutales ultrajes," July 15th o f 1934, *La Opinión.*
[404] "Pagó con su vida el ultraje a una niña," July 16th of 1934, *La Opinión.*
[405] Asqueroso sátiro que estuvo a punto de morir lynchado," August 5th of 1937, *La Opinión.*
[406] June 24, 1938 "Lyncharon a un sátiro en Tlapala, ayer", *La Opinión.*

offenders.[407] As in the cases describe above, accusations were often based on rumors and no material or legal evidence was provided in order to establish their veracity.[408] Wyatt-Brown explains that lynching served as means to uphold both the superiority of white southern planters over black men and the control over white women's sexuality.[409] In this sense, lynchings contributed to reiterate racial and sexual hierarchies as well as to define the racial boundaries of given communities. In Mexico, it was not the race but the class of perpetrators what seems to have justified certain lynchings and extrajudicial killings. The press often portrayed alleged rapist as savages, ignorant, and low life.[410] Granted, class was underpinned by racial and ethnic differences in Puebla and in Mexico in general,[411]and thus it is possible to assert that race and ethnicity were present, albeit in a covert way, in the social construction of criminality.[412]

Men accused of rape continued to be the locus of collective outrage in the state in the following decades. For instance, on July 11th of 1979, newspapers reported the attempt of lynching of Antonio Sánchez Maceda in the hands of a group of neighbors from the community of Pueblo Nuevo in the city of Puebla.[413] The man was accused of kidnapping

[407] Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*; Evans, *Cultures of Violence*; Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 65-70.
[408] Garland, "Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning," 812; Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 167.
[409] Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, viii-ix
[410] For a discussion on how conceptions of honor intersected with class, gender, and sexuality in turn of the century Mexico, see Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion.*
[411] The "race question" was "de-biologized" in Mexico at the outset of the twentieth century and was instead 'naturalized' or reified based on cultural and socioeconomic markers such as language, dress, religion, and culture. See Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo."
[412] It should be noted that although family members are considered the main perpetrators of rape, in the cases of lynching I documented, the offender was often described as a stranger or a neighbor. The only exception was that of the attempt of lynching of Julián Sánchez on August 19th of 1935. The man had allegedly raped her daughter several times. When the neighbors found out that the 14-year old girl was pregnant, they decided to lynch Sánchez. The police stopped the attack. "Monstruoso padre iba a ser linchado en Cholula," August 19th, 1935, *La Opinión.* For an analysis on victims and perpetrators of rape in Mexico City during the first decades of the twentieth century, see Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 118-26. For an analysis on rape in present-day Mexico, see: Gasman et al, "Violencia sexual en México."
[413] "Un violador cerca estuvo de ser linchado por vecinos de Pueblo Nuevo," July 11th, 1979, *La Opinión.*

three-year old girl Laura "N" and taking her to the Atoyac river in order to rape her. He was described as a drug addict with a dark police record. A few years later, on July of 1983, a man was nearly lynched after being accused of raping nine-year old girl María Eugenia "N," also in the city of Puebla[414]

In reference to a case of rape taking place near the Los Ángeles neighborhood, in the periphery of the city of Puebla, a newspaper article stated that at the exact time when the victim Esperanza "N" became the victim of rape, private properties of high rank officials were: "strictly watched over by the police in order to prevent their residents from being assaulted by the gangs of sexual delinquents that have invaded Puebla recently."[415] As this quote illustrates, police negligence and poor policing were considered an indirect cause of rape, particularly in low-income neighborhoods. Thus contributing to the perception that the police could not offer protection or justice for victims of rape. In addition to police negligence, levels of impunity may offer a plausible explanation as to why people resorted to lynching to punish so-called rapists. Similar to other contexts, reliable statistics on sexual violence are hard to come by in Puebla and in Mexico as a whole. The main reason for this may very well be that the number of rapes reported to the police tends to be low due to mistrust of both the effectiveness of the police and victims' fear of being discriminated by security officials.[416] Still, a revision of available statistics on rape in Puebla from 1940 to the

[414] "Violó a una pequeña y por poco lo linchan," July 14, 1983, *La Opinión.* It is worth mentioning that in both this case and the one taking place in Pueblo Nuevo the newspaper does not provide the family name of the victim, but identifies them under "N". This contrast with the 1930s press coverage of similar cases where the family name of the victim was provided in full, perhaps to indicate the class of the victim.
[415] "Enésima joven violada," July 2nd, 1971, *La Opinión.*
[416]According to Mexico's National Institute for Penal Sciences (INACIPE), only 1.5% of the crimes reported between 1997 and 2002 were sexual crimes. Gasman et al, "Violencia Sexual en México," 20. For an historical account of dynamics of gender discrimination in relation to sexual crimes see Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 118-26. For an analysis of the persistency of discrimination and impunity surrounding cases of rape in Mexico and Latin America, see: Gasman et al, "Violencia Sexual en México;" Organization of American States, "Alertamérica, Report on Citizen Security in the Americas," 60-5.

year 2000 suggests that the rates for this crime are considerable, oscillating between 3.5 and 4.6 indictments for rapes per 100,000 inhabitants.[417] Moreover, despite of their limitations, statistics on rape allow us to get an approximation for the level of impunity characterizing this crime. Comparing the total of individuals indicted for rape with the total of individuals sentenced for this crime during 1940-2000 indicates that, on average, less than 50% of those accused of rape were found guilty.[418] These seemingly low levels of sentencing may contribute to a sense of collective retribution or self-help justice. As will be analyzed further, impunity and distrust of the police are a very common motive for cases of lynching against so-called criminals.

Cases of lynching driven by rape were reported in other states of Mexico during the 1980s and 1990s. Sociologist Carlos Vilas, for instance, documented a total of 12 cases linked to rape accusations during the 1990s out of a national sample of 103 cases of lynching.[419] These cases included the lynching of three alleged rapists who were burn alive in the municipality of Mexotintla in Chiapas on September 1996, as well as the hanging of a man who was accused of having committed various robberies and rapes in the town of Chilapa de Alvarez in Guerrero on April of 1998. In the later case, some of the villagers declared to the press that "they were tired of the police setting criminals free," and that they wanted to send a clear message for those wrongdoers that kept the region stricken with

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[417] This rate is most probably a low estimate, particularly considering problems of underreporting characterizing rape. Rate was calculated using INEGI population data and Piccato's *Estadísticas del crimen.* The rates per decade are the following: 3.7 (for the year 1940), 3.75 (1950), 4.5 (1970), 4.6 (1990), 4.28 (1995) and 3.8 (2000). These results are consistent with Piccato's calculation of rape rates at the national level, which fluctuated between 3 and 4 indicted rapes per 100, 000 inhabitants. According to data from the INACIPE, rape rates for Puebla reached 13.71 cases per 100 thousand inhabitants in 2002. See: Gasman et al, "Violencia Sexual en México,"21.

[418] Calculations based on data compiled by Piccato, *Estadísticas del crimen en México.* There are certainly important variations from decade to decade, with the lowest percentage of sentenced individuals corresponding to the year 1940 (4.6%) and the highest to the year 1990 (73.9%).

[419] Vilas, "Linchamiento por mano propia…," 146-8.

crime.[420]Also mentioned by Vilas was the lynching of a 27-year-old man by three women in Tijuana, Baja California on September of 1998. A newspaper article stated that the three women had prevented the man from raping a young girl. After beating the man unconscious, the women tied his hand and feet; he died after the incident due to severe head injuries.[421]

Two other national studies on lynching feature cases driven by accusations of rape. The abovementioned study by Fuentes Diaz documented 25 lynchings, out of a total of 318 cases, between 1984 and 2003.[422] Rodríguez Guillén, on his part, documented a total of 28 lynchings against so-called rapists from 1988 to 2010 (based on a total of 232 cases). In both studies, robberies are mentioned as the most important conduct leading to lynching.[423]

Car accidents and mob violence

Rapes were not the only crimes generating public outrage in twentieth-century Puebla. A very different kind of crime, killings provoked by car accidents, also precipitated lynch mobs. In these cases, attackers were either bystanders or witnesses who gathered rapidly around the so-called guilty driver, perhaps fearing that he would try to flee the crime scene. In this sense, lynchings seem to follow from a more immediate reaction and sense of outrage towards the alleged negligence of the driver. For instance, on June of 1938, in the town of Chachapa in Amozoc, Puebla, a car driven by Eduardo Goya accidentally killed the boy José Alonso. The accident generated the indignation of those who witnessed it, provoking the attempt of lynching against both the driver and his assistant.[424] A couple of weeks later, another boy was killed in an accident; his family, including his mom, were

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[420] "Pobladores de Chilapa, Guerrero, Ahorcaron a un presunto violador," April 16, 1998, *La Jornada*.
[421] "Linchan tres mujeres a un presunto violador en Tijuana," *La Jornada*, September 13, 1998.
[422] Fuentes Díaz, "Violencia y Estado, Mediación y Respuesta No Estatal,"124.
[423] In Fuentes Díaz, 120 cases are attributed to robberies; in Rodríguez Guillén, 98 cases. See: Rodríguez Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social: los linchamientos en México," 55. A more recent study also confirms this trend, see Gamallo, "Crimen, castigo y violencia colectiva...", 105.
[424] "Un grave motín en Chachapa," June 3rd 1938, *Diario de Puebla.*

severely injured. The press described the driver as a "savage individual" who hardly knew how to drive. He was nearly lynched by a crowd.[425] A year before, on July 2nd 1937, a driver hit and killed eight-year old girl Elena Espinosa in her way to school. When they found out the news about the accident, a group of infuriated women nearly lynched the "savage driver" who had already been involved in a similar crime against another girl.[426]

Statistics corresponding to the years 1940s to the 1990s indicate that the number of car accidents in Puebla increased exponentially during the 1970s.[427]The same holds true for the rate of people that were either injured or killed by car accident in the state. The rate per 100,000 inhabitants of people injured or killed by car accidents went from 5.3 in the year 1950 to 12.6 and 34.4 in the years 1970 and 1990, respectively.[428] This dramatic increase in number of people impacted by car accidents may explain the ongoing occurrence of lynchings precipitated by this offense. On July of 1973 for instance, a diver was nearly lynched by a group of people that witnessed how a bus overturned on the road from Puebla to Valsequillo. Six people were injured and one person was killed.[429] The newspaper described the driver, Ángel Ordoñez González, as reckless and claimed the man was driving too fast what seemed to be an overcrowded bus. Suffice it to say, lynchings motivated by car accidents have played an increasing role in the occurrence of lynching. This is so much so that, according to three different studies carried out at the national level, lynchings triggered

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[425] "Familia destrozada por un camion en S. Francisco," June 18th 1938, *Diario de Puebla.*

[426] "Iba a ser linchado en Metepec, torpe chofer," July 2nd 1937, *La Opinión.*

[427] Whereas the average of car accidents in the 1940s was 42, in the 1960s and 1970s this number reached a total of 225 and 1069, correspondingly. During the 1980s the average number of car accidents was 3, 505 and in the year 1990 alone there were a total of 3639 accidents. See: Piccato, *Estadísticas del crimen en México.*

[428] Rate calculated based on INEGI's data on Puebla's population and on data on car accidents provided by Piccato, *Estadísticas del crimen en México.*

[429] "Un muerto y 6 lesionados al volcarse un autobús," July 2nd 1973, *La Opinión.*

by car accidents represent between 6 and 10% of all the cases documented between the years 1984 and 2011.[430]

Lynching and child theft: rumors and myth-like fears

Present-day studies on lynching in Mexico also refer to child theft as a misconduct that precipitates lynching.[431] In contrast to lynchings provoked by rapes or car accidents, cases driven by accusations of child theft seem to both generate and be based upon more complex narratives of fear. As analyzed above, during the 1930s and up to the 1960s the kidnapping and disappearance of children was often attributed to mythical beings such as decapitators or witches. In the 1980s and 1990s this offense was squarely linked to the actions of so-called criminals. For instance, on March of 1993, two men from Veracruz were lynched in Tepatlaxco, Puebla.[432] The men had been taking pictures of students in various elementary schools in order to sell them back to these schools. While they were waiting outside of a Tepatlaxco primary school to meet with the principal and ask his permission to take the pictures, they heard the tolling of the church bells. A few minutes later they saw how a large group of people gathered around them, armed with stones and clubs. The crowd started to shout at them, calling them kidnappers and accusing them of being "the ones that steal children and rip them open." The men took refugee in the police station but were

[430] See Chapter 1, table 1. The study by Fuentes Díaz documented 22 cases of lynchings driven by car accidents between 1984 and 2003. Guillén's study documented a total 18 (for the period 1988-2010) and Gamallo's a total of 40 cases (between 2000 and 2011). Fuentes Díaz, *Violencia y Estado, mediación y respuesta no estatal,* 117; Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social," 55; Gamallo, "Crimen, Castigo y Violencia Colectiva," 92.
[431] Fuentes Díaz, for instance, identified a total of seven cases taking place at the national level between 1984 and 2003. I documented four cases of lynching against people accused of child theft between 1985 and 1998, three in the state of Puebla and one in Hidalgo. Fuentes Díaz, *Violencia y Estado, mediación y respuesta no estatal,* 129; See also: Shadow and Shadow, "Los robachicos;" Vilas, "(In)justicia por mano propia..."
[432] ¿Quienes intentaron linchar a fotógrafos y profesores?:¡Tepatlaxco señor!, March 17, 1993; *La Jornada de Oreinte*;"Ustedes destripan niños nos gritaba la gente," March 31 1993, *La Jornada de Oriente*'; see also Fuentes Díaz, "El Estado y la furia..." pp. 7-8

dragged outside by the enraged crowd and taken to the town's main plaza where they were tied up and dosed with gasoline. The police was able to rescue them before they were burned alive by the lynch mob, but their injuries kept them in coma for more than two weeks. A few years earlier, on June of 1985, a similar case took place in Cholula against three men that were selling candies outside of a school. Accused of stealing children, the men were beaten up and killed. The cadaver of one of them was burned.[433]

In the study mentioned above, Carlos Vilas refers to similar cases taking place in different states of Mexico during the 1990s. These include the lynching of two "strangers" accused of stealing children in Naucualpan, Mexico state on October 1994; as well as the lynching of two other men, also accused of kidnapping children, in Huejutla Hidalgo on March 1998.[434] In the later case, the two men had been taken to the police station after two girls (eleven and nine) had told their parents the men had tried to kidnap them. Rumors circulated that the men were part of a kidnapping ring that trafficked children's organs. Some villagers even claimed that the men had a liver or two in their truck and that, as journalist Sam Quiñones documented, "the men weren't salesmen at all but foot soldiers in a Texas-based ring of child kidnappers..."[435] When a group of parents heard, through a local radio station, that the men were going to be released after paying a bail, a crowd of approximately 300 residents broke into the office of the local court, held the judge and his staff inside, and forcibly removed the two men outside of the police station.[436] Armed with machetes and clubs, they dragged the men to the main town's plaza where they were lynched and killed;

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[433] "Linchó una multitud a tres vendedores de dulces en Coapa e incineró un cadáver", June 18th, 1985, *El Sol de Puebla*.
[434] Vilas, "(In)justicia por mano propia...," p. 22; for a detailed account of the lynching in Hidalgo, see also Quiñones, *True Tales form Another Mexico,* pp. 33-4.
[435] Quiñones, *True Tales form Another Mexico,* p. 33.
[436] "Por radio incitaron a sacarlos de la cárcel; desoyeron al gobernador," March 27th, 1998; *La Jornada.*

one of them was left hanging from the bandstand. During the same attack, the mayor's offices were ransacked and dosed with gasoline, two police cars were destroyed, and the car of the two men was set on fire. After the event, it was established that the two men were actually traveling salesmen who used to sell children stamps from town to town.

In Latin America, in countries like Guatemala, Bolivia, and Brazil, various scholars have documented the occurrence of lynchings linked to accusations of child theft and organ trafficking over the last twenty to thirty years.[437] Scheper-Hughes has traced the seemingly pervasive nature of these accusations and the communal fears they generate to both Latin America's recent political past as well as to a growing global market of trafficked organs. In terms of Latin America's recent past, she refers to the abduction and disappearances that military regimes in countries like Brazil, Argentina, and Guatemala carried out during the 1970s and 1980s.[438] As she points out, these repressive practices have been linked to an underground traffic of bodies and organs as well as to medical experiments supported by these regimes. In terms of the contemporary global traffic of organs and the type of anxieties and rumors they generate she suggests a genealogy that is worth quoting at length:

> "The latest version of the organ-stealing rumor seems to have begun in Brazil or Guatemala in the 1980s and spread from there like wildfire to other, similar political contexts ... I first heard the rumor when it was circulating in the shantytowns of Northeast Brazil in the 1980s. It warned of child kidnapping and body stealing by “medical agents” from the United States and Japan, who were said to be seeking a fresh supply of human organs for transplant surgeries in the First World. Shantytown residents reported multiple sightings of large blue-and-yellow combi-vans scouring poor neighborhoods in search of stray youngsters. The children would be nabbed and shoved into the trunk of the van, and their discarded and eviscerated bodies—

[437] Sieder, "Contested sovereignties...;" Churchhill, "Lynching and States of Fear...;" Samper, "Cannibalizing Kids...," Burrell, "After lynching..."
[438] Scheper-Hughes, "The Global Traffic in Human Organs,"202-3.

> minus heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, and eyes— would turn up later by the roadside, between rows of sugarcane, or in hospital dumpsters."

It is possible to recognize some elements of this rumor in the lynching of the two traveling salesmen in Huejutla Hidalgo, especially in their portrayal as Texas-based foot soldiers. Nonetheless, it would be in Guatemala where this organ-stealing rumor would spread with greater intensity, generating a series of attacks against U.S. citizens, especially women, in the mid-1990s.[439] A case in point was the lynching of American tourist June Weinstock on April 4, 1994.[440] Her lynching took place in the midst of rumors regarding a child trafficking and organ-harvesting network operating in the country. Guatemalan newspapers had published various articles claiming that an illegal and U.S.-led market of human organs was "flourishing", while word of mouth referred to snatched children reappearing death with organs missing and "thank you" notes written in English.[441]

Similar rumors have continued to surface in Mexico over the last ten years, at times coinciding with statements made by public officials and at others having a more localized character. On May 2012, the disappearance of two children in Morelia, Michoacán, led to the spreading of the rumor that children were being snatched by a criminal group that was extracting and selling their organs.[442] The rumor eventually led to the attempt of lynching of two men who had been apprehended by the police for car theft. The two children were found death days later, their organs intact. In the northern state of Chihuahua, a rumor broke on

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[439] Adams, "Gringas, Ghouls, and Guatemala..."

[440] Weinstock had been taking pictures of some children in a market she was visiting in the town of San Cristobal Verapaz in Guatemala. When a local woman noticed her 8 year-old-child was missing, people identified Weinstock as the kidnapper and managed to seize her from the hands of the police who were trying to protect her. She was stabbed eight times and suffered severe head injuries. The missing boy was found, alive and well, later that day.

[441] Samper, "Cannibalizing Kids," p. 6.

[442] "Indignación por homicidio de niños," *El Sol de Morelia*, June 10, 2012; available at: http://www.oem.com.mx/elsoldemorelia/notas/n2574900.htm

October 2013 regarding the alleged disappearance of various children who would later be found with no organs or no eyes. A newspaper report indicated the police itself had warned the parents to watch for suspicious cars or people dressed as doctors outside of schools.[443] In the same state, a decade earlier, public officials attributed the killing of several women in the border city of Ciudad Juarez to an organ trafficking ring that was allegedly harvesting and selling their organs to United States' wealthy families.[444]

According to Samper, rumors constitute collective interpretations that serve to "explain uncertain, ambiguous events or intangible fears, anxieties, or perceived dangers." When reiterated over time, he argues, rumors acquire a plot and structure that brings them closer to oral narratives or so-called urban legends.[445] This legend-like character of the children theft rumors during the 1980s and 1990s resembles the mythical fears discussed above. In particular, it echoes the type of anxieties triggering the legend of the *degollador* (children's decapitator) and the rumors that claimed the government was kidnapping children in order to be sent to the U.S. where they would be turned into oil. As a matter of fact, I would argue that in the case of Mexico and probably other Latin American countries, the genealogy Scheper-Hughes delineates for the child theft rumors needs to be placed within a longer historical trajectory. As illustrated by the myth of the *pishtaco*, this trajectory can be traced back to these countries' colonial period and can be later be situated in the processes of modernization these countries underwent during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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[443] Patricia Mayorga,"Pánico en Chihuahua por supuesto robo de niños para tráfico de órganos," *Proceso*, October 23, 2013; avialable at: http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=356155

[444] Maki Becker, "Organ trade ghouls Mexico thnks women killed for body parts," *Daily News,* retrieved on July 3, 2015, available at: http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/news/organ-trade-ghouls-mexico-thinks-women-killed-body-parts-article-1.668754

[445] Samper, "Cannibalizing Kids," p. 4.

There are at least three elements that the myths of the *pishtaco* and the *degollador* share with contemporary child theft rumors: the potential presence of a foreign individual, the victimization of innocent children, and the use of body organs or fluids to invigorate machines or people overseas. As argued by French philosopher Roland Barthes, myth is not a lie but an "inflexion" that serves to render certain events as factual and self-evident.[446] In light of this, we can argue that myths and myth-like rumors provide an effective narrative to collectivize violence, as accusations ought not to be demonstrated because they are, always already, self-evident. In establishing this connection my intention is not to argue that contemporary fears are somehow pre-modern. After all, they are informed by the existence of present-day forms of transnational crime made possible by "late modernity" processes of globalization. My intention is rather to point at the continuities that exist between past and present-day fears and rumors that have, at different points in time, led to the legitimation of lynching as a means of social control. In this case, these continuities (i.e. the presence of foreign individuals, the appropriation of local resources by or for outsiders) are telling of the tensions and animosities generated by so-called modernizing forces; which, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, have underpinned the occurrence of lynchings throughout twentieth-century Puebla.

Lynching against murderers

So far, we have discussed three types of crime precipitating lynching: rape, car accidents, and child theft. In most of these cases, lynch mobs targeted outsiders, recidivist criminals, or individuals that people believed would not be punished for their actions. The same trends can be observed in cases of lynching against murders. On September 22 of 1931,

[446] Barthes, "Myth today," p. 129.

a crowd lynched four men in the town of San Martín Texmelucan. [447] One of the victims was Felipe Valencia, the former mayor of a neighboring town, who had killed an innocent man weeks before. No charges had been made against Valencia for his crime, but when the neighbors saw him that day they surrounded him and the other three men in order to avenge the death of the deceased. As explained in Chapter 2, throughout the 1930s, mayors and local authorities tended to bend the law in order to advance their political interests, often with impunity.[448] The lynching of Valencia can, in turn, be regarded as a means to "correct" his corrupted behavior as well as the impunity characterizing this and other abuses.

Similarly was the lynching of Remedios Ramos on August 3rd of 1943 also provoked by people's attempt to castigate a crime that was not properly punished by authorities. Ramos was lynched by seventy villagers in the town of San Francisco Ocotlán, in Cholula.[449] He was serving time in prison for having murdered eight people but had managed to escape a few days before the incident. Ramos was identified by a group of neighbors who caught him trying to rape a local girl, and thereafter attacked him with sticks, knives and pistols, letting his corpse completely deformed.

In other instances, lynchings were not so much a reaction to impunity but to what was regarded as an "insufficient" punishment. Cases reported in other states and regions across the country allow us to illustrate this point. On October of 1938, for instance, a crowd tried to break in the Tecate prison in Baja California in order to lynch two Chinese men suspected of

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[447] "Cuatro individuos fueron linchados ayer en el pueblo de Temaxalac," *La Opinión*, September 24, 1931.

[448] In point of fact, the same month this lynching was reported, newspaper *La Opinión* narrated two other cases of state abuse that further confirm corruption and impunity loomed large in these towns. The first involved the police commander of San Martín Texmelucan who was reportedly using torture and different torments against suspects; the second referred to the mayor of San Aparicio who had allegedly "staged" a lynching in order to cover up the illegal execution of two innocent men. See: "Bárbaro atentado cometió comandante de Texmelucán," September 8th, 1931, *La Opinión*; "El alcalde de San Aparicio cometió un grave delito," September 9th, 1931, *La Opinión*.

[449] "Fue linchado un asesino y prófugo en San Francisco Ocotlán, Cholula," *La Opinión* August 3rd, 1943.

slaying a 19-year old girl.[450] Although the men had been put in prison and were waiting for their trial, people decided to take justice into their own hands. Several years later, in Contra Estaca, Sinaloa, a group of men and women broke into the local prison and seized three men who were suspected of having murdered seven people, including two children and a woman. The three men were stoned and beaten with clubs. Once death, their corpses were dragged with ropes and were going to be burned but their families managed to rescue their remains.[451]

In spite of their gravity, murders do not figure as prominently as robberies in the cases of lynching documented by this research.[452] The national level studies of Fuentes Díaz (1984-2003) and Rodríguez Guillén (1988-2010) confirm this tendency.[453] One potential explanation for this might be that, unlike robbery rates, homicide rates have been declining at both regional and national levels since the second half of the twentieth century. In Puebla, in particular, homicide rates have been trending downward since the 1950s.[454] In contrast, and as will be analyzed in the following lines, robbery rates experienced a considerable increase from the 1980s onwards. An alternative interpretation could be found in the rate of sentencing of homicides, particularly when compared to those of robberies. A cursory revision of data from the years 1937-2000 for the state of Puebla indicates that homicides are more likely to lead to formal sentencing than do robberies. Put different, robberies have a statistically higher level of impunity than homicides.[455] Lastly, the relatively low presence of

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[450] "2 Suspects Moved To Avert Lynching," *The Washington Post*, Oct 20, 1938.
[451] "Tres criminales son linchados por el populacho," *El Universal,* February 5, 1989.
[452] From a total of 49 cases of lynching linked to criminal offenses, 6 were provoked by an accussation of homicide and 12 to robberies. See Chapter 1.
[453] Fuentes Díaz documented 120 lynchings driven by robberies versus 21 precipitated by murder (out of a total of 318 cases); whereas Rodríguez Guillén, from a total of 232 cases, documented 98 lynchings driven by robberies versus 23 related to murder. See: Fuentes Díaz, "Violencia y Estado, Mediación y Respuesta No Estatal," 124; Rodríguez Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social: los linchamientos en México," 55.
[454] See Chapter 1.
[455] Impunity levels can be calculated by comparing the total of individuals indicted of homicides and robberies against the total of individuals sentenced for each these crimes. Data corresponding to the local level or "fuero

lynchings driven by homicides might suggest that, when punished outside of the law, so-called murders are castigated through more covert forms of vigilantism, such as secret murders or disappearances.[456]

Punishing thieves

In contrast to lynchings against so-called murderers, attacks against alleged robbers usually followed from minor offenses. With a few exceptions such as cattle rustling, cases against alleged robbers usually involved the stealing of small items or inexpensive possessions. This signals the disproportional character of lynchings as a means to punish a wrongdoing as well as the likely poverty of those being robbed. As mentioned above, lynchings driven by robberies are not new to Puebla. On July of 1930, for instance, a "professional thief" was nearly lynched in the town of San Cristobal in Cholula by a group of local neighbors.[457] The man had been caught by the police in a nearby town after having stoler a sewing machine, and had been brought to San Cristobal, where he had sold the stolen machine to a villager. When the neighbors found out the police had detained him, they seized him and attempted to lynch him as some of them claimed the same man had robbed them before. On July of 1933, villagers of Santa María Xonacatepec lynched a man who was

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común" of Puebla shows that the percentage of individuals sentenced for homicide has been consistently higher than the corresponding percentage for cases of robbery. For instance, whereas 46% of those indicted for homicide were sentenced in 1950, in the same year only 32% of those indicted for robbery were sentenced. In the following years a similar trend can be observed. See: Piccato, *Estadísticas del Crimen.* Indicators of impunity at the national level also suggest homicides are more likely to be punished than homicides. By comparing the total of homicides reported with those that were punished, statistics from INEGI for the year 2012 indicate that 16 out of 100 homicides were punished. In contrast, only 6 out 100 reported robberies were punished. The same tendency can be observed for the years 1997 to 2011. The highest number of punished homicides per 100 reported homicides was 42.7 in 2006; for robberies the highest number was 10.84.

[456] In the context of Guatemala, for instance, it has been suggested that certain crimes might be dealt with through more covert forms of violence. One of these forms is the practice known as *limpieza social* or "social cleansing," which implies the private killing of a so-called offender. See: Núñez, "The Person is Simply Not There…"

[457] "Un ratero profesional estuvo a punto de ser lynchado en un pueblo," July 2, 1931, *La Opinión*

considered the head of a cattle-rustling band that had recently stolen various animals from a local farm.[458] The man was killed with pistols and machetes and his cadaver abandoned on a road. On July of 1937, in the city of Puebla, a man was stoned and severely injured by a group of women who claimed the man was selling them fake coal mixed with stones.[459] On September 25 of 1941, inhabitants of the Cabrera neighborhood in Atlixco hanged a man who they believed had taking part in a burglary where a watch and some clothing had been stolen.[460]

The lynching of so-called robbers continued in the decades to come. In many cases, the police was not absent but was rarely sought by villagers as legitimate representatives of law and justice. Although police officers were able to save some individuals from being killed, they were rarely able to prevent lynchings in the form of beatings. On December of 1969, for instance, two merchant brothers were lynched in the town of San Miguel Canoa by a group of villagers that accused them of cheating.[461] The men were beaten up and then hanged by a tree. The police managed to rescue them as, according to a newspaper article, the police had "kept an eye on the area," since the lynching of the five university workers on September 14th of 1968 (see case description above). On September of 1982, one woman and three men were lynched by a group of Cholula neighbors.[462] The three individuals, who were siblings, had assaulted the owner of a local pharmacy and threatened her with a knife and pistols. The police managed to rescue them, but they suffered severe injuries. A few years later, on August of 1987, three individuals accused of cattle rustling were nearly

[458] "Crimen en el P. de Xonacatepec," *La Opinión*, July 21, 1933.
[459] " Un carbonero fue lapidado en el barrio de el Monton," *La Opinión*, July 8th 1937.
[460] "Horripilante crimen cerca de Atlixco," *La Opinión*, September 25, 1941.
[461] "Mexican Police Stop Mob from Lynching 2," *Los Angeles Times*, December 25th, 1969.
[462] "En San Antonio Cacalotepec casi linchan a tres fallidos asaltantes," *La Opinión*, September 19th, 1982.

lynched in San Salvador Atoyatempan, in the municipality of Puebla.[463] The three individuals had been caught by a group of people who found out they were trying to steal two oxen from one of their neighbors. The group had turned the individuals to the police but decided to take justice into their own hands when they found out they were the same people that had assaulted the town before. A similar case took place on September 2 of 1996, when two rustlers were nearly lynched by villagers of the municipality of San Nicolás de los Ranchos. Villagers claimed one of the rustlers was a military that had threatened them many times before. According to a newspaper article, tired of the negligence and corruption of the authorities, people decided to take matters into their own hands.[464] The men were held by a large group of villagers who agreed on hanging and burning the men in the town's main plaza. After hours of negotiation with the local authorities, they turned the two men over to the police.[465]

During the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, lynchings against so-called criminals in Puebla and other parts of the country prompted a national debate over Mexico's justice and security systems.[466] Although some cases of lynching continued to be attributed to the ignorance or backwardness of given communities, journalists and editorialists focused increasingly on the state's failure to provide security and justice. In the midst of Mexico's full entry into a global and market oriented economy via the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA), many observers also lamented the "barbarism" characterizing these episodes of violence. A columnist remarked in 1996 that lynchings were driven by "desperation and

[463] "Casi linchan a abigeos en Sn. Salvador Atoyatempan," *La Opinión*, August 18th, 1987.
[464] "Vecinos de San Nicolás de los Ranchos pretendían linchar a dos por abigeos," *Síntesis*, September 2, 1996.
[465] "A salvo en el Cereso la pareja casi linchada en San Nicolás," *Síntesis*, September 5th 1996; see also on this case: Vilas, "(In)justicia por mano propia," 17; "Linchamientos: sintoma de la crisis del sistema judicial*?," La Opinión Los Angeles*, September 9, 1996.
[466] See for instance the collection of essays published by Mexico's Human Rights Commission (CNDH) in 2002 as part of a national essay contest (the first one organized in the country) on the issue of lynching. CNDH, *Justicia por propia mano.*

despair, fatigue and lumpenization, lack of future and barbarism; that speak not only of economic and institutional failures, but of a true reversal in the country's civilization process."[467] A year before, another commentator argued that lynchings occurred because "the justice security institutions are so corrupted that criminals obtain total impunity rights. Is not just about poverty, but about lack of trust and credibility in the government."[468] An interview with Mexican president Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) conducted by Jacobo Zabludowsky, the most important national TV anchorman at the time, illustrates vividly the level of attention lynching received during this period:[469]

> Jacobo Z. "We have seen recently that in some towns they catch criminals that have been caught in flagrante and [we have seen] the attempt of pacific people to lynch them because they distrust those who are going to capture them and judge them."
> President Zedillo: "Well, we do not know, we do not know if it is because of that or simply because there are no policemen, sometimes it is as bad a that. There are municipalities in the country where there are one or two policemen, and in some there are none..."

As has been analyzed thus far, however, lynchings did not signal the "absence of the state," but its disavowal by people who preferred to take justice into their own hands. In the case of lynchings against so-called criminals, in particular, the police was often present before and during the occurrence of these acts of violence but was unable to prevent them due to people's distrust and rejection of state authorities. Moreover, in some cases, people managed to seize criminals from prison, demonstrating that lynching was not simply about demanding punishment but about endorsing a *particular kind* of punishment for offenders.

[467] Luis Salazar C., "Los linchamientos y la sombra de Hobbes," *Nexos*, October 1996.
[468] Hermenegildo Castor, "Justicia por mano propia," *Nexos*, November 1995.
[469] "Entrevista al C. Presidente para el programa 24 Horas," Los Pinos, 24 de agosto de 1996, retrieved on July 5, 2015; available at: http://zedillo.presidencia.gob.mx/pages/disc/ago96/24horas.html

The argument that lychings are not an expression of state's absence but of communities' defiance of the state's presence has been discussed at length by literature on lynchings in the United States. Particularly in the post-bellum period, lynchings were organized in open defiance of the extant institutions of justice and signaled a tendency to privilege communal, racially biased, and harsh forms of justice.[470] As remarked by Garland, "in a majority of recorded cases the lynch-victim was in the custody of law-officers when he was seized by the mob."[471] One could certainly argue that in the Mexican context levels of impunity provide "objective grounds" to distrust the state institutions.[472] However, in order to explain why people choose lynching as a means to correct the state's incapacity to provide justice over less overt forms of violence or over other non-violent alternatives,[473] we need to look at other factors. These factors include the perpetrators' attempt to reiterate these acts as acts of communal justice (as oppose to crimes), as well as to control certain conducts by way of exemplary and spectacular forms of punishment.

Robberies constitute, according to various studies, the main offense eliciting lynching in Mexico and the rest of Latin America today.[474] In countries as different as Guatemala, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Brazil, lynchings are not driven by murders, rapes, or other serious

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[470] Pfeifer, *Rough Justice,* 94-100.
[471] Carrigan and Webb, “The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin…”, 416; Garland, "Capital Punishment and American Culture,"353.
[472] According to official data from INEGI, in 2013 the percentage of crimes that went underreported and that did not lead to any investigation was 93.8%. INEGI, Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública 2014; see also chapter on lynchings and state formation.
[473] For instance, in various indigeneous localities of Mexico (including some in Puebla and Guerrero) communities have opted for models of justice based on restorative principles that reject the use of physical forms of punishment. See Sierra, "Indian Rights and Customary Law in Mexico," Sierra, "Construyendo seguridad y justicia en los márgenes del Estado."
[474] Snodgrass Godoy, "When Justice is Criminal," Krupa, "Histories in Red," Goldstein, "In Our Own Hands;" Vilas, "Linchamiento por mano propia: linchamientos en el México contemporáneo;" Fuentes Díaz, "Violencia y Estado, Mediación y Respuesta No Estatal," Rodríguez Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social: los linchamientos en México."

offenses, but by minor property crimes.[475] One way to explain this apparent paradox is by looking at the total increase in robberies that Latin American countries experienced during the last three decades. According to some estimates, robberies across the region have tripled in the last 25 years and armed robberies have increased in nearly all countries.[476] In Mexico, in particular, robbery rates experienced a sudden increase during the 1980s at the national level, going from 31 indicted robberies per 100 thousand inhabitants in 1980 to 59 per 100 thousand inhabitants by the end of the 1990s.[477] Although less marked, the same trend can be observed in the state of Puebla. In the year 1980 Puebla had an indicted robbery rate of 14 per 100 thousand inhabitants; in 1995 and 2000 the rate was 22.[478] Another way to account for this paradox is to analyze lynchings in light of the economic vulnerability of those being victimized by robberies. As indicated above, lynchings driven by robberies involve the stealing of small items and inexpensive possessions. In reference to lynching in contemporary Bolivia, Goldstein makes a similar observation noting that most items being stolen are of little economic value, such as gas tanks, clothing, and food. This, he argues, allows us to illustrate "the direct impact of these thefts on people's attempts to preserve basic domestic economy." [479] In Puebla, the 1970s decade witnessed a deterioration of the economy, which manifested in greater unemployment rates, the growth of the informal sector, and the further pauperization of rural communities.[480] This context, together with the actual increase in robberies, might have contributed to amplify communities' sense of vulnerability in the face of crimes against property.

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[475] Snodgrass Godoy, "When Justice is Criminal," 629.
[476] PNUD, Informe Regional de Desarrollo Humano: Seguridad Ciudadana con Rostro Humano 2013-2014, v.
[477] Piccato "Estadísticas del crimen en México: Series históricas, 1901-2001," http://www.columbia.edu/~pp143/estadisticascrimen/EstadisticasSigloXX.htm
[478] Calculation based on Piccato "Estadísticas del crimen..." and INEGI population data.
[479] Goldstein, "In Our Own Hands," 39.
[480] Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla,* 254-63; Romero Melgarejo and Pech Matamoros, "La violencia por la disputa de los recursos del bosque," 188; Chrisman, *Community, Power, and Memory*, 28-9.

A third explanation can be offered by going beyond objective levels of crime and by focusing on perceptions of crime and fear of crime. As argued by Snodgrass Godoy, "lynchings are more a reaction to fear and insecurity than they are to crime *per se*."[481] In effect, fear of crime has been on the rise over the last thirty years in Latin America, increasing citizens' sense of vulnerability and insecurity.[482] Robberies and street crime, in particular, are considered the main threat to citizen security in most Latin American countries today.[483] Susana Rotker and other scholars addressed the question of fear of crime in the region and the end of the 1990s and argued: "The portrait of daily life in urban Latin America depicts a felling of generalized defenselessness..."[484] Similarly, Holston and Caldeira, claimed that: "a culture of fear and suspicion has taken hold under political democracy that produces abandonment and lawlessness of public spaces—their conversion into no-man's land—or their enclosure, fortification, and privatization."[485] As argued by Risor, in this interplay of insecurity and fear of crime, "the thief" is constantly being constructed and imagined by neighbors who "... refuse to accept the ordinariness of supposed thieves and seek to reconstruct their identity as radically different criminal persons."[486] In this context, she explains, lynching emerges as the "ultimate and lethal practice of defining and marking dangerousness, allowing urban order and community to make their mimetic opposition to the

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[481] Snograss Godoy, "When Justice is Criminal," 628.

[482] The survey Americas Barometer, for instance, has documented an increase in the percentage of Latin Americans that consider insecurity and crime the "most serious problem faced by their country." Whereas in 2004, this percentage was 22.5%, in 2014 it reached 32.5%. The importance of the economy, on the other hand, has declined over the last 10 years (although it is still considered the most important problem by 35.8% of respondents). Zechmeister, *The Political Culture of Democracy in the Americas*, 11; see also PNUD, Informe Regional de Desarrollo Humano: Seguridad Ciudadana con Rostro Humano.

[483] PNUD, Informe Regional de Desarrollo Humano 2013-2014, 76.

[484] Rotker, "Cities written by Violence," 14-5.

[485] Caldeira and Holston, "Democracy and Violence in Brazil," 694.

[486] Risor, "Twenty Hanging Dolls and a Lynching,"469.

“criminal” and to the state."[487] In Puebla, public representations of dangerousness focused increasingly on youth violence, drugs, and street gangs since the 1960s and 1970s, as manifested on local press’ descriptions of the threats disrupting the tranquility of city dwellers.[488]

The centrality of the criminal as a sign of citizen's insecurity is, as Comaroff and Comaroff point out, a global phenomenon. In places as diverse as South Africa, Nigeria, Brazil (and we can add Mexico and other Latin American countries), the figure of the criminal has emerged as one condensing the fears, frustrations, and contradictions of recently constituted democracies confronted with old and new forms of economic marginality.[489] It is in light of this context that so-called criminals have become the locus of both state and non-state forms of violence and punishment in. According to a recent study (2013), in countries as different as Mexico, Brazil, El Salvador, and Chile, around 50% of respondents claimed that they "very much agreed" with the notion that the best way to tackle crime was to apply "tougher" punishments for criminals.[490] The same study reported that in countries like Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, and Bolivia, between 22 and 30% of respondents approved "taking justice into their own hands" when the state does not punish criminals.[491] A more recent survey (2014) carried out in Mexico at the national level offers even more alarming results: 47.7% of respondents claimed that they approved or very much approved

[487] *Ibid*, 466.
[488] The following headlines from the newspapers’ front-page give an idea of the type of news that prevailed at the time: “Coto al incremento del delito: 675 aprehensiones por diversos delitos en 75 días laborales,” *El Sol de Puebla,* July 8th, 1972 “Una mujer y ‘3 hippies’ asaltaron a un taxista,” *El Sol de Puebla,* July 8th, 1972; “Reos drogados cometieron un asesinato,” *El Sol de Puebla*, July 3, 1974; “26 temibles delincuentes aprehendidos en Zacaola,” *La Opinión*, August 13, 1983; “El hombre actual más violento que hace 23 años,” *El Sol de Puebla*, September 2, 1985. See also: Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla*, 254;
[489] Comaroff and Comaroff, "Criminal Obsessions, After Foucault," see also Calderia, "Fortified Enclaves: the New Urban Segregation," Goldstein, “Neoliberal violence and ‘self-help’ security in Bolivia,” Auyero, “The Hyper-Shantytown."
[490] PNUD, Informe Regional de Desarrollo Humano 2013-2014, 182.
[491] *Ibid*, 146.

communities lynching criminals whenever authorities failed to capture them.[492] The crystallization of the criminal as the main victim of lynchings in Puebla needs to be read against this national and global background. It furthermore needs to be interpreted in light of a local history of shifting conceptions of danger and deviancy wherein criminals seem to have displaced witches and anticlerical individuals as the main target of collective fears and collective violence.

Conclusion

The present chapter has offered an analysis of the conducts eliciting lynching in twentieth-century Puebla. Based on the revision of several cases taking place between the 1930s and the 2000s, it has demonstrated that lynchings have been organized as a means to punish persons whose conducts are considered deviant or dangerous, including mythical beings, anticlerical or impious individuals, as well as so-called criminals. In this sense, this chapter has contributed to pluralize our understanding of the drivers of lynchings vis-à-vis an extant literature that has focused, almost exclusively, on lynchings organized as a reaction to crime in contemporary Latin America.

Furthermore, this chapter has sought to illuminate the sociological function of lynchings as a form of social control while, at the same time, it has aimed at pointing at the historical transformation of notions of deviance and danger in twentieth-century Puebla. In terms of continuities, evidence suggests lynching mobs target both outsiders and individuals that belong to those communities where lynchings take place. In the latter case, however, victims of lynching are individuals that occupy a marginal position within the community based on their behavior, political ideas, or religious affiliation. Whether directed at outsiders

[492] Schedler, "Ciudadanía y violencia organizada en México," 65.

or at internal outcasts, though, lynching serves to draw the boundaries between those behaviors that will be tolerated versus those that are not be accepted. Based on this historical rendering, it is also possible to conclude that there has been a gradual convergence of those conducts or wrongdoings punished by formal law and those punished by lynchings. While lynching elicited by conducts not typified as crimes by formal law (i.e. witchcraft, abduction of children by mythical beings) declined significantly by the second half of the twentieth century, those aimed at punishing conducts that are typified as crimes (i.e. robberies, rape, kidnappings) became more prominent.[493] In this sense, contemporary lynchings do not signal a contradiction or dissonance between local conceptions of crime and formal law; rather, they express a disagreement regarding both the effectiveness and legitimacy of the official criminal justice system.[494]

Scholars working on lynchings in Latin America have interpreted the occurrence and apparent upsurge in this practice as a direct outcome of increasing levels of crime and insecurity in the region over the last thirty years. The findings of this chapter suggest an alternative interpretation. They suggest that lynchings need to be situated within long-term dynamics of social control promoted by local communities in the face of behaviors considered dangerous or destabilizing. Overall, lynchings have been informed by a conservative conception of social order and a rejection of modernizing forces including

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[493] This contrasts with the trajectory of collective killings in South Africa, where the necklacing of so-called witches actually increased during the post-apartheid period. This increase impelled the African National Congress (ANC) to organize a commission of inquiry into witchcraft and the murder of witches, thus illustrating the tensions of a regime that regarded itself as an exemplar of modernity and democracy. See: Comaroff and Comaroff, "Policing Culture, Cultural Policing;" Harnischfeger, "Witchcraft and the State in South Africa."

[494] The illegitimacy of the justice system in contemporary Mexico has been widely documented. According to data from the World Value Survey the percentage of Mexicans expressing distrust in the legal system increased from 12% to 25.3%, from 1981 to 1997. Kossick "The Rule of Law and Development in Mexico," 718. See also Domingo, "Rule of Law, Citizenship, and Access to Justice in Mexico;" Schedler, "Ciudadanía y violencia organizada en México," 111.

capitalism development, secularization, and the disruptions brought about by structural adjustments and globalization. In this sense, the targeting of so-called criminals is nothing but the latest iteration of a longer history wherein communities have, time and again, constructed those "dangerous others" that ought to be punished and, ultimately, eliminated.

CHAPTER 4

In the Name of Christ:

Lynching, Religion and Politics in Twentieth-Century Puebla

Between 1934 and 1938 approximately one hundred socialist teachers were hung, shot at, and mutilated, by armed groups of vigilantes and spontaneous mobs, all in context of the so-called "Second Cristiada."[495] Organized as a reaction to the government's official campaign to secularize and modernize the countryside, the attacks took place in various rural communities of the states of Puebla, Sonora, Michoacán, Jalisco Veracruz, and Chiapas. Irrespective of their level of formal organization, many of these episodes of violence occurred in highly visible places, such as the towns' school or central plaza, and were directly or indirectly supported by landowners, hacendados, and local priests. Similarly, during the 1940s and up to the 1960s, dozens of Evangelicals were expelled from their communities, had their homes and churches burned, and were either threatened or actually lynched by groups of Catholics throughout Mexico's central and southern states, including Puebla, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Guerrero, and Chiapas. Driven by intra-community conflicts, these events were further precipitated by local enactments of the "Crusade for the Defense of the Catholic Faith" launched by the country's Archbishop Luis Martínez in 1944. On September 14th of 1968, in the town of San Miguel Canoa in Puebla, hundreds of members of the community - official records refer to 800- lynched five university workers from the Universidad

[495] The exact number of teachers who were either killed or injured is difficult to establish. Meyer estimates that there were about a 100 assassinated and 200 lacerated teachers, while Raby documented 138 cases being threatened or actually attacked. A newspaper note referred to 50 teachers that had been assassinated by December 9th, 1935 ("Unificación del magisterio nacional. Se instaló la convención de maestros" *El Universal*). A book published by the graphic artist Leopoldo Mendez, at the request of Mexico's Ministry of Education (the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* or SEP by its Spanish acronym), refers to the killing of more than 200 maestros. See: Jean Meyer "An Idea of Mexico: Catholics in the Revolution," 291; Raby, "Los maestros rurales y los conflictos sociales," SEP, *En nombre de Cristo…Han asesinado más de 200 maestros*.

Autónoma de Puebla (UAP). Two of the victims died from lethal machete injuries whilst three survived after undergoing a long process of both physical and psychological recovery. The lynching was triggered by the belief that these workers were in fact communist students who were allegedly planning on killing the priest and hoist a red and black flag in the town's plaza.

The aim of this chapter is to offer a close reading of these different cases in order to highlight the pivotal role religion, particularly Catholic religion, has played in the organization and sanctioning of lynchings and other forms of collective violence in the state of Puebla throughout the twentieth century.[496] The argument is two-fold. Firstly, I argue that the discourse and practice of Catholicism in Puebla contributed to the formation of a reactionary and anti-communist ideology that called for the vehement defense of communities' traditional values and power structures. This ideology,[497] embedded as it was in long term intra-community conflicts and dynamics of domination, led to the legitimization of the use of violence against impious or presumed dangerous elements at moments when the status quo seemed threatened or destabilized by social transformations. Secondly, I claim that in order to understand how religious beliefs gave rise to a popular and local forms of Catholicism that justified the use of collective, cruel, and highly visible forms of violence,

[496] Although the focus of this chapter will be the 1930s-1960s period, historical evidence of lynchings driven by religion in Puebla goes back at least to the mid-nineteenth century in the context of the so-called liberal reforms. One of these earlier episodes of lynching took place in San Miguel Canoa, the same town of the 1968 case under analysis, on November 18th of 1856. The victims, three men who were passing by the town, were accused of being impious and anti-clerical. The lynching started with the tolling of the church bells as a warning sign that attracted a large group of people from the community and was led by the local priest, Miguel Santa María, and by the town's mayor, Manuel Pérez. See: Gálvez, "San Miguel Canoa, Matanza en tres tiempos: 1856, 1924, 1968;" Bazant, "La Iglesia, el Estado y la sublevación conservadora de Puebla en 1856." See also: Chapter 3.

[497] By ideology I understand a set of predispositions that inform individuals' subjectivity and actions. My use of this concept refers to the types of inclinations that Bourdieu describes under his notion of *habitus*. For Bourdieu, habitus refers to the "social embodied" and to an "open system of dispositions" that is subjected to experience but which remains relatively stable and irreversible, as it is informed by given structures. Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 131-4.

we need to trace the intricate connections that existed between priests, public officials, and local communities in Puebla. The relational and ideological proximity between Catholic priests and public officials, particularly mayors, on the one hand, and the influence and traditional authority that these priests exercised on the organization of communal life, on the other, added to a milieu that rendered these acts plausible, legitimate, and in most cases seemingly un-punishable.

For the purposes of this chapter, Catholic religion is defined as a particular system of practices, institutions, and ideological dispositions that articulate and reinforce social relations and hierarchies of power within given communities.[498] This religious practice is furthermore presented as a system that is diverse, porous, and dynamic, as well as one possessing a popular dimension that not always corresponds to the dictates of the upper ranks of the church's hierarchy.[499] Furthermore, religion is interpreted as an ideological field connected to spiritual as well as to material and political concerns at the community level.[500] In this sense, it is analyzed as a field that relates to the "mundane" pursuit of political interests as well as to the genuinely affective experience produced by the belief in otherworldly or otherwise transcendental worldviews, mandates, and rationales.[501] A political understanding of religion is particularly pertinent for analyzing Puebla's post-revolutionary years. Central and regional elites sought to transform the place religion and the church occupied within the country's social and political spheres, all of which produced diverse and at times violent reactions on behalf of given communities as well as local elites. The outbreak

[498] As argued by Stephen and Dow, "religion affects political alignments, social stratification, and cultural identification." Quoted in Garma, "Religious Affiliation in Indian Mexico," 57.
[499] Butler, *Popular Piety and Political Identity in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion Michoacan 1927-29*, 9-13.
[500] For a sociological discussion on the relation between the religious field and power relations see Bourdieu, "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field."
[501] *Ibid*.

of the Cristero civil war, less than two decades after the triumph of the revolution, had illustrated the extent to which the exercise and defense of religion could become the object of political mobilization and discontent.[502] The so-called Second Cristiada as well as the activities of the National Sinarquista Union (*Unión Nacional Sinarquista)* during the 1940s, further strengthens my argument of a contentious political underpinning of religious practice in Puebla.[503]

The relation between religion and lynching will be henceforth understood as one defined by ideological and political affinities rather than by a simple cause-effect dynamic. In other words, religion will not be presented as a cause of lynching but as a political and ideological field that provided the *conditions of possibility* for this form of violence. In this regard, literature on lynching in the United States is helpful. This literature has argued that religion was a key element in the organization and legitimation of this form of violence in the American South.[504] Southern Protestantism in particular promoted a theological framework centered on retribution, sacrifice, and redemptive violence that contributed to the maintenance of a segregationist and racist system aimed at safeguarding the "purity" of the community. Catholicism in Puebla would, similarly, contribute to the sanctification of violence as a means to defend the spiritual and social order of the community against impious and anti-clerical elements. Albeit not based on racial claims, lynching was also aimed at safeguarding the spiritual integrity and purity of the community against corrupting

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[502] The Cristero civil war (1926-1929) was not particularly strong in Puebla, but it was not absent either. The clergy as well as Catholic organizations such as the *Liga Nacional de Defensa de la Libertad Religiosa* supported the actions of the Cristero rebels, which were organized mostly in groups of twenty to thirty men. Sánchez Gavi "La fuerza de lo religioso y su expresión violenta," 124. For a general discussion of the rebellion, see Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion;* Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico*, 2-16.

[503] There were, of course, less controversial forms of political involvement organized by lay members of the Catholic Church, including civil society organizations and political parties. Meyer "La iglesia católica en México 1926-1965."

[504] See: Evans, *Cultures of Violence,*124-53; Mathews , "The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice;" Patterson, *Rituals of Blood*; Ehrenhaus and Owen, "Race Lynching and Christian Evangelicalism."

and destabilizing elements. Furthermore, as in the United States, lynchings were ultimately driven by reactionary and conservative conceptions of social order that rejected social change and the intrusion of so-called modernizing forces. In the context of Latin America, the work of Federico Finchelstein further illustrates the ways religious fervor and catholic militancy may become intertwined with political ideologies that sanctify the use of violence. Envisioned as an "instrument of the sacred," Finchelstein explains how Argentine fascism was central in the organization of a violent reaction against the “dangerous elements” represented by communists, Jews, and Protestants.[505] In Puebla, the militant variety of Catholicism promoted by Cristeros during the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the ultra-nationalist and authoritarian undertones of the Sinarquistas during the 1940s, would also constitute an ideological ground to justify and rationalize the hostilities perpetrated against socialists, communists, and Evangelicals.[506]

Literature dealing with past and present cases of lynching in Mexico and in other Latin American countries, such as Guatemala, Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador, has tended to overlook the role of religion in the organization and legitimation of these acts.[507] Taking the 1980s or 1990s as their starting point of analysis, this literature has analysed lynchings as a response to rampant levels of crime and insecurity in the region as well as a consequence of the impunities and weaknesses characterizing most Latin American criminal justice systems.[508] This interpretation has certainly exposed one important dimension of this practice as manifested in the present context. However, it has foreclosed the analysis of alternative

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[505]Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism : Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy,* 125-8.

[506] Sanchez Gavi, "La fuerza de lo religioso y su expresión violenta;" Velazquez, "Radical Catholic Resistance to the Mexican Revolution;"

[507] Cfr: Holston and Caldeira, “Democracy and Violence in Brazil;” Díaz, *Linchamientos, Fragmentación y Respuesta*; Davis “Undermining the Rule of Law: Democratization and the Dark Side of Police Reform in Mexico;” Goldstein *The Spectacular City*; Snodgrass Godoy “When "Justice" Is Criminal: Lynchings in Contemporary Latin America;” Krupa “Histories in Red: Ways of Seeing Lynching in Ecuador.”

[508] *Ibid*.

motivations of lynching.[509] My research indicates that lynchings may be grounded on religious identities and practices, as well as on communal fears expressed by the belief in witches, bloodsuckers, or other mythical figures.[510] By focusing on the regional history of Puebla, the present chapter seeks to expand our understanding of the potential drivers behind this form of violence in the Latin American region.

The chapter will be divided into three main sections and will follow a chronological order. The first section will focus on the series of attacks organized against socialist teachers during the 1930s, and will be followed by a discussion on the violence performed against Evangelicals during the 1940s and up to the 1960s. The second section will offer a detailed description of the 1968 lynching in Canoa. This is based on archival and secondary sources as well as on a personal interview carried out by the author with Julián González, one of the three survivors of the lynching.[511] The attention that will be given to this single case in the second section follows from the importance and visibility of this lynching in the country's historical memory of the convulsive events surrounding the year of 1968, including the army's attack against unarmed high school and university students known as the "Tlatelolco massacre."[512] The third and last section will reflect on the shifting weight of religion in the organization of lynching during the last three decades of the twenty-century.

[509] For an exception to this trend, see Handy's study on the ways in which culture and religion influence the occurrence of lynchings in Guatemala. Handy "Chicken Thieves, Witches, and Judges: Vigilante Justice and Customary Law in Guatemala."
[510] See Chapter 3.
[511] The other two survivors oft the lynching, Roberto Rojano and Miguel Flores, passed away a few years ago. According to the interviewee Julián González, Roberto committed suicide at the end of the 1970s, whereas Miguel died from leukemia three years ago. Personal interview carried out on February 6th, 2014.
[512] On October 2nd of 1968, in Mexico City, police and military forces shot hundreds of unarmed students in one of the main city's plazas. Although it is difficult to establish the number of persons killed (the figures go from at least 40 to thousands of victims) the case is considered to be one of the most visible markers of the authoritarian and repressive policies that characterized the Mexican post-revolutionary state.

Killing the Infidels: Lynching and Vigilantism during the 1930s-1950s

Considered a key moment in the consolidation of post-revolutionary Mexico, the 1930s were marked by the government's efforts to create a more cohesive and stable political reality through cultural politics, institutional consolidation, and economic development.[513] The monopolization of violence was, however, far from becoming a reality and the post-revolutionary project faced both violent and non-violent forms of resistance, often informed by long-term intra-community dynamics as well as state-community interactions during the previous decades.[514] As explained in chapter 2, attacks against socialist teachers constituted a direct reaction to the "*Educación Socialista*" project (1934-1936), an ambitious and multi-layered policy aimed at secularizing education at the national level, instituting an agrarian reform in the countryside, and disarticulating the political and economic influence exercised by religious authorities and large landowners within rural communities.[515] The socialist education was based on the notion of a "rational, secular, modern, hygienic, and sober" citizen[516] and was ultimately envisioned as an instrument to incorporate rural and indigenous populations under the central state's influence.

Implemented during Lázaro Cárdenas presidency (1934-1940) the socialist education project was at first modeled on the basis of preceding revolutionary policies that openly promoted iconoclastic, anticlerical and secularizing measures.[517] Although Cárdenas would

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[513] Vaughan, *Cultural politics in revolution: teachers, peasants, and schools in Mexico, 1930-1940*.
[514]A case in point is the Sierra Norte of Puebla, which communities' strong sense of autonomy and defense of local interests marked their participation during the liberal uprisings, the 1910 revolution, and later on, their strong opposition,towards the socialist education. See Vaughan, *Cultural politics in revolution*; Brewster, *Militarism, Ethnicity and Politics,* 35; La France, *Revolution in Mexico's Heartland,* 38-9; Bazant, "La iglesia, el estado y la sublevación conservadora en Puebla;" Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation*, 10.
[515] Raby "La 'Educación Socialista' en México."
[516] Lewis "A Window into the Recent Past in Chiapas...,"67.
[517] In particular, former president Plutarco Elias Calles (1924-1928), whose influence was felt throughout the 1928-1935 period, strongly supported the development of "defanaticization campaigns" across the country, which involved the systematic persecution of the clergy, the closing down of religious temples and churches, as

eventually adopt a more moderate approach, one that enabled a discretionary and regionally varied implementation of these policies, these years of religious persecution nevertheless informed the opposition the socialist education experienced at the local level. Iconoclasm, for instance, left a deep mark in the memory of various communities who witnessed the destruction, burning and stealing of their patron saint's images. As has been suggested by the historiography of the period, the profanation of sacred spaces constituted violations that offended the "community's spiritual heart" and were perceived as direct threats to the integrity and equilibrium of its inhabitants.[518]

Although iconoclasm was not prevalent amongst socialist teachers, there were cases reported by Catholics in letters addressed to President Cárdenas, where teachers were accused of destroying crosses, setting images of the virgin on fire, mutilating images of patron saints, and vandalizing churches.[519] Ilfonso Vega, for instance, a parish priest of a local church in San Juan de Gracia, Michoacán, accused the "maestro rural" for using the church as a kitchen, a toilet and even a chicken coop. He expressed concern that these abuses "can result in great disorders given the discontent that these acts generate among the inhabitants of this place".[520] In reference to the same town, Pedro Toledo, the local judge, reported the destruction of religious images inside the church. He described these acts as "savage" and stated that he found "two virgins without head, a Christ without head, a sacred

well as the burning of religious images. See Fallaw, "Varieties of Mexican Revolution Anticlericalism;" Bantjes, "Saints, Sinners and State Formation," 137-156; Moreno Chávez, "Quemando santos para iluminar conciencias...," 37-74.

[518] Butler, "Keeping the Faith," 25-6. See also Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire....*

[519] See Becker, *Setting the Virgin*, Fallaw "Varieties of Mexican," Vaughan, "El papel politico."See also Archivo General de la Nación, Dirección General de Gobierno, Caja 56, exp. 13, f. 1 and f. 2.

[520] "El C. encargado del templo católico quéjese de que el maestro rural trata de sacar los objetos del templo", May 8th, 1937. AGN. DGG. Caja 56, exp. 13, f. 2.

heart without head, and the body of the local patron saint, San Jose, with only his feet [left]..."[521]

Puebla's implementation of the socialist education was not distinctively anti-clerical. Governors and political elites supported in principle the secularization and defanatization efforts of the central government.[522] In practice, however, and particularly after the consolidation of Maximino Ávila Camacho governorship (1937-1941), the political elite showed neither interest nor willingness to implement the socialist education. That is, at least not in any radical or rigorous form. Puebla's politicians, as well as its business and capitalist elites, in all rather conservative groups, shared the Catholic Church's interest in defending order and stability.[523] Moreover, governors and public officials held strong ties with the highest ranks of the Catholic hierarchy;[524] a nexus tolerated by the central government in exchange for the loyalty that Puebla elites demonstrated towards the hegemonic party.[525] Socialist teachers, for their part, applied the principles of the socialist education only modestly and stayed away from iconoclastic actions altogether, and if only to prevent potential attacks against them or to comply with the Catholic beliefs that some of them professed.[526]

The socialist education project was implemented in the wake of the Cristero civil war (1926-1929), a conflict escalating from the tense and hostile relationship between Mexico's

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[521] "Trámite queja del C. Ildefonson Vega", April 9th, 1938. AGN. DGG. Caja 56, exp. 13, f.1.
[522] The last governor to hold anti-clerical ideas was José Mijares Palencia, who in 1934 announced a series of policies against religious and private schools and called for a strict regulation and control of religious practices in the state. Márquez, "Oposición contrarrevolucionaria," 37. Arrazola Cermeño, *La Oscura sombra*, p. 44
[523] Vaughan, "El papel político," 182.
[524] See, for instante, DGN, Fondo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Caja 305, Exp. 4. In this report filed on January 1932, a federal agent denounces the constant violation of the laws that regulate religion in Mexico with the connivance of the political elites, including Puebla's governor.
[525] Márquez, "Oposición contrarrevolucionaria," 47.
[526] Vaughan, "El papel politico," 176. There were, of course, certain measures that the socialist education promoted that may have been regarded as offensive, regardless of the teachers' better intentions. For instance, all socialist schools integrated female and male students in the same classroom, which was considered morally offensive and was particularly opposed by the Catholic clergy.

post-revolutionary state and the Catholic Church. Initiated as an armed rebellion against the state's anti-clerical measures, the conflict resulted in violent confrontations amongst peasants that held opposing views about the place religion should hold in the social, political and economic organization of given communities. These opposing views were mainly represented by two groups: so-called *agraristas*, who defended an agrarian reform that promised to expropriate land from large landowners; and *Cristeros*, self-proclaimed defenders of Christ' kingdom on earth who regarded the government's actions against the church as impious, heretical and a violation of communal life.[527] These ideological divisions would continue to surface in decades to come, albeit under different political axis. In Puebla in particular, Cristero ideology would survive in a variant of Catholicism that promoted anti-communist actions and a fervent defense of the priest authority during the 1930s and up to the 1960s. On the other hand, the leftist character of *agraristas* demands would surface in the political agenda articulated by communist and leftist students, as well as independent union workers, up to the 1970s and 1980s.

In June of 1929 a truce between the higher hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the government was signed aimed at putting an end to the Cristero civil war. Nonetheless, discontent and distrust loomed large amongst *Cristero* rebels and Catholic believers.[528] Attacks against socialist teachers have been interpreted as a "Second Cristiada" or "Segunda", a sequel of the *Cristero* civil war situated predominantly in the Bajío region.[529] Unlike the former conflict, however, the Segunda did not receive the official support from

[527] Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion*, 92-110; Butler, *Popular Piety,* 7-9.
[528] As explained by historian Alan Knight, despite of this official detente, "Mexican wars of religion rumbled on, generating a kind of low-intensity warfare in many parts of –usually rural-Mexico." Knight, "Habitus and Homicide," 118.
[529] The Bajío region is integrated by the states of Guanajuato, Aguascalientes, Michoacán, Jalisco, and Querétaro. See: Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*, 31.

the upper hierarchy of the church, while it relied on the participation of priests, landowners, armed groups of bandits, and lay members of the Church at the local level.[530]

Puebla's teachers were victimized in indigenous and remote rural communities of the Sierra Norte,[531] all characterized by a strong sense of local autonomy and Catholic identification, as well as in other towns in the south and southeast regions of the state.[532] Particularly because they lacked strong unions as well as consistent support and protection from Puebla's political elites, socialist teachers were vulnerable and virtually defenseless in the face of the continuous threats and attacks directed against them.[533] On April 29th of 1937 newspaper *La Opinión* reported that a group of women had tried to lynch a female teacher in Cholula.[534] A month later, teacher Antonio Morales was killed with machetes by a group of men outside of the rural school of the town of Xicotlán, in Chiautla.[535] In 1935, various teachers were reportedly forced to abandon different towns in the face of threats of lynching.[536] Other states to the east and west of Puebla experienced similar cases. In the town of San Martín Hidalgo in Jalisco two female teachers, sisters Micaela and Enriqueta Palacios, were attacked on November of 1935. Both sisters had their ears cut. Their father was hung and killed.[537] A couple of months earlier, teacher León Fernández and his wife were nearly

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[530] Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion,* 215-6.
[531] Vaughan, "El papel politico," 178. To see a characterization of the region, see Brewster, *Militarism, Ethnicity and Politics,* 35; Bazant, "La iglesia, el estado y la sublevación conservadora en Puebla."
[532] Sánchez Gavi, "La fuerza de lo religioso," 131..
[533] Vaughan, "El papel político,"181-2. The author contrasts the experience of Puebla with that of Sonora, where teachers were better organized, counted on the support of local political elites and did promote anticlerical and even iconoclastic measures to advance the socialist education.
[534] "En Cholula se pretendía linchar a una profesora por mujeres del lugar," April 29th, 1937, *La Opinión.*
[535] "Maestro atacado a machetazos," May 27th 1937, *La Opinión.*
[536] *La Opinión*, April 2nd, 1935. See also Sánchez Gavi, "La fuerza de lo religioso," 147.
[537] The two teachers survived the attack and travelled to Mexico City, wearing heavy bandages around their heads, and demanding protection and justice from the then president Lázaro Cárdenas. "Maestros socialistas sin orejas. Se las cortó un núcleo de gente alzada" *Excélsior*, Sunday, November 19th, 1935. "Llegan las maestras a quienes les cortaron los alzados las orejas" *Excélsior,* Sunday, November 24th, 1935.

lynched in Guadalajara by a group of neighbors who beat them with sticks.[538] The same year, a lynch mob beat and hanged 19-year-old teacher David Moreno Herrera Aguascalientes.[539] In Veracruz, on April of 1936, seventy armed men set fire on a school, burning teacher Carlos Toledano alive and cutting the ears of teacher Pablo Jimenez.[540]

Some of the attacks against teachers included well-planned assassinations led by vigilantes who either fought during the Cristero war or simply were hired by landowners.[541] These attacks are similar to what Brundage and Evans describe as "private mobs" or "private lynchings" in context of the United States.[542] That is, events that appeared more calculated and less ritualistic expressions of violence and that were carried out by groups of armed vigilantes. For instance, on November 15th of 1935 teachers Carlos Pastrana, Carlos Sayago and Librado Labastida were killed with pistols and machetes in different towns of the municipality of Teziutlán, in Sierra Norte. According to the report filed by the federal inspector in charge of the investigation, there had been disturbances in these towns since April of the same year. Parents stopped sending their children to school and some local religious associations, with the support of the priests, put into circulation leaflets that denounced the socialist education. The report stated, “The dominion that the clergy exercises over the indigenous people of the area is absolute…leading them to perpetrate crimes, like those that took place against the teachers.”[543] The virtually simultaneous killing of the three teachers at three different places led the inspector to conclude that the attacks were carefully premeditated. Carlos Sayago, 23 years old, was killed by a group of armed men just 200

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538 "Maestro víctima de unos vecinos," *Excélsior,* September 18th, 1935.
539 “Mexicans hang teacher,” *New York Times*, March 27th, 1935.
540 "Fue quemado un maestro rural y otro más fue vilmente mutilado,"*Excélsior,* April 21st, 1936.
541 Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*, 6. See: Sánchez Gavi "La fuerza de lo religioso y su expresión violenta," 130.
542 Evans, *Cultures of Violence*; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South.*
543 “Rinde informes de la investigación practicada en la Zona de Teziutlán, Puebla,” AGN, Fondo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Caja 71, Ex. 2.

meters away from the school where we was teaching; Carlos Pastrana was killed not far from his residence with a machete that nearly cut off his head; and Librado Labastida, approximately 28 years old, was shot only 30 meters from his assigned school.

In other cases, the distance between well-organized and more spontaneous attacks is difficult to establish. On March 2nd, for instance, newspapers reported the killing of teacher José Ramírez Martínez and two local officials in the southwest town of Tochimilco by the hands of Enrique Rodriguez alias *El Tallarín*.[544]As governor of Puebla, Maximino sent a letter to the Minister of the Interior explaining that an investigation conducted by the state authorities established that El Tallarín had indeed provoked the attack.[545] By the same token, he explained that inhabitants of Tochimilco, contrary to what other accounts claimed, had not participated in this act of violence as they had consistently demonstrated their willingness to cooperate with the federal authorities. However, just a few days later, the state's teachers union provided an alternative explanation, when it described the event in detail in a letter addressed to the president. According to this explanation, witnesses claimed teacher José Ramírez was hung by a group of neighbors, presumably under the orders of El Tallarín, *after* El Tallarín had killed Ramírez. However, contradictions between the different testimonies as well as the fact that the autopsy revealed the victim died from asphyxia and not from gunshot wounds, suggested that the town's inhabitants may have actually played a more active- and complicit- role. In Michoacán, the assassination of teacher María Salud Morales seems equally opaque as far as it concerns the identity of the victimizers. Whereas one source indicated that she was beaten with stones and sticks by a group of religious fanatics, another

[544] "Otros asesinatos de la banda que manda el criminal Tallarin cometidos anteayer," *La Opinión*, March 2nd of 1938. For an analysis of the politics driving El Tallarín's violence, see: Salinas, "Untangling Mexico's Noodle…"
[545] Letter to the Minister of the Interior by Gov. Maximino Ávila Camacho, March 25, 1938. Serie Asesinatos, Galeria 5, Caja 55, 2/012.2 (18), exp. 30.

suggested she was attacked by a group of armed cristeros supported by the local priest, Cipriano Zarpién.[546]

Although the Second Cristiada was not openly supported by the higher ranks of the Catholic Church, [547] local priests did play a central role in shaping communities' predispositions and animosities towards the socialist education.[548] According to a report filed on January 17, 1937, Puebla's local priests organized meetings and supported the creation of catholic associations in order to boycott the socialist education project.[549] They also used the pulpit to condemn those parents that sent their children to so-called socialist schools. In San Lucas el Grande, for instance, the priest Pedro Soriano even went so far as to threaten parents with excommunication. To set an example, he denied deathbed blessing to a local peasant that had an active role in the opening of one of the socialist schools in town. As these and similar news spread throughout the town, four new private schools offering religious education were opened, whilst the attendance of the socialist school dropped considerably. The same report indicated that in Huejotzingo, local priests worked hand in hand with *Acción Católica*, a Catholic organization that advised parents against the socialist education. During a meeting organized by teachers with aim to persuade parents to enroll their children in the socialist school, the parish clerk, himself a member of *Acción Católica,* stated he roundly

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[546] See Raby, "Los maestros rurales y los conflictos sociales en México," 193.
[547] After the truce signed between the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the Mexican government in 1929, the Church officially rejected the validity of the use of violence in the name of religion and adopted a more pragmatic relation with the government that prioritize the interests of the clergy over the lay members of the church. María Luisa Aspe Armella, *La formación social y política de los católicos mexicanos. La Acción Católica Mexicana y la Unión Nacional de Estudiantes Católicos, 1929-1958* (México: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2008), 90.
[548] Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*, 23.
[549] "Informe sobre actividades sediciosas de curas en pueblos de Puebla en contra de educación socialista."January 17, 1932. AGN, Fondo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Caja 258, Exp. 32,

condemned the socialist education because it perverted children. After his declarations, the parents started rioting against the teachers, who were forced to suspend the meeting.[550]

Catholic priests in all exercised a considerable influence over these communities' spiritual, social and political organizations. They blessed the newborn and the death, organized the town's festivals, and delineated the moral contours of the community by establishing what were considered acceptable or unacceptable forms of behavior.[551] Nonetheless, the priests' authority and their connections to Catholic militants did not go unchallenged. Socialist teachers as well as other local organizations supporting the secular and socialist currents of the revolutionary project openly reproof the priests' presence and actions. In a letter sent on March 7th of 1936 to president Lázaro Cárdenas, Puebla's teachers union Braulio Rodriguez denounced the assaults and killings socialist teachers had suffered at the hands of "religious fanatics" and demanded protection on behalf of the central government. The unionized teachers also asked the government to restrict the priests' preaching licenses and urged the president to honor his promise of providing teachers with arms to organize self-defense groups.[552] On November 25, 1937, the peasant organization Emiliano Zapata located in Atlixco, Puebla, addressed the president in order to ask for justice for the assassination of teacher Jerónimo Meléndez and requested the provision of arms in order to defend teachers.[553] By the same token, the local branch of the revolutionary party Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) denounced the killing of a socialist teacher at the hands of a group of men under the command of El Tallarín and asked for the expulsion of the

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[550] For other examples, see Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation,* 25.
[551] Sánchez Gavi, "La fuerza de lo religioso," 121.
[552] Unión Federal de Maestros Rurales de la 11va Zona del Estado de Puebla, November 17, 1935. AGN, Documentación de la Administración Pública: Caja 53, folio 2/012.2(18), Expediente 59. President Cárdenas had authorized the use of arms amongst socialist teachers and promised the full support of the federal government since 1935. "Se autoriza a los maestros rurales para usar armas," November 8th 1935, *Excelsior.*
[553] Juan Tejeda "Se inserta oficio que dirige la Secretaría de Gobernación," December 18, 1935. AGN, Documentación de la Administración Pública: Caja 53, folio 2/012.2(18), Exp. 62.

clergy who, according to them, were the sole intellectual authors of the violence against teachers.[554]

Demands to expel local priests made by so-called revolutionaries were based on a top-down understanding of the priests' authority. Yet, the priests' influence cannot be understood without taking into account the communities' own appropriation of Catholic religion and the ways in which religion itself became a catalyst for ventilating intra-community conflicts and disagreements.[555] The lynching of Micaela Ortega on November 11th, 1934 in the town of Acajete in Puebla allows us to explore this point further.[556] Micaela Ortega, a 58 years old widow, was not a socialist teacher but she was known for being a spiritualist healer, holding socialist ideas, and keeping a close relationship with Moisés Juárez, an *agrarista* who had been accused of stealing the harvest of indigenous' communal lands. Different witnesses stated the priest did not sanction the attack. Instead, they claimed she earned the town's animosities after she had threatened Catholics with burning the image of "Jesus the Father" and with turning the church into a library. Micaela was brutally attacked by a mob of more than twenty indigenous people. In a sequence of events that disturbingly resembles those of the 1968 lynching in Canoa, the perpetrators, following the tolling of the church bells,[557] headed to Micaela's domicile and used pistols, stones, sticks, and machetes to break into her house. According to the report, her attackers were heavily

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[554] See AGN, Documentación de la Administración Pública: Caja 53, folio 2/012.2(18), Exp. 57.

[555] For a similar argument on the importance of popular or grass roots enactments of religion, see Salinas, "Untangling Mexico's Noodle," 494; Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*, 29-32.

[556] Inspector Fernando Rodríguez, AGN, Fondo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Caja 70, Exp. 11.

[557] The tolling of the church bells is part of the symbolic and ritualized character various cases of lynching analyzed in my research. Following the work of Davis on religious riots, we can claim that this allowed perpetrators to sanctify their use of violence. Davis, "The rites of violence." A more pragmatic rendering of the use of church bells is provided by Van Young, who in reference to nineteenth century riots in Mexico, argues that the church bells served to mobilized rural people in anti-colonial insurgencies. The ringing of bells was, in his acount, "the aural manifestation of a deeper projection of community into the outside world and ultimately of the impulse toward communal auto-defense..." See Van Young, *The Other Rebellion*, 484.

drunk and kept shouting "¡Viva Cristo Rey!" (Long Live Christ the King!). After receiving a shot in her forehead that left her bleeding on the floor in the presence of her two children, she received a machete blow in the face and was hit several times with sticks. A group of men and women took her outside her home and used pieces of hot iron to burn different parts of her body and set fire on her. Her daughter, Enedina, who was also severely injured with machetes, was able to stop the fire and to prevent the corpse from burning. In her statement as a firsthand witness, Enedina declared that amongst her mother's attackers was the mayor of the town, Pedro Loraca.[558]

As this case illustrates, religious conflicts were intertwined with material and political interests. Recognizing this mundane dimension of religion does not deny the authenticity of the religious experience; rather, it allows us to understand the particular weight of religion in shaping relations of power and the importance religion can have in legitimating violent acts. The lynching against Micaela Ortega and the attacks against socialist teachers were shaped by several layers of conflict that defy a purely mystical or spiritual understanding of religion. In effect, Lázaro Cárdenas' secularization campaigns put greater stress on questions of redistribution of land and credit as well as on the active support of worker's rights through the formation of unions, including teachers' and peasants' unions.[559] The campaigns furthermore aimed at transforming the communal system of landholding, a transformation that disrupted the economic and political influence of the church, large landowners and caciques. It was this destabilizing capacity of the socialist education that turned teachers into

[558] AGN, Fondo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Caja 70, Exp. 11, foja 12.
[559] Lewis, "A window into the recent past;" Lerner *La educación socialista*.

a potential threat, not only to the symbolic aspects of religion, but also to its material and political ramifications, including the political power of the church and of church officials.[560]

Although the attacks were driven by a combination of material and religious interests, most of the media and official discourse referred to them as acts driven by indigenous idolatry and fanaticism.[561] In 1936, for instance, Puebla's newspaper *La Opinión* under the headline "All rural teachers are condemned to death in the Sierra Norte" severely criticized the attacks and stated that the only wrongdoing of the teachers was trying to "get thousands of Indians from the most remote areas out of their ignorance…but the fanatics do not understand it and hence proceed to exterminate them."[562] In an article covering the above mentioned killing of the three teachers Pastrana, Sayago and Labastida, national newspaper *El Universal* explained that a "tumult of fanatic Indians" had attacked a group of teachers in charge of promoting the socialist education.[563] Although the investigation revealed that the attack had actually been carefully planned by a group of armed men commanded by Clemente Mendoza,[564] who was connected to Teziutlán's priests and landowners, the newspaper nevertheless portrayed the attack as a case of indigenous ignorance.

The official discourse was characterized by a similar undertone. A bureaucrat speaking at the 1935 Scientific Congress stated that it was difficult to establish how much progress the defanatization campaigns had accomplished amongst the Indians since they had

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[560] Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation* , 6.

[561] See, for instance, "Numerosos muertos y heridos en Ciudad González. Zafarrancho sangriento por causa religiosa" *Excélsior*, Tuesday, March 31st, 1936; "Fue quemado vivo un maestro rural y otro más fue vilmente mutilado" in *Excélsior*, 22nd April 1936; "Fue duramente batida la gavilla que quemó a un maestro y amputó las orejas de otro en Tlapacoyan" in *Excélsior*, 23rd April 1936; "Maestros socialistas sin orejas. Se las cortó un núcleo de gente alzada" *Excélsior*, Sunday, November 19th, 1935.

[562] "Todos los maestros rurales están condenados a muerte en la Sierra Norte," July 20th 1936, *La Opinión.*

[563] "Tres maestros fueron asesinados en Puebla," November 17th 1935, *El Universal.*

[564] AGN, Fondo Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Caja 71, Ex. 2; "Los asesinos de maestros muertos por las tropas" E*l Universal*, Sunday, November 19th, 1935.

for too long lived under the uncontested influence of the Catholic church.[565] President Cárdenas himself, in reaction to an attack carried out by Catholics armed with stones, knives and pistols against teachers in Guanajuato, reportedly declared that the "*only [people] responsible* for these acts were the priests who had incited parishioners against the teachers."[566]According to both of these accounts, it seems, the attackers had no political agenda of their own but acted solely under the priests' influence and manipulation. These media and official representations most probably intended to conceal the fact that the post-revolutionary project continued to face considerable resistance and opposition. A discourse that depicted these acts as a result of Indigenous fanaticism seems particularly suitable for the period. After all, the socialist education was seen as the cornerstone of President Cárdenas' crusade to modernize the country by secularizing and "mexicanizing" the Indians.[567] By calling their opponents religious fanatics, revolutionary politicians put themselves on the side of modernity and progress and could disavow these acts of violence as expressions of religious primitivism.

In the 1940s, the seemingly irreconcilable opposition between a "modern Mexico" and a "religious Mexico" that characterized the 1930s experienced a considerable shift. As mentioned earlier, Cárdenas had already promoted a more moderate approach to secularism than previous post-revolutionary governments. However, with the arrival of president Manuel Ávila Camacho's (1940-1946), the relationship between the post-revolutionary state and the Catholic Church would not only be less antagonistic but would in fact become

[565] "No es posible declarar si se ha logrado algo con la desfanatización de indios," *Excelsior,* September 11th, 1935.
[566] "Numerosos muertos y heridos en Ciudad Gonzalez. Zafarrancho sangriento por causa religiosa" *Excélsior*, Tuesday, March 31st, 1936.
[567] In a well-known speech given during the *Primer Congreso Indigenista Interamericano* held in 1940, president Cárdenas expressed that the aim of his government was "not to indianize Mexico but to mexicanize Indians" (*"No buscamos indianizar a México sino mexicanizar a los Indios"*). Quoted in Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, 114.

increasingly harmonious, even collaborative. From the moment he was elected, Ávila Camacho made it clear that the days of anticlericalism and state-sponsored socialism were over. He expressed his Catholic faith openly and, together with a new group of PRI politicians, laid out the basis for what would become a mutually beneficial alliance between the state and the Church.[568] Although officially the Mexican government articulated a discourse that was critical of both communism and fascism, in practice, anti-communist policies dominated the political scenario. The government promoted a policy of constant surveillance and persecution of communist organizations whilst Catholic organizations, characterized by a fascist undertone, were tolerated. In Puebla, local elites had already built close alliances with the state's conservative groups, including ranchers, landowners, and members of the Catholic Church, under Maximino's governorship. Nonetheless, with Manuel in the presidency and the consolidation of *Avilacamachismo* throughout the state, Puebla became a solid ground for Catholic militancy, anti-communism, and a homegrown version of fascism.[569]

This détente between the Catholic Church and the Mexican state however did not put an end to lynchings and other acts of collective violence driven by religion. From the 1940s and up to the 1950s, there were several attacks against Protestants,[570] particularly Evangelicals, at the hands of Catholics in various communities of Puebla.[571] Driven by religious differences, attacks against Evangelicals were also underpinned by political ideologies and intra-community conflicts. They were furthermore precipitated by

[568] Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion,* 73.
[569] Dávila Peralta, *Las Santas Batalla*s, 85-7.
[570] Other Christian groups with presence in Central Mexico include Mormons, Pentecostals, and Adventists. Nutini and Issac, *Social Stratification in Central Mexico, 1500-2000*, 185.
[571] Similar examples have been documented in Oaxaca, Veracruz, Guerrero, Chiapas, Michoacán, Hidalgo and Mexico City. See: De la Luz García, "Ciudadanía, representación y participación cívico-política..." 18.

Evangelicals' refusal to participate and contribute to Catholic festivals or to take part on public rituals informed by Catholic traditions.[572] These events confirm both the centrality of religion in the organization and legitimation of collective acts of violence as well as the complex intertwinement between spiritual and political concerns in Puebla.

Similar to the violence that characterized the Second Cristiada, violence against Evangelicals included both spontaneous and well-planed attacks. During the 1940s, Catholic militancy was articulated around the Sinarquistas or members of the National Sinarquista Union (*Unión Nacional Sinarquista)*, an organization that became more prevalent in Puebla during the 1940s.[573] Organized against the backdrop of the conservative politics brought about by Avilacamachismo, the Sinarquistas' underlying political ideology did not contradict or defy the central elites' anti-communist and ultra-nationalist agenda. In fact, Sinarquistas contributed to advance the government's ideology, although their use of violence would at times go beyond the limits of what *políticos* could accept or tolerate.[574] On the other hand, like Cristeros, Sinarquistas counted on the support of local actors such as priests, caciques, and even mayors within given communities.[575] These conditions increased Evangelicals' vulnerability and contributed to the impunity that characterized attacks against them.

On August of 1945, a group of Evangelicals from the town of Esperanza in Puebla addressed the Interior Minister, urging him to denounce a number of assaults perpetrated

[572] In general, protestants stood closer to socialist ideas and were more open to social change, including literacy campaigns and the agrarian reform. In Puebla as well as in Chiapas, protestants often threatened the political arrangements between the PRI party and local and indigneeous communities. See: Gross, "Protestantism and modernity;" Bastian, *Los disidentes: sociedades protestantes y revolución en México*; Collier, "The New Politics of Exclusion," 38-9.
[573] Serrano Álvarez defines Sinarquismo as a "right-wing Catholic movement, popular, nationalistic, authoritarian…" that opposed both the presence of 'Yankees' and communists. According to the author, Sinarquismo was most influential during the 1940s and in the states that comprise the Bajío region. Serrrano Álvarez, "El Sinarquismo en el Bajío Mexicano," 199.
[574] Let us not forget the attempt of assasination of president Manuel Ávila Camacho by the Sinarquista José Antonio de la Lama y Rojas on April 1944 and the ensuing ban that Ávila Camacho put over the organization.
[575] De la Luz García, "Ciudadanía, representación y participación cívico-política..."

against them.[576] Among others these assaults included the attempt of lynching of Melquiades Lezama and three young women by a group of Catholics who had also threatened Evangelical families with burning down their homes. The signees complained about the response they had received from the mayor as well as by the state governor, stating that the "local authorities, with a clear partial attitude, have neither implemented measures to prevent such crimes, nor proceeded against the wrongdoers." A report prepared by federal inspector Reyes Retana suggested the attempt of lynching against Lezama resulted from Catholics' intention to avenge the killing of two fellow Catholics who had died the night before, during a brawl allegedly caused by Lezama. The three women were family members of some of the Evangelical men involved in the fight and due to this relationship were accused of being involved in the death of the two Catholics.

Similarly, two years later, on October 1947, the Evangelicals' National Defense Committee condemned the violent actions carried out by religious and clerical fanatics against Evangelicals in different states of Mexico, including Chiapas, Oaxaca, Puebla, and Jalisco.[577] On August 18th of 1948, David Genaro Ruesga, president of the committee, sent an urgent telegram to the President requesting federal troops to intervene in the town of Xonacatlán in Puebla after groups of Catholics, organized by the priest, had provoked "bloody acts of religious persecution against Evangelicals, who found themselves under an imminent threat of being assassinated."[578] Days after this incident, José Octavio Dávila demanded protection for Santiago Mena, who had been severely injured for being a member

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[576] Informe de Ing. Carlos Reyes Retana, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DGIPS), AGN, Caja 98, Exp. 20.
[577] Telegrama al Presidente de David G. Ruesga, Presidente Comisión Nacional de Defensa Evangélica. AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Miguel Alemán, Serie conflictos religiosos, Exp. 547.5/3
[578] Telegrama al Presidente de David G. Ruesga, Presidente Comisión Nacional de Defensa Evangélica. AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Miguel Alemán, Serie conflictos religiosos, Exp. 547.5/3

of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the town of San Nicolás de los Ranchos.[579] The relationship between Catholics and Evangelicals was also marked by tensions in the towns of Guadalupe Victoria and La Gloria, two municipalities located at the border of the states of Puebla and Veracruz. In 1944, for example, a group of Catholics burned and tore down the houses of twelve Evangelical families, after Evangelicals had removed the crosses of the municipal cemetery in order to bury one of their members.[580] The same year, in the town of La Gloria, a group of Catholics burned nine Evangelical households and blew up their temple, leading to the exodus of seventy families.[581]

On May of 1945 in the municipality of Acatzingo a group of *Sinarquistas* led by Esteban Mendez, broke into the homes of various Evangelical families shouting ¡*Viva el Sinarquismo*! ¡*Mueran los protestantes*![582] Leonardo Tamariz, the local minister, was dragged to the town's plaza and then shot. Members of the Evangelical Union condemned the attack and blamed both the town's Catholic priest as well as the ideas promoted by the Archbishop of Mexico, Luis María Martínez who, as part of the Catholic Church crusade against communism, had urged Catholics to eliminate the "infernal serpent of Protestantism."[583] Informed by a nationalistic undertone, this so-called crusade portrayed both Protestantism and communism as foreign and dangerous ideologies that needed to be eliminated to secure the moral integrity of Catholic communities. As we will see, this notion of communism as foreign and morally dangerous would also inform the lynching of 1968 in Canoa.

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[579] AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Miguel Alemán, Serie conflictos religiosos, Exp. 547.5/6

[580] De la Luz García, "Ciudadanía, representación y participación cívico-política..." 21-2.

[581] *Ibid*, 23.

[582] AGN, Ramo Presidentes, Manuel Ávila Camacho, Serie Asesinatos/Atropellos, Exp. 542.1/1221

[583] Luis María Martínez, Archbishop of Mexico from 1937 to 1957, was central in reestablishing the domain of the Catholic Church in the country by supporting the nationalistic and anti-communist discourse promoted by the government.

The 1968 lynching in San Miguel Canoa

Perhaps no other episode of lynching in the recent history of Mexico has been narrated as many times and with so much detail as the 1968 lynching in San Miguel Canoa.[584] To Felipe Cazals' film[585] and the academic and popular works that have been written about it,[586] one can add the multiple newspaper articles and editorials published almost every year about the lynching.[587] Usually published on the date that marks the anniversary of the event, these articles tend to emphasize, as most academic works, the relation between the lynching and the broader context of anti-communism and political repression that affected thousands of young students and protesters during the time. Julián González, one of the three surviving victims, starts his account of the event by referring to these manifold narratives. His memory is surely mediated by them. Though the opposite may also hold true, as he himself has given multiple interviews and even collaborated closely with Felipe Cazals in the preparation and writing of the script of the film *Canoa*. The relationship between personal, popular, and academic accounts of the event in Canoa highlights how collective memory and history may become entangled around certain narratives.

[584] The only case that has been similarly documented, though not analyzed with the same frequency as Canoa, is the lynching known as the "Tlahuac case." This lynching took place on November 23rd of 2004, in San Juan Ixtapoyan, a small town located in the borough of Tlahuac in Mexico City. According to media reports, the town inhabitants lynched three men accused of being part of a criminal network responsible for kidnapping minors. The three men turned out to be police officers of the Federal Preventive Police (PFP, by its Spanish acronym). See Davis, "Undermining the rule of law."
[585] "Canoa" (1975) is considered with films like "Rojo Amanecer" (1989) one of the best cinematic accounts of the nationalistic and anti-communist sentiments stir up by the 1968 student movement in Mexico. See Pérez Turrent, *Canoa: Memoria de un hecho vergonzoso*.
[586] Meaney, *Canoa*: *el crimen impune*; Romero, *La violencia como fenómeno social;* Chrisman, "Community, Power, and Memory in Díaz Ordaz's Mexico."
[587] Cfr. "A 45 años del linchamiento en Canoa nunca se hizo justicia", *Milenio,* September 13th 2013; "Canoa no se arrepiente a 44 años del linchamiento", *El Popular, Diario Imparcial de Puebla,* September 14th 2012; "A 38 años de la masacre, persiste la imagen de que sus habitantes son peligrosos," *La Jornada de Oriente*, October 2nd, 2006.

I met Julián at the Carolino Building located at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP), previously known as Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (UAP), a place that witnessed some of the most violent confrontations between competing factions of the student movement in Puebla during the 1960s. A mild-mannered man in his seventies, one can hardly tell he underwent such a traumatic experience during his youth. Only a few signs serve as a reminder of his past: the three fingers missing from his left hand, which were severed by a machete while he tried to protect himself against one of his attackers; and his firm reluctance, after nearly 50 years since the lynching, to go back to the town of San Miguel Canoa.

Most popular and academic accounts about the lynching in Canoa start by referring to the hiking excursion to La Malinche, a dormant volcano located in the surroundings of the town, planned by the university workers for the afternoon of September 14th, 1968.[588] Julián's retelling of the event follows the same structure. He starts by explaining how the group planned the expedition a week in advance, with the idea of leaving on the 14th, right after they all had received their "*quincena*", their two-weekly pay. Julián was responsible for organizing the trip, a thought that would haunt him for the years to come as he dealt with the guilt of having survived the attack. Although initially eleven workers were suppose to make the trip, the excursion ended up with a group of only five: Julian González, Roberto Rojano, Jesús Carrillo, Ramón Gutierrez, and Miguel Flores Cruz.[589] This was not the first trip Julián and others made to La Malinche and it was not the first time they had to pass by Canoa. The town- located just 23 kilometers away from the city of Puebla- is a natural stop for hikers going to the volcano and as, he explains, the town is famous for its good *pulque*, an alcoholic

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[588] Meaney, *Canoa: el crimen impune*; Melgarejo, *La violencia como fenómeno social.*
[589] Personal interview carried out on February 6th, 2014.

beverage made out of the maguey plant. Julián had organized two previous visits that same year, on August and March, with no signs of hostility on behalf of the town's inhabitants. This detail is revealing, as it goes to demonstrate how the presence of strangers or visitors was not foreign to the people of Canoa and that the sheer presence of Julián and the others as "outsiders" could not have been the only cause of the attack.

In an attempt to avoid the heavy rains that characterize the month of September, the five workers left the city of Puebla and headed to Canoa in a public bus around 4 pm. During the trip, they sang and celebrated their trip, conceivable irritating the rest of the passengers and the bus driver himself.[590] Julián recounts that it was most probably the bus driver who told Canoa inhabitants they were university workers. Since he and the rest of the group were in their early or mid-twenties – Julián was only 26 years old- it is possible that the bus driver assumed they were university students, as did the inhabitants of Canoa. Moreover, the relationship between Puebla's bus drivers and the student movement was characterized by tension and distrust. During the 1960s and up to the mid 1970s, students from leftist and communist organizations were accused of hijacking several buses in protest of rising public transportation fares or in order to attend rallies in different towns to gather support for the student movement.

Despite their intention to avoid the bad weather, a heavy rain forced them to seek refuge in the town and to delay their trip to La Malinche. The workers tried to ask for shelter at a store located at the town's entrance with no success.[591] They then went to the church, where they were intercepted by a group of armed men who told them they were not welcome

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[590] Chrisman, "Community, Power and Memory," 22. It is not clear what type of songs they were listening to. The Cazals film, which was allegedly based on the story provided by the three survivors, shows them shouting a "porra" to the national university and then singing Pedro Infante and Alfredo Jimenez songs.
[591] Personal interview carried out on February 6th, 2014.

in the town. According to the report filed by the federal security agency, *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (DFS), the workers asked the town's local priest, Enrique Meza for shelter. They identified themselves as workers from the university but the priest denied them refuge.[592] After this, the group walked to another store where they bought something to eat and drink. It was in this store where they met Pedro García, who was accompanied by his two nieces and by a young man from Mexico City, Odilón Sanchez. Pedro told them that his brother, Lucas García, a town local, would surely receive them at his place. They had finally found shelter.

Lucas García is central to understanding the unfolding of the event in the next hours. Julián narrates their encounter with Lucas with detail. After having perceived the rejection and animosity from the other villagers, he and the others were relieved to feel welcomed by Lucas, his wife and his four children in their one-room shack. Lucas told them he was not on good terms with the priest and he complained about the tithes and other donations the priest would arbitrarily charge the villagers to maintain the church. He also mentioned he was part of the *Central Campesina Independiente* (CCI), an independent peasants union created as an alternative to the official unions controlled by the hegemonic party, *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI)). The CCI was formed in 1963 by members of the Mexican Communist Party and kept strong ties with the leftist-radical sector of the student movement during the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the protests carried out by the students were organized in solidarity with the CCI. They included invading lands that allegedly belonged to CCI peasants, hijacking public transportation buses, and orchestrating street demonstrations

[592] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, Dirección Federal de Seguridad (hereafter DFS), Foja 1, AGN.

against members of the official union controlled by the PRI, *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (CNC).[593]

The connections between the CCI and the student movement serve to illuminate a larger set of relations student activists had established with peasant organizations and rural communities such as San Miguel Canoa during the 1960s. The economic and political context of both the city of Puebla and the town of Canoa at this particular juncture are worth exploring further. Between 1940 and 1960 the city of Puebla experienced a rapid demographic growth but its economy faced a moment of stagnation and crisis in both the industrial and agrarian sectors.[594] This resulted in an upsurge of unemployment levels that increased tensions between the business and political elites and the middle and working classes. Social discontent turned into popular protests, with university students taking a leading role, building alliances with unionized workers and peasants in both the city and the countryside.[595]. These economic and political tensions went beyond the city of Puebla, impacting those towns and semi-rural communities that were incorporated into the city at the beginning of the 1960s, such as San Miguel Canoa. Considered part of the Malinche region, Canoa, together with other towns bordering with the state of Tlaxcala, were characterized by an agrarian-based economy and a communal form of organization centered on religious festivities. Nonetheless, rather than being isolated or entirely inward looking, these communities were, at once, "…deeply loyal to their communities, but equally deeply patriotic citizens of the Mexican state."[596]

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[593] See, for instance, Caja 1083, Exp 2, DGPIS, fojas 166-7; Dávila Peralta, *Las santas batallas,* 151-3.
[594] Ventura Rodríguez, "La industrialización en Puebla…;"Pansters, *Política y poder en Puebla*, 171; Melgarejo and Pech, "La violencia por la disputa de los recursos del bosque…"
[595] Pansters, "Social movement and discourse..." 91.
[596] Hill and Hill, *Speaking Mexicano*, 43-4.

Puebla's student movement had transitioned from an exclusively urban and university-based activism to a broader political movement with strong ties to popular, peasant and workers' organizations since 1961.[597] San Miguel Canoa was actually one of the towns that students visited in order to attract support for the movement. Just a few days before the lynching, students from the School of Economy had been in Canoa and held a meeting with local members of the CCI and other town's inhabitants.[598] According to the testimony provided by some locals, on that occasion students assaulted one of the town's stores and caused disturbances in the community.[599] Bus drivers also made allegations of this type, claiming that students hijacked their buses in order to assault and rob local communities.[600] These claims would eventually turn into an important component of the rumors that led to the lynching.

Acknowledging these political tensions is central to understanding why staying with Lucas García, a local who belonged to the CCI, turned the university workers into an easier target of rumors. Moreover, Lucas' antagonistic relationship with the priest surely contributed to the town inhabitants' animosity towards the group of young men. The priest, Enrique Meza, had an extraordinary influence on the towns' religious, social and political organization. Closely connected to politicians of the ruling party PRI, including the state's governor, Puebla's attorney general, and the mayor of San Miguel Canoa, Martín Perez,[601]

[597] Agüera Ibañez (ed.) (2008), pp. 38-9.
[598] DFS, foja 11; Romero Melgarejo, *La violencia como fenómeno social*: 341.
[599] *Ibid*.
[600] See, for instance, Caja 1213 A, Expediente 1, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (hereafter DGIPS), Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (hereafter AGN). In a letter signed by the *Alianza de Camioneros de Puebla* (the Bus Drivers Alliance of Puebla) they express their discontent and condemnation of the actions carried out by the students (foja 392).
[601] DFS, foja 11; Meaney, *Canoa el crimen impune,* 46. During the long-sixties, the PRI shared with Puebla's clergy a strong anti-communist and conservative ideology which explains why, in practice, various PRI politicians were closely related to Catholic priests and even bishops of Puebla. See also Chrisman, "Community, Power and Memory," 68-9, 30.

Meza was able to establish himself as a central figure within the town's local politics. With most of Canoa inhabitants following Catholic beliefs with particular fervor, Meza was also the town's undisputed religious leader.[602] As was the case during the previous decades,[603] Catholic practices and celebrations were strongly tied to the cultural and political organization of the community, including baptisms, marriages, the organization of "*bailes*" and "*fiestas*" as well as the allocation of public positions such as the "*mayordomo*",[604] the "junta municipal" and even the local judge.[605] Meza also played a central role in the community's material wellbeing. He promoted the building of the first local high school and helped introducing potable water, electricity, pavement as well as a telephone line in Canoa, all with money he collected from the parishioners.[606] Given his political, material and spiritual influence, Meza enjoyed the unquestioning support of most town inhabitants. A plaque outside the church erected by his loyal followers reads: "Gratitude of the town of Canoa, Puebla. The Divine providence brought us to Mr. Enrique Meza Pérez, on August 17th of 1961. Thank you thousand times, thank you God." [607]

Meza's authority did not go entirely unchallenged, however. There were those who, like Lucas García, were critical of both the traditional authority of the priest and the PRI's control over local politics and peasant organizations. According to a study, only 15 Canoa families supported the CCI at the time, while approximately 100 families favored the PRI and the priest.[608] Still, the presence of people like Lucas complicates the image of Canoa as a homogeneous community reacting unanimously against the five university workers. Meza

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[602] Meaney, *Canoa el crimen impune,* 52-4.
[603] Vaughan, *Cultural politics in revolution*, 121-2; Sanchez Gavi, "La fuerza de lo religioso..."
[604] The "mayordomo" is a traditional figure within indigenous communities who is usually in charge of overseeing the parishioners' contributions to the religious festivities and ceremonies.
[605] Romero Melgarejo, *La violencia como fenómeno social*, 143
[606] Meaney *Canoa el crimen impune* 46, 61.
[607] *Ibid*, 19
[608] Melgarejo and Matamoros, "La violencia por la disputa de los recursos del bosque, 183-94.

was furthermore accused by his opponents of forcing Canoa inhabitants to pay excessive fees for religious celebrations, the maintenance of the church, and the provision of public services the state had failed to provide.[609] Accordingly, he would threaten those who refused to pay with divine punishment or prison. For these threats, he counted on the support of the local judge and the town's mayor. Moreover, people blamed him for using corruption and force in order to impose his own political candidates. As a matter of fact, Martín Perez, the mayor of Canoa at the time, was Meza's favored candidate. The day of his election, under the apparent command of Meza, a group of people attacked Perez's opponents with stones, sticks and pistols.[610] Official and media accounts indicate that at least 15 people were injured as a result of this violent encounter.[611]

Most accounts of the lynching in Canoa, including the film by Cazals, have reproduced an image of the town as an undifferentiated community that, immersed in conservative politics and a fanatical exercise of religion, reacted against "outsiders" with hostility and mistrust.[612] For instance, the influential Mexican writer and critic, Carlos Monsivais, would refer to the lynching in San Miguel Canoa as "the answer of a choleric primitivism on behalf of a population that, idolatrous of the word of its authorities, fears the unknown, the other, the foreign…"[613] This narrative of the lynching erases Canoa's internal conflicts and denies the existence of members of the community that opposed both the

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[609] Meaney, *Canoa el crimen impune,* 60-1.
[610] *Ibid,* 67-9.
[611] Caja 820, Expediente 8, DGIPS, "Hechos que sucedieron en el pueblo de San Miguel Canoa," s/f; "Aprehenderán a los culpables del zafarrancho en Canoa," *El Heraldo de México*, March 1, 1966.
[612] Cfr. Romero Melgarejo and Pech Matamoros, "La violencia por la disputa de los recursos." This understanding of lynchings as an expression of a community's unified will also informs some of the scholarly work on lynching in contemporary Latin America. Snodgrass Godoy, for instance, has argued that in contemporary Guatemala lynchings can be seen as an "expression of popular will…aimed squarely at outsiders and the state." Snodgrass Godoy, "When justice is criminal," 638, emphasis added. See also Vilas, "Injusticia por mano propia," and Goldstein, *The Spectacular City*.
[613] Carlos Monsivais, "Los linchamientos de Canoa", *Excelsior*, 20 March 1976.

priest's authority and the place of religion in local affairs. It also obscures the fact that victims of the Canoa lynching included local residents, such as Lucas García and his family, and Pascual Romero Perez, the owner of the store where the workers stopped before heading to Lucas' home and who was also shot the night of the lynching.[614]Furthermore, it tends to downplay the existent complicity between Meza and the ruling party, drawing attention away from the indirect and yet significant impact that the state's rhetoric against communists had on the animosity that inhabitants of San Miguel Canoa had towards communist students.

In other words, the lynching in Canoa was not simply an attack against outsiders. Rather, the lynching also signaled a process of internal retribution directed against Lucas García and his family. It was an act that reflected the town's internal conflicts and political divisions. As explained by Rene Girard, the victims of collective violence share a "sacrificeable" character; they are often: "exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants."[615] Expressed in sociological terms, the expendable nature of the victims of the lynching in Canoa was a function of the social distance that existed between them and the rest of the community. In explaining what are the elements that predict the collectivization of violence, Senechal de la Roche has suggested that lynching is a joint function of strong partnership amongst the perpetrators and "weak partisanship toward the alleged offender."[616] In this case, the alleged offenders, the workers and Lucas himself, had indeed weak ties with a community that imagined itself as Catholic and endangered by the threat of communism.

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[614] Chrisman,"Community, Power and Memory," 45. Pascual Romero survived but the reasons behind his attack remained unclear.
[615] Rene Girard *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore, MD.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 12.
[616] Roberta Senechal de la Roche "Why is Collective Violence Collective?" *Sociological Theory* 19, 2 (2001), 129.

Julián explained to me that a few minutes into their conversation with Lucas they heard the tolling of the church bells and then the voice of women shouting in both *Nahuatl* and Spanish. According to newspaper reports some of the attackers used the town's megaphone to ask people to stay alert because a group of communist students had arrived and were planning on killing the priest.[617] They also claimed the group wanted to hoist a red and black flag in the town's main plaza,[618] steal people's livestock,[619] and remove the image of the town's patron saint San Miguel.[620]Each of these accusations can be read, respectively, as potential offenses to the political, material, and spiritual wellbeing of the community. The accusation regarding the workers' alleged intention to remove the image of the town's patron saint San Miguel, in particular, resembles the kind of actions attributed to socialist teachers during the 1930s. As discussed in the previous section, in that context, communities feared that saints and other religious images could be removed or destroyed by socialist teachers and education inspectors as part of the country's secularization campaigns. In the 1960s, so-called communist students rather than socialist teachers came to be associated with impious and potentially iconoclastic actions. As has been documented by anthropological studies centered on Puebla's religious practices, particularly amongst Nahuas communities, saints and patron saints are highly venerated figures as they are "...thought to protect individuals and

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[617] Elsa R. de Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas," *Contenido* (June 1976), 82.

[618] "Identifican a los Instigadores del Linchamiento en San Miguel Canoa," *El Día: Vocero del Pueblo Mexicano,* Sept., 19, 1968.

[619] "Nada Habían Hecho Esos Muchachos Para que los Mataran"; Dice la Viuda." *El Sol de Puebla.* 18 Sept. 1968.

[620] Following Catholic tradition, Canoa's patron saint, San Miguel, is an archangel, a warrior-like angel who fights demons and confronts the powers of hell. According to the story of San Miguel's apparition in the town, the archangel appeared for the first time with his open wings, carrying a machete with his hand raised. It was called "San Miguel of the Miracle" and the town, originally called only "Canoa", became "San Miguel Canoa" in its honor "Las campanas de la iglesia llamaban a difuntos..." *Revista Siempre*, May 5th, 1976,; Meaney, *Canoa el crimen impune,* 29.

communities against illness, bad weather, and economic disaster."[621] Whether all perpetrators actually believed the saint's image would be taken from them or used this allegation in order to instigate the lynching is difficult to establish. The case illustrates, nonetheless, how rumors regarding the violation of religious images could contribute to the collectivization of violence.

After the church bells were tolled, the sequence of events leading to the lynching unfolded very quickly. Julián and the rest of the workers heard a mob surrounding the house. They shouted at Lucas and asked him to turn in the communists. When they broke into the house they attacked Lucas who, together with his brother, kept trying to explain that Julián and the others were not communist students but workers from the university.[622] The infuriated crowd did not listen. Lucas was the first one killed. He was struck in the jugular with a machete and then shot to death when he was lying on the floor. The others in the room were attacked with stones, shotguns, machetes and sticks. There were men, elderly, women, and even children among the mob.[623] As in previous attacks described by this chapter, many of the perpetrators were drunk at the time of the lynching. One of the attackers was Martín Perez, the mayor of San Miguel Canoa,[624] a fact that must have further legitimated the attack. Pedro García, Lucas's brother, was able to escape; his two nieces were also attacked but did not receive serious injuries. Lucas's wife, María Tomasa, was able to escape with her four children. In an interview with a local newspaper a few days after the lynching, María Tomasa stated that she knew the university workers were innocent and said

[621] Nutini and Issac, *Social Stratification in Central Mexico, 1500-2000*, 191; Slade, *Making the World Safe for Existence*.
[622] San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, Foja 11, AGN.
[623] Personal interview with Julián González. February 6th, 2014; see also Meaney 1977 pp. 105-38.
[624] San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, Foja 11, AGN.

she was willing to reveal the names of the attackers to the authorities.[625] María Tomasa's daughter, in an interview carried out forty-five years after the lynching, stated her mother was constantly threatened by locals and was forced to abandon any legal charges against the perpetrators.[626] She also declared the attack was a vengeance orchestrated by the priest Enrique Meza and other members of the community against her father: "[The priest]…wanted to have the control of the town and my father resisted so they wanted him out of the way…"[627] In light of this, the lynching in Canoa can be interpreted as a spontaneous attack that, similar to the assaults against socialist teachers and Evangelicals, was nevertheless grounded in an ongoing intra-community conflict.

Jesús Carrillo and Ramón Gutierrez tried to exit the house but were killed with shotguns and their bodies were severely mutilated with machetes.[628] Julián, Roberto Rojano, Miguel Flores and Odilón Sánchez- the young man from Mexico City who was visiting town with Lucas's brother, Pedro, had their arms and necks tied with ropes and were taken outside of the house and forced to walk through the town towards the main plaza, where the church was located. Odilón was shot in the head at a short distance soon after they left Lucas' home. Although he was not part of the group, the attackers probably assumed he was also a student.[629] Miguel Flores was severely injured. He was eventually forced to stand up against a tree, where he was shot by a group of men with pistols and shotguns. Because none of the shots hit him, people shouted he was the devil and hence had to be set on fire.[630] They poured gasoline around him and poked him with burning logs until his body stopped moving. Miguel

[625] "Nada Habían Hecho Esos Muchachos Para que los Mataran"; Dice la Viuda." *El Sol de Puebla.* 18 Sept. 1968.
[626] "A 45 años del linchamiento de Canoa nunca se hizo justicia," *Milenio*, 13 Sept. 2013.
[627] *Ibid*.
[628] "Piden castigo para los criminales de los empleados de la universidad," *El Sol de Puebla*, Sept. 17, 1968.
[629] "Los Confundieron con Comunistas y los Mataron a Machetazos," *El Heraldo de Mexico,* Sept. 18, 1968, reprinted in Cano Andaluz, *1968: Antología periodística,* 176.
[630] Meaney, *Canoa el crimen impune*: 132-3.

saved his own life by pretending to be dead.[631] Julián and Roberto were taken to the town's plaza until they reached the church's atrium. Although they were already severely injured, people kept beating them with fist, sticks and machetes. It was at this moment when Julián fingers were severed.

Julián recalls his attackers kept urging him and the others to show them where their communist propaganda was.[632] This suggests that, however false the rumors about the victims' communist affiliation were, the perpetrators-at least some of them- truly believed them. Rumors have a central function in the organization and reproduction of collective acts of violence. As suggested by Samper, rumors "...allow people some measure of joint control over ambiguous, stressful situations; they affect the solidarity of a group, creating a public that can then participate in collective action."[633] They furthermore shape people's perceptions and fears by invoking a plausible and collectively crafted version of reality that appeals to a "hierarchy of credibility" already in place within a given community.[634] In the case of the 1968 lynching in Canoa, the rumors' credibility was informed by national and local politics as well as by conceptions of morality and danger informed by Catholic beliefs that echoed those held by Puebla communities in the previous decades. Despite the fact that San Miguel Canoa was and continues to be a small and economically marginalized town, it was fully connected to the tensions and conflicts taking place in the city of Puebla.

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[631] Los Confundieron con Comunistas y los Mataron a Machetazos," *El Heraldo de Mexico,* Sept. 18, 1968, reprinted in Aurora Cano Andaluz, *1968: Antología periodística,* 176

[632] Personal interview with Julian González. February 6th, 2014. See also Meaney 1977: 123.

[633] Samper "Cannibalizing Kids, Rumor and Resistance in Latin America," 2.

[634] Stoler uses this concept to refer to the relations of power that inform competing narratives or representations of a given reality and that may render one narrative as more plausible or believable than another. Stoler "In Cold Blood. 'See also Griffin's discussion on the capacity of narrative explanations to offer a logical ad temporal sequence to a series of contingencies that would otherwise remain disjointed. Griffin "Narrative, Event-Structure Analysis…"

According to the testimony offered by the survivors of the lynching, the rumors were instigated by the priest and then disseminated by his allies, including the town's mayor and those who used the town's megaphone.[635] The accusation of communism hurled against the victims was informed by an anti-communist rhetoric that, during this period, was used to criminalize the political activism of the leftist branch of the student movement. The city of Puebla was one of the main scenarios of the student movement outside the country's capital. Specifically, the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla witnessed the organization of a large student movement characterized by violent confrontations between members of the radical left and radical right. The latter, organized through the militant Catholic organization known as MURO (*Movimiento Universitario de Renovadora)* aimed at defending the Catholic Church, the nation, as well as Catholic education and morality against the "foreign" infiltration of communist ideas promoted by Cuba, the Soviet Union and leftist Mexican students.[636]

Anti-communism served to articulate a discourse that depicted youngsters as irresponsible and immoral, and as having no respect for patriotic and family values or for Catholic religion.[637] The most influential newspaper of Puebla at the time, *El Sol de Puebla*, openly promoted the government's anti-communist campaign, by reproducing an image of youth as threatening and morally deviant and by publishing biased accounts on the leftist student movement.[638] Days before the lynching in Canoa, *El Sol de Puebla* and other local newspapers called the students, agitators, anti-patriotic, deceptive and violent.[639]

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[635] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, Foja 9, AGN.
[636] Pensado "To Assault with the True...".
[637] Zolov, *Refried Elvis*; Carey, *Plaza of sacrifices.*
[638] Aguera Ibañez, ed. *Memoria y Encuentros*, 109-10.
[639] For a selection of some of the main editorials and statements made by the media before and after the lynching see Meaney, *Canoa, el crimen impune*, 11-42.

The Catholic clergy was also actively involved in a campaign to raise awareness about the threat communism posed for the moral and social integrity of Mexican society. In 1961, for instance, the Archbishop of Puebla devoted an entire pastoral letter to the issue of communism.[640] The letter, which was meant to be read in all of Puebla's Catholic churches during the Sunday sermon, the Archbishop warned Catholics about the imminent threat posed by communism and asked them to stay alert.[641] He further appealed to the oath of obedience that all Catholics were called to take towards the Church and remind them of the importance of defending Catholic values: "Let's raise our voice with all energy in defense of the Christian civilization and of the highest values it has. Let us defend the family, the human person…liberty, order, authority, religion, our motherland."[642] The letter finished by asking: "Who of you would dare to see, unperturbed, our motherland fall into the foreigner's power; to have in our public buildings, instead of our glorious tricolor ensign, a foreign flag... [643] Disturbingly enough, the possibility of seeing a foreign flag- in this case, a red and black flag- in the town would become another central element of the lynching.

The federal government had depicted the red and black flag as a symbol of foreign intrusion and anti-nationalism. As other studies have suggested, the rumor that claimed that the group wanted to hoist a red and black flag in the town's main plaza may have actually been informed by a previous incident, somehow displaced and superimposed onto the accusations that led to the attack.[644] Two weeks before the lynching, in Mexico City, students were accused of attempting to replace the national flag located in the *Zócalo* with a black and

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[640] Dávila Peralta, *Las santas batallas,* 135.
[641] "XV Carta Pastoral del Arzobispo de Puebla sobre el Comunismo Ateo", Arzobispado de Puebla, 15 de mayo de 1961," quoted in Dávila Peralta, *Las santas batallas*, 135.
[642] *Ibid.* p. 137.
[643] *Ibid*. 141.
[644] Chrisman, "Community, Power and Memory," 26.

red flag. The event was followed by a series of newspaper articles and editorials that denounced this act as an act of treason against the nation. *El Sol de Puebla*, together with the 32 nationwide newspapers owned by Puebla's entrepreneur, José García Valseca, started a campaign to honor the flag under the title "Forgive your offenders" and which involved publishing, everyday and in the front page, a full color image of the Mexican flag. It is in light of this context of moral and patriotic panic that the feasibility of the rumor of the red and black flag needs to be understood. This dynamic of displacement was also at play in the case of the rumor regarding the group's intention to steal people livestock. As was mentioned before, when the students of the School of Economy visited the town days before, they were accused of stealing some livestock on their way out.[645] Although it remains unclear if this incident was true, it is possible that this event was nevertheless used, directly or indirectly, to infuse the accusation against the university workers with certain trueness.[646]

Roberto Rojano, one of the three survivors of the 1968 lynching in Canoa, reported having seen the priest Enrique Meza standing, inert, close to the church while they were being attacked.[647] According to the report filed by Mexico's federal security agency, DFS, the priest declared, "He did not know what was happening, because when he got to the parish he felt sick and because he does not hear very well, decided to rest in his room; then around 9:30 pm he heard women screaming: Kill them, kill them, but that he did not know what was the reason; that the victim that accused him of being the master mind of the attack should be thankful because…despite being sick, he came out and try to calm people's temper."[648] The

[645] Romero Melgarejo, *La violencia como fenómeno social*, 341.
[646] As has been observed by Garland, perpetrators of lynching often employ symbols in order to render their actions legible and legitimate for a wider audience. The flag is the ultimate patriotic symbol in Mexico's political culture and thus, the alleged transgression of such symbol served as a powerful means to validate the feelings of animosity against the university workers. See Garland "Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning..."
[647] Meaney, *Canoa, el crimen impune*, 130.
[648] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, Foja 21, AGN.

report qualifies the priest's declarations as contradictory and concedes the priest may have incited the rumor that led to the attack. All the survivors pointed to the priest as the main instigator of the lynching. Roberto Rojano, Lucas García's brother and his widow explicitly blamed the priest for orchestrating the attack. Lucas' brother provided the Judicial Police of Puebla with a list of 83 names, including the priest and the mayor of the town, Martín Perez Arce. Only 16 people were found guilty of homicide, damage against property, and illegal possession of arms, amongst other charges.[649] None of the people arrested served time in prison.[650]

The priest was never prosecuted and was not called to testify before the court. The town's mayor did face charges and was held under arrest on March of 1969, but was freed only three days later.[651] The fact that the priest was able to evade any charges illustrates the extent of his political influence and connections. Julián recalls visiting the offices of Puebla's main cathedral, known as *La Mitra*, months after the lynching. He wanted to meet with Puebla's clergymen and ask them for their intervention in the case. He met with a priest who denied Enrique Meza's involvement and rather lamented Meza's delicate health and physical condition.[652] Enrique Meza stayed in Canoa for more than a year and allegedly left the town only after the CCI managed to build an oppositional force against him.[653] Members of the CCI had been trying to undermine Enrique Meza's influence for nearly two decades. But Meza had built strong alliances not only with PRI politicians, but also with the town's commercial elite, which included the owners of buses, *pulque's* stores, and even

[649] Meaney, *Canoa el crimen impune,* 216-7.
[650] Chrisman, "Community, Power and Memory," 72.
[651] "Capturaon al ex Alcalde de Canoa y a un Obrero, por 'Instigadores,'" *El Sol de Puebla,* Mar. 11, 1969.
[652] Personal interview with Julian González. February 6th, 2014.
[653] Meaney, *Canoa, el crimen impune,* 211.

megaphones.[654] Nearly a decade after the lynching, the priest declared in an interview: "All that happened that night of 1968, they asked for it."[655] For Julián and the rest of the survivors, justice was never served.

After Canoa: Tracing the Shifting Weight of Religion in the Organization of Lynching

The 1968 case in San Miguel Canoa brings together three key elements characterizing most cases of lynching driven by religion in Puebla. The first is the intricate connection between religious beliefs and political disputes within given communities, informed in particular by anti-socialist or anti-communist ideologies. The second is the central place that local priests play in the sanctioning or organization of lynchings, as traditional figures of authority and as individuals that developed strong ties with town's political and economic elites. The third, which was explored in further detail on Chapter 3 and surfaced in many of the examples explore here, is the presence of a rumor regarding the potential defilement of a religious site or object, being a church or the image of a saint, virgin, or other divine figure.

A cursory revision of cases of lynching reported by the press in contemporary Puebla suggests that Catholic religion continues to inform this practice, albeit in a less frequent manner. For instance, as recent as September of 2011, two hundred villagers from San Martín Texmelucan led by the local priest threatened to lynch and "crucify" all Evangelicals if they did not leave their town in the next two days. A woman interviewed by a local newspaper stated: "This town belongs to Catholics...Christians come from other places; they do not belong to the community and we do not know their tricks or their intentions. If they do

[654] Romero Melgarejo and Pech Matamoros, "La violencia por la disputa de los recursos," 190.
[655] Jesus García Olvera, "Canoa, una película que deforma la realidad de lo que pasó," *Impacto,* no. 1361, (Mar.1976), 24; quoted in Chrisman, "Community, Power and Memory," 17.

not leave on Monday, we know how to get them out."[656] On December of 2013, a 48-year old woman was accused of stealing the silver shoe adorning apostle Santiago's image from the church of Santiago Mixquitla in Cholula.[657] According to the church's guardian or *mayordomo*, the woman had stolen the shoe when he and other churchgoers were changing the image's clothing. Although he never saw the woman stealing, he and others assumed she was responsible for the robbery as she was from out of town and was allegedly acting suspiciously. Nearly 300 people gathered at the atrium after hearing the tolling of the church bells and attempted to lynch her, but the police managed to save her from being beaten to death. Similarly, on January of 2015, three men were nearly lynched after being accused of stealing the original silver pieces of the *Santísimo* throne from the church of La Resurección in the city of Puebla. The men, who used to be guardians of the church, were accused of subtracting and replacing the silver pieces with false replica made out of cheap metal.[658]

With the exception of incidents such as the ones described above, however, lynchings driven by religion seem to have declined during the second half of the twentieth century in Puebla. The same can be said about lynchings motivated by mythical fears.[659] This observation is based on the data collected by this dissertation. As explained in Chapter 1, whereas lynchings driven by religion and mythical fears amounted to 40% of the cases during the first half of the twentieth century, during the second half, these cases represented

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[656] "Católicos amagan con linchar y crucificar a evangélicos," *La Jornada de Oriente*, September 9, 2011.
[657] "Le robó a Dios," *El Sol de Puebla,* December 16th, 2013.
[658] "'Encueran' a imagen religiosa en parroquia de La Resurección," *El Sol de Puebla*, January 14, 2015.
[659] Although religion and myth differ significantly in terms of the degree of systematization and institutionalization characterizing each belief system, in practice, communities that endorse mythical beliefs tend to see no contradiction between these and Catholic beliefs. For instance, Nutini and Issac argue that the belief in witchcraft is often grounded in what they call "folk Catholicism," which includes: "the cult of the dead, elaborate service to saints, emphasis on life-cycle celebrations, and inclusion of magical elements." On the conceptual differences between religion and myth, see Bottici, *A philosophy of Political Myth,* 125-9; on their connections and similarities in communities of Central Mexico, see Nutini and Issac, *Social Stratification in Central Mexico, 1500-2000*, 129.

18% of the total cases studied. In addition, recent studies carried out at the national level also suggest that lynching driven by mythological beliefs and religious practices occupy a marginal place in contemporary Mexico. Fuentes Díaz, for instance, documented a total of 318 lynchings at the national level from 1984 to 2003. From this total, only 10 were driven by accusations of witchcraft; 5 more were linked to religious conflicts in the form of attacks against individuals that professed Evangelicalism.[660] Rodríguez Guillén analyzed 232 cases of lynching at the national level from 1988 to 2010. His study did not identify any case of lynching driven by mythical fears, and it only documented a total of 7 cases linked to religion.[661]

How can we interpret the seemingly declining presence of religion as a driver of lynchings? A plausible explanation could be found in the normalization of church-state relations in Puebla and in Mexico in general after the 1940s. As explained before, under president Manuel Ávila Camacho's presidency (1940-1946), the relationship between the post-revolutionary state and the Catholic Church became increasingly harmonious, as anti-communism and conservatism took hold of national and regional politics. In light of this, one could make a case for the redundancy of collective violence as a means to reassert communities' religious practices and beliefs. Nonetheless, the occurrence of lynchings against Evangelicals and so-called communists in the hands of Catholic believers during the 1940s and up to the 1970s suggests that, as a matter of fact, the correspondence between official ideology and Catholic ideology served to render these religious and political minorities even more vulnerable.

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[660] Fuentes Díaz, "Violencia y Estado, Mediación y Respuesta No Estatal,"124.

[661] Rodríguez Guillén does not explain what type of cases does he classify under religion. In both studies, assaults, robberies and rapes are described as the main conducts eliciting lynchings. Cfr. Fuentes Díaz, "Violencia y Estado, Mediación y Respuesta No Estatal,"124.; Rodríguez Guillén, "Crisis de autoridad y violencia social: los linchamientos en México," 55.

An alternative explanation could be articulated by looking at quantitative and qualitative assessments on the changing importance of religion in twentieth-century Puebla. In terms of quantitative assessments on religion in Puebla, data published by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography in Mexico (INEGI) suggests that Catholic religion remained predominant in this and other states of Mexico throughout the twentieth century. According to its 2000 report on religious diversity in Mexico, Puebla figured amongst the top 11 states with highest percentage of Catholic population in the country.[662] Nonetheless, the percentage of Catholic population experienced a minor decrease during the second half of the twentieth century in Puebla. Whereas the percentage of Catholics was 98% from the 1930s to the 1950s, this number decreased by seven percentage points in the following decades of the twentieth century (by 2000, the percentage was 91.6%).[663] Conversely, the percentage of people that practiced a non-Catholic religion went from 0.8% in 1940, to 2% in 1970 and 6.2% in the year 2000. The percentage of people that did not practice any religion denoted a small increase, going from 0.8% in 1940 to 1.4% in 2000.[664]

Qualitative studies have also documented a relative decline in the importance of religious and mythical beliefs within communities' everyday practices. Inasmuch as they are able to capture the impact of religion in the social organization of given communities, these studies offer a more granular understanding of the presence of religion.[665] In their study of social stratification in Central Mexico, which includes the state of Puebla, anthropologists

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[662] INEGI, *La diversidad religiosa en México*, 154.

[663] At the national level, the percentage of Catholic population decreased even further, going from 96.6% in 1940 to 88% in 2000. INEGI, *La diversidad religiosa en México,* 154, 5.

[664] At the national level, the percentage of people practicing a non-Catholic religion went from 1.2% in 1940 to 7.6% in 2000; by the same token, the percentage of people with no religion went from 2.3% in 1940 to 3.5% in 2000.INEGI, *La diversidad religiosa en México*, 7- 11.

[665] As argued by Aspe Armella and Suárez Rojas in reference to the use of surveys for the study of religion, the word "Catholic" is polysemic in nature and does not necessarily capture the extent to which Catholicism informs everyday practices. Aspe Armella and Suárez Rojas, "Creer en México."

Nutini and Issac identified a relative decline in the weight of religion in communal life, which they associate to the process of modernization rural and Indian communities underwent during this period.[666] This process entailed, among other things, the transition from an agricultural to a wage labor economy, an increasing fluency of Spanish amongst the younger generations, grater levels of migration to urban areas, and a greater dependence on people outside the community for activities such as education and employment, which were previously provided by family and community members.[667] In their view, the cumulative effects of these changes can be observed in the religious field and in the realm of mythical beliefs. Religion became increasingly decoupled from time-consuming ceremonies and ritualistic obligations that involve different members of the community and shifted towards more conventional and individualized practices, such as attending mass. As they explain: "Life in general is desanctified as religion becomes largely compartmentalized in its own realm."[668] By the same token, belief in magic and supernatural elements recedes, with younger generations developing feelings of shame or discomfort towards traditional beliefs.[669] In his study of the Sierra Norte of Puebla, Garma suggests that Catholic priests have themselves contributed to the marginalization of magical and healing rituals and the adoption of a more institutional exercise of Catholic religion, as part of a broader effort to

[666] Nahuas or Nahuatl-speaking communities are the largest indigenous group in the state of Puebla. They are mostly concentrated in the municipality of Puebla as well as in the Sierra Norte and Sierra Negra. The percentage of population self-identified as indigenous by their use of language has been declining in the state since the 1930s. In 1930, 32% of the population spoke an indigenous language; in 1960 it was 17.7%. In 2000, the percentage went down to 13%. INEGI, *La población indígena en México*, 156.
[667] Nutini and Issac, *Social Stratification in Central Mexico, 1500-2000*, 189-90. For a similar argument regarding disruptions in customs and traditions in light of structural transformations in the Sierra of Puebla, see Sierra, "Indian Rights and Customary Law in Puebla...," 237-8.
[668] Nutini and Issac, *Social Stratification in Central Mexico, 1500-2000*, 191.
[669] An example of this is the decline in communities' belief in witchcraft after the 1960s in Tlaxcala and neighboring communities, as manifested in the weakening of the ritualistic and communitarian dimensions of the belief system and the decreasing number of parents who attributed the deaths of infants to bloodsucking witches. Nutini and Roberts, *Bloodsucking Withcraft*, 402-3.

reorient and secure the dominance of Catholicism over more indigenous and syncretic religious practices.[670]

Taken together, these studies point at a secularization process that has resulted in a more individualized, de-ritualized, and compartmentalized exercise of religion. This process has not necessarily undermined the importance of religion, but it has transformed the impact of religion in the social organization of communities. As has been suggested by this chapter, when informed by religious questions, lynching tends to be grounded on a communal and all-encompassing exercise of religion that is connected directly to the political dynamics of a given community. In this sense, religion does not appear as confined to spiritual concerns but is linked to worldly affairs such as politics and access to material resources. If we concede that religion has become increasingly decoupled from community's social, political, and economic life, we may be able to understand why its impact on the sanctioning and legitimization of lynchings has grown weaker.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued for an understanding of religion as a political and ideological field that provided the conditions of possibility for the organization and legitimation of lynchings in twentieth-century Puebla. Through a close analysis of various cases of lynching taking place during the 1930s and up to the 1960s, including the 1968 lynching in Canoa, it explored the key role of Catholicism in the formation of an anti-communist ideology that promoted the defense of the community against moral, social, and political dangers. Local priests were vital in the propagation of this ideology as they were central for the communities' social, economic, and political organization. Religion did not only articulate

[670] Garma, "Religious Affiliation in Indian Mexico," 60

communities' symbolic and spiritual concerns, expressed in the defense of sacred spaces as well as religious images, but also served to define the political and economic contours of the community. These rather worldly concerns do not deny the authenticity of the religious experience, but illustrate the particular weight of religion in shaping social and political relations at the local level.

In referring to the impact of religion in the occurrence of lynchings in the American South, Ivan Evans explains that: "If religion informed all aspects of Southern society, then it is surely plausible that lynching was as much reinforced by religious sensibilities as by any of the region's other institutions."[671] Catholic religion has had a pivotal place in the makings of the ideological and institutional contours of local communities in Puebla. Despite the intentions of central elites during the 1920s and 1930s, Catholicism's stronghold in shaping people's mentalities and dispositions remained a dominant feature of Puebla's social and political makeup for many decades to come. Given this, it is striking that scholars have paid little if any attention to the role of religion in the production and reproduction of lynchings in this region or in Mexico at large.

[671] Evans, *Cultures of Violence*, 123.

CONCLUSION

In 2007, Mexico joined the list of Latin American countries, each lauded being host to formal and relatively stable democracies, which have experienced levels of lethal violence that either match or surpass the number of deaths associated with civil war and traditional political conflict.[672] Driven by an upsurge in drug-related violence, the last seven years have witnessed the onslaught of pervasive violence, including graphic and brutal expressions such as hangings, decapitations, mutilations, and mass killings. One of the most recent expressions of this surge in levels of brutality is the disappearance and massacre of 43 students in the Mexican city of Iguala, in Guerrero, on September 26th of 2014. The students' disappearance has been attributed to a group of municipal police officers that, on the orders of the mayor of the city, kidnapped the students. According to this account, police officers then turned the students over to the criminal organization Guerreros Unidos, whose members massacred the students, after which they burned their remains in a morbid spectacle that lasted over 15 hours.[673]

Mexico's present context of violence has spurred a national debate over the reasons behind this apparent escalation of levels of violence and overt forms of cruelty. Whilst some scholars have interpreted this context as a clear departure from a national trajectory of

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[672] When a country reaches an average of more than one thousand battle-deaths per year, it is considered to be at war. In Mexico the number of deaths attributed to organized crime, in the year 2013 alone was 10,095 (a mid-level estimate). Shirk et al, "Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis through 2013," 23.

[673] The veracity of the official investigation regarding these tragic events continues to be highly questioned in Mexico. "Is Mexico mishandling investigation into disappearance of 43 students?," *The Washington Post*, February 8, 2015; Anabel Hernández y Steve Fisher, "Ayotzinapa: se caen piezas clave de la versión oficial," June 13, 2015, *Proceso*, retrieved on June 16, 2015, available at: http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=407453

political stability and social pacification, others have seen in it elements that call into question the characterization of this very trajectory. In particular, an emergent body of literature has highlighted the multiple expressions of violence underlying the country's post-revolutionary process of state building.[674] By focusing on the violent and terrorizing practices used by regular armed forces, *pistoleros*, bandits, crooked politicians, drug-traffickers, and self-defense forces, this literature has been able to recalibrate the place of violence in Mexico's twentieth and twentieth-first century.

The present work can be read as a contribution to this literature, albeit with a caveat. By putting lynching at the center of my analysis, this dissertation has brought to the fore the ways in which local communities have themselves added to the production and sanctioning of public, illegal, and particularly cruel forms of violence. In other words, and based on the regional history of Puebla, it has contributed to elucidate the communal basis for the legitimation of violence in Mexico. Furthermore, by examining a practice that does not fit into traditional expressions of political or criminal violence, this dissertation has pluralized our understanding of the modalities and motivations behind Mexico's past and present forms of violence.

Set against the backdrop of a broader repertoire of illegal and privatized forms of violence operating at the local level, this dissertation has also problematized the notion that violence was, at any given point, exercised exclusively by the state in a centralized or top-down manner. In addition, and based on a regional perspective, it has documented the de-

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[674] See Piccato, "Homicide as Politics in Modern Mexico;" Knight, "Habitus and Homicide: Political Culture in Revolutionary Mexico;" Pansters (ed), *Violence, Coercion and State Making*; Rath, *Myths of demilitarization in post-revolutionary Mexico*; Gillingham and Smith (eds.), *Dictablana*; Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata*; Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements.*

civilizing tendencies of Mexico's process of state building. These de-civilizing tendencies include the use of hangings, mutilations, and public forms of torture by both state and non-state actors in twentieth-century Puebla. They also involve a particular predisposition, on behalf of both state and non-state actors, to resort to illegal and extralegal forms of violence as a means to establish social control and uphold a given status quo. As such, this study has illuminated the impact that the country's process of state formation has had upon the persistency of public and harsh forms of violence.

As stated in the introduction, this dissertation originated in an interest to elucidate Mexico and Latin America's historical present through the lenses of lynching. In this sense, I will conclude by suggesting three ways in which the analysis of lynching and state-building can help advance our understanding of violence in contemporary Mexico and Latin America.

First, the study of lynching in relation to state building reveals the impacts that a partial, uneven, and politicized provision of security can have in legitimating illegal and violent behaviors. Mexico's central and regional authorities have, time and again, proven unable to protect victims of lynching. Authorities have neither effectively sanctioned perpetrators of lynching nor have they been able to prevent the offenses leading to this form of violence. In turn, and in light of the state's own de-civilizing tendencies, state authorities have failed to de-legitimate this practice by shaping people's dispositions or inclinations towards violence. The apparent legitimacy of lynching in the eyes of given communities is grounded on a peculiar citizen ethos that regards the law as uneven, ineffective, and unjust and therefore subject to being manipulated and privately appropriated. A similar ethos, I would suggest, informs the legitimacy of present-day vigilantes and self-defense forces in states like Guerrero, Michoacán, Morelos and Puebla, whose members have taken up arms in

order to fight the influence of drug-trafficking organizations in their communities. This citizen ethos also informs, drug-trafficking organizations, criminal gangs, and even regular citizens who bend the law, all while they deem their motivations legitimate and their actions seemingly un-punishable.

Secondly, the historical trajectory of lynching illuminates how local communities can themselves contribute to the legitimation of cruel and harsh forms of violence. It does so by establishing the cultural, social, and communal sources of legitimation of violence. Scholars working in Mexico and Latin America at large have tended to focus on forms of violence and abuse promoted by state actors, such as police officers, military personnel, and corrupted politicians. More recently, scholars have incorporated the study of state forms of violence that are perpetrated through "subcontracted" elements, such as paramilitaries, thugs for hire, and pistoleros.[675] That is, non-state actors that do the "dirty work" of the state – by neutralizing enemies or repressing social movements - and yet allow the state to deny any plausible responsibility. However, the examination of forms of violence originating in civil society, intra-community dynamics, or even everyday interactions, has received less systematic attention in Latin America. This is particularly the case of those forms of violence that, like lynching, are not squarely motivated by criminal or political interests. In addition to lynchings, I have in mind interpersonal forms of violence, domestic or intra-family violence, juvenile gangs, and communal forms of violence.

Perhaps most importantly, few works have attempted to draw the connections between more and less organized forms of violence.[676] This dissertation has shown how

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[675] Krupa, "State by Proxy;" Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements*; Pensado, *Political violence and student culture*; Piccato, "Pistoleros, Ley Fuga, and Uncertainty;" Auyero, *Gray Zone of Politics.*

[676] For a few valuable exceptions see: Pearce, "Bringing violence back home;" Adams, "Chronic Violence and its Reproduction;" Hume "It's as if you don't know…."

official ideologies and state-led forms of violence were, at different points of time, crucial in the organization and further legitimation of lynching. Similar connections can be drawn, for instance, between the state's criminalization of youth and the legitimation of communal forms of social cleansing targeting "undesirable" youths; or between intra-family violence and the participation of formerly victimized children and youth in drug trafficking organizations.

Third and lastly, the analysis of lynching illuminates the impact that social constructions of deviancy and danger can have in the justification of violence. As such, it highlights the centrality of the field of representation and discourse in the authorization and legitimation of violence. As documented by this dissertation, lynchings have consistently targeted marginalized individuals whose conducts are regarded as threatening by a given group or community. Over the last thirty years, so-called criminals have become the most prevalent victims of lynching in Mexico and in Latin America as a whole. This reflects the dominance of security discourses and public representations of deviancy centered on the dangers that so-called criminals pose for the state and civil society.

The crystallization of the criminal as the main victim of lynching also suggests a continuum between the attitudes that serve to justify lynching and those that legitimate the adoption of harsher forms of punishment (both legal and extralegal) against alleged criminals. Literature on lynching in Latin America has tended to interpret this practice as part of communities' attempt to reassert their security and agency in the face of rampant levels of crime and unequal access to justice.[677] If we turn our gaze to the victims of lynching, however, it becomes evident that lynch mobs have actually contributed to perpetuate the

[677] Snodgrass Godoy, "When justice is criminal;" Goldstein, "In our own hands."Binford and Churchill; "Lynchings and States of Fear in urban Mexico."

production of "criminal others" whose rights as citizens are often denied by the state. In this sense, rather than expressing moments of agency that allow citizens to reassert their right to security vis-á-vis an unresponsive state, lynchings should be read as moments of acute mimicry. In these moments, communities constitute themselves as proxy-states that reproduce, rather than defy, the state's partiality, violence, and injustice.

The criminal, the gang member, the drug-trafficker, and the kidnapper, have become the outsiders against which, paraphrasing Foucault, "society must be defended." In Mexico and Latin America's historical present, these "criminal obsessions"[678] have rendered the use of brutal forms of violence possible, justifiable, even necessary. In this defense of society, however, not only the state but also citizens themselves have helped deepened the seeming vortex of de-civilization and violence we are experiencing today.

[678] Comaroff and Comaroff, "Criminal Obsessions, after Foucault."

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Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de las Revoluciones de México

Interviews

Julián González, Survivor of the September 14th of 1968 lynching in San Miguel Canoa
Interview carried out on February 6th of 2014
Carolino Building, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP)

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