

Sandra Cervantes

The Mexican state of Guerrero has rarely been discussed as the hotbed of political unrest. Popular ideas related to Guerrero usually conjure up romantic images of Acapulco, its idyllic beaches and its tourist friendly atmosphere. Guerrero, however, has been the site of one of the most vicious and aggressive conflicts in Mexico's history, the Dirty War. Located in southern Mexico along the Pacific coast, Guerrero harbored much of the guerilla activity that was perceived as a serious threat to the Mexican government. Within the state, the Asociacion Civica Nacional Revolucionaria, or National Revolutionary Civic Association (ACNR) and the Partido de los Pobres (PdIP), or Party of the Poor organized to fight for social justice. Until recently, there has been relatively little published on Mexico's Dirty War because, unlike the dirty wars in the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay), there was no regime change that allowed the atrocities to be uncovered. In Mexico, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), or Institutional Revolutionary Party controlled Mexico's politics for 71 years, from 1929 until 2000 when it lost the presidential election. During the height of the Dirty War (1961 through 1978) the PRI, under the leadership of President Luis Echeverria Alvarez, was able to regulate information on the violence and political repression that was taking place in Guerrero; this explains why there has been little documentation in official records. The few reports and articles in the media that did reveal those horrors often cited the government as a source of information. This leaves the experiences of the victims in Mexico's Dirty War unknown.

This paper analyzes the period from 1961-1978, starting with the creation of the ACNR in 1961 and its shift from a reformist struggle to an armed movement and concludes in 1978 when there was a marked decline in guerilla activity. It focuses on the countryside and movements that took place away from the city. It highlights the differences between urban and rural, noting how the countryside had its own process of challenging or adapting reforms brought forth after the revolution through the PRI. Despite being neglected, the Mexican countryside remains a central place for political activity and political control that often takes a backseat to political events in more urban spaces. Further, analyses often fail to connect the national context and rural consequences, perpetuating this difference. This paper uncovers the missing narratives about guerilla groups in Guerrero, their experiences, and the dialogue used to describe the Dirty War, revealing Guerrero as the center of the Dirty War.

A "dirty war" is characterized by kidnapping, torture, and murder and the use of other low-intensity warfare tactics conducted by the military, secret police, or state against revolutionary and terrorist insurgents, with

members of the civilian population often the victims.¹ Left-leaning groups are included in the definition, given that victims of low-intensity warfare often belong to progressive or reformist organizations and not necessarily actors challenging the state. Studies on dirty wars in Latin America have focused on Southern Cone countries, particularly Argentina. As a well-noted example of state terror, Argentina also helped export such tactics and methods elsewhere in Latin America during the Cold War.² In Mexico, these patterns and methods served to help minimize unrest from political dissidents in both the city and countryside.

Growing concerns over Soviet expansion into Latin America triggered the United States government to increase its role in the region in order to combat leftist and potentially radical movements. U.S. fears that Mexico might fall into Soviet hands spurred the Central Intelligence Agency to install the largest office in the Western Hemisphere, making Mexico its “frontline post” in Latin America.³ Mexico’s political instability originated from three major issues: increasing disappointment with the PRI’s authoritarianism, labor conflicts, and Mexican attempts at nationalization, closely resembling recent strategies taken by socialists in Cuba. The 1968 student movements, for example, were saturated with iconography and sentiment in support of the both Cuba and Che Guevara. The protests that took place July 26, 1968 were intended as a nod to the birth date of the Cuban revolutionary movement. Furthermore, Mexico had a history of welcoming leftist figures from across Latin America; everyone from Augusto Sandino and Farabundo Martí in the 1920s, to the Argentine Montoneros in the 1970s, had sought refuge in Mexico. Thus Mexico became an important post for the fight against communism in Latin America.

Historians rarely see Mexico as a country with a “dirty war” history. It is often seen as an exception in Latin America due to its proximity to the U.S. and because the PRI often kept these events from the international news. When the dirty war in Mexico has been discussed, historians focus on the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco as the beginning of the use of dirty war tactics. This is because of the visibility of the urban space and because 1968 atrocities were documented so thoroughly by the international press.

Much of the literature on state terror in Latin America re-directs the discussion away from the nation state and attributes blame to a U. S. influence.⁴ While the United States has played a significant role in determining Latin American politics, the tendency of scholars to

¹ *Dictionary.com Unabridged*, s.v. “dirty war,” <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/dirty-war> (accessed: December 10, 2009).

² Ariel Armony, “Producing and Exporting State Terror: The Case of Argentina” in *When States Kill: Latin America, the U.S., and Technologies of Terror*, ed. Cecilia Menjivar and Nestor P. Rodriguez, (University of Texas Press, 2005). Discusses the production of state terror in Argentina and how it served as a model for other countries in Latin America. Argentina trained and exported these methods, particularly within the context of the Cold War.

³ Jefferson Morley, *Our Man in Mexico: Winston Scott and the Hidden History of the CIA* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 1; Philip Agee, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* (New York: Stonehill, 1975), 524.

⁴ *Why States Kill: Latin America, the U.S and Technologies of Terror*, ed. Cecilia Menjivar and Nestor Rodriguez (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

underestimate the culpability of the nation state in state-sponsored terrorism throughout Latin America is alarming. For the Mexican case, historians have examined social movements in terms of the mechanisms the government had in place to respond to unrest.⁵ Scholars have also focused on forms of resistance and the experiences of movements facing the government.⁶ They have shown how repression led movements to increase and radicalize their activity in the cities, resulting in murder, disappearances, and other dirty war tactics. This process in Guerrero, however, is still missing from the literature. The ACNR and the PdP in Guerrero received heavy blows from the government when organizing, but little has focused on their experiences during the Dirty War. Using the writings of revolutionaries and guerilla groups uncovers these experiences to tell a narrative of the Dirty War in Guerrero.

This paper utilizes articles published in *¿Por qué? Revista Independiente*, the *Los Angeles Times*, documents from George Washington University's National Security Archives, and personal memoirs to show a larger context of the guerillas during the Dirty War. *¿Por qué?*, a leftist newspaper of the period, reflects trends in Marxist-Leninist guerilla groups throughout Mexico. It published communiqués from guerillas who sought to not only raise awareness of the situation in Guerrero but to argue for a particular course of action that supported their ends. The documents from George Washington University's National Security Archives shed light on the Cold War context under which these events took place. Sent between U.S. officials placed in embassies, consulates, or other offices in Mexico, these documents reflect the concerns of both the Mexican and U.S. governments; these sources present dialogue behind the government's actions which, until recently, was known only by a few insiders. The *Los Angeles Times* articles used for this project shed light on international perceptions of the guerillas and the dirty war itself in Guerrero. Finally, this project examines Alberto

⁵ Evelyn P. Stevens, *Protest and Response in Mexico* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974) and Viviane Brachet de Márquez, *The Dynamics of Domination: State, Class, and Social Reform in Mexico, 1910-1990* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994). Through focusing on the railroad and doctor's strike along with the student movement of 1968, Stevens describes how the government met each movement with violence. She, however, ignores the guerilla movements in Guerrero. Brachet de Márquez presents the relationship between concessions granted and political control, continually keeping the Mexican political machine running efficiently despite the challenges. Considering the effect reforms and concessions have on the mobilized sectors, she argues how the government maneuvered around political conflicts with comparative ease.

⁶ Donald Clark Hodges and Ross Gandy, *Mexico Under Siege: Popular Resistance Under Presidential Despotism* (London: Zed Books, 2002); Hodges and Gandy examine forms of resistance by Mexicans since the 1940s when rising up against the corruption of the PRI government, providing a concise overview of each movement. Laura Castellanos, *Mexico Armado: 1943-1981* (Mexico DF: Ediciones Era, 2007); Castellanos investigates armed struggles in Mexico, considering how groups and movements historically resorted to arms to achieve their goals. Tanalis Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax Priista, 1940-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). Padilla focuses on how the movement in the sugar fields of the state of Morelos radicalized from struggling for the revolutions' reforms within the PRI and the electoral system, tracing how the process of fighting for reforms without success led to armed struggle.

Ulloa Bornemann's *Surviving Mexico's Dirty War*, a memoir of his experiences as a former guerilla member and political prisoner. The limited nature of memoirs and testimonies in the history of the Dirty War in Guerrero complicates the understanding of the human experience. Ulloa's memoir provides invaluable contributions in considering the effect the war had on its victims.⁷

From the 1940s until the 1960s there was sustained economic growth in the GDP; however, the economic, social and political imbalances in Mexico (and Guerrero in particular) provided fertile ground for rural discontentment. Domestic economic development through industrialization and import-substitution that came to be known as the "Mexican Miracle" had produced uneven economic development throughout Mexico; much of the economic progress that was seen remained relegated to urban spaces. In the state of Guerrero, industrial development in the logging and mining industries helped to raise the profile of the Mexican economy and Acapulco led the nation's production of coconut oil and coffee.⁸ While agriculture had sustained the most profound changes after industrialization in the 1940s, the benefits of economic prosperity that helped cities did not touch the countryside, leaving the rural population destitute.⁹ The *Los Angeles Times* reported little trickle-down effect, and noted Mexico was mired in the same poverty that was seen immediately after the Mexican Revolution.¹⁰ Many Mexicans lacked basic services such as electricity, sewers, or potable water, while 70 percent suffered from malnutrition.¹¹ During the 1950s, peasants flocking to the major cities formed "poverty belts," making the conditions of poverty in the countryside visible in urban settings.¹² By 1971, one out of four Mexicans was unemployed, while a third of Mexico City's three million residents were "economically inactive."¹³ The *Times* acknowledged how the unrest could ultimately be solved by "correcting social and economic inequalities" effectively validating the struggles of the guerillas.¹⁴ Further, political rigidity and the lack of a space within Mexican society for dissidence "produce[d] extremists and even terrorists."¹⁵

Observers in the U.S., Mexican citizens and guerillas all attributed the social, political, and economic conditions in both Guerrero and Mexico to

⁷ Alberto Ulloa Bornemann, *Surviving Mexico's Dirty War: a Political Prisoners Memoir*, ed. Arthur Schmidt and Aurora Camacho de Schmidt (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007).

⁸ Castellanos, 103.

⁹ Brachet de Márquez, 131.

¹⁰ Francis B. Kent, "Discontent Boils Beneath Glossy Façade of Prosperity in Mexico," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1971.

¹¹ Francis B. Kent, "Discontent Boils Beneath Glossy Façade of Prosperity in Mexico," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1971.

¹² Brachet de Márquez, 131. Ochoa, 158.

¹³ Francis B. Kent, "Discontent Boils Beneath Glossy Façade of Prosperity in Mexico"; Francis B. Kent, "Threat of Revolt: Mexico Awakens to Danger."

¹⁴ CIA Directorate of Intelligence, "*Mexico: Rural Discontent*," Top Secret Review, June 14, 1974. <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB105/Doc14.pdf>

¹⁵ National Security Council, "*Review of US Policies Toward Mexico*," Confidential Presidential Review Memorandum [extract], November 21, 1978. <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB89/mexhr11.pdf>

the PRI. These groups placed the government's inefficiency, inactivity and corruption at the focus of their critiques. Prior to 1968, the PRI had maintained control over Mexican politics through a series of presidential successions and leadership of local unions.¹⁶ It was not until after 1968 that the government became concerned with a "democratic opening" represented by Echeverria's election in 1970.¹⁷ U.S. sources attributed the Mexican population's unrest to "corruption and ignorance" of the PRI as well as "population pressures...shortage of good land" and "the concentration on industry" of the prior 30 years.¹⁸ The *Los Angeles Times* critique of the PRI pointed to the government's failure to live up to the promises of the Mexican Revolution. The rule of the "revolution made party," its one-party rule embittered and embodied the ills in Mexican society. In the *Times* saw what began as an uprising against a "corrupt and rapacious upper class" had, by 1972, resulted in "hopelessness and despair."¹⁹ The guerillas viewed the situation in Guerrero differently. Guerillas cited how historical unrest in Guerrero made it a prime place to launch such a struggle. To *¿Por qué?*, Guerrero was rife with "repression and institutionalized crime."²⁰ Genaro Vazquez, leader of the ACNR, explained they chose Guerrero to build a resistance because the political, social and economic problems common in Mexico had become even more apparent there.²¹ Vazquez understood Guerrero to have a "tradition of exemplary struggle...Independence, Reform, and Revolution", which would now lead to opportunities to struggle for "liberation" against the PRI's heavy hand.²²

Luis Echeverria's contradictory policies of populist reform and repression of guerillas masked conflicts throughout Mexico. During his presidency, 1970 to 1976, Echeverria characterized himself as a "leftist reformer and his administration proposed reforms for Mexico to restore the progress of the Revolution."²³ Despite this, Echeverria's own father-in-law, former Jalisco governor Jose Guadalupe Zuño, criticized his son-in-law and government's failure in achieving the ideals of the Revolution after being kidnapped by a guerilla group in Guadalajara. After his return from captivity, Zuño asserted that neither Echeverria "nor other presidents have kept the true validity of the Mexican Revolution."²⁴ While his administration opened the doors to militant leftists escaping dirty wars and military dictatorships in South America, twenty-eight officials sent to the School of the Americas

¹⁶ Hodges and Gandy, 13.

¹⁷ Ibid. Castellanos, 124.

¹⁸ CIA Directorate of Intelligence, "Mexico: Rural Discontent," Top Secret Review, June 14, 1974. <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB105/Doc14.pdf>

¹⁹ Hugh O'Shaughnessy, "Threat of Revolt: Mexico Awakens to Danger," *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, 1972.

²⁰ "El Gobierno Sigue Matando Gente en Guerrero," *¿Por qué? Revista Independiente*, June 22, 1972.

²¹ Augusto Velardo, "Primicia Periodística: Habla Genaro Vazquez, Entrevista con el Jefe de la Guerrilla en Guerrero," *¿Por qué? Revista Independiente*, July 29, 1971.

²² Ibid.

²³ Stanley Meisler, "Mexican Government Vindicated in Handling of 2 Political Kidnappings," *Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 1974.

²⁴ Meisler, "Mexican Government Vindicated in Handling of 2 Political Kidnappings."

learned the very same techniques of repression used in Mexico and later Guerrero.²⁵ Known to be responsible for the 1968 student massacre in Tlatelolco, Echeverría attempted to mask the intolerance of political dissidents elsewhere by making peace with those from Tlatelolco. After the killing of a political prisoner in the Lecumberri prison under “highly suspicious circumstances,” Echeverría released twenty prisoners held for participating in the 1968 riots. The *Los Angeles Times* noted those released as some of the “less doctrinaire participants” of the demonstrations.²⁶ Despite this, he had done nothing to punish the “faceless right-wing organization” responsible for attacking students in 1971 nor the “systematic torture of dissenters by the army in the Campo Militar Número Uno in Mexico City.”²⁷ Death squads such as the White Brigade and the Anonymous Justice of Guerrero began to appear in the countryside wreaking terror on the rural population.²⁸ The White Brigade was composed primarily of individuals who belonged to assorted security and justice bodies who formed to fight communist guerrillas; they utilized the color white as an antithesis of communist red.²⁹ The Brigade fought the September 23rd Communist League in the cities and later moved into the countryside.³⁰ The PRI-protected police formed the Anonymous Justice of Guerrero when the army could no longer catch the “cattle thieves” it claimed to fight.³¹ As Laura Castellanos acknowledges, paramilitary groups such as the White Brigade simply enacted the policies of the presidents during the Dirty War, such as Echeverría, yet the presidencies denied their existence time and time again.³²

Economic difficulties plagued the poor in both urban and rural Mexico. *Los Angeles Times* correspondent Francis B. Kent stated that “despite the revolutionary phraseology of the PRI, the poor are getting relatively poorer and the rich richer in what is for the moment a businessmen and bankers paradise.”³³ The 1970s saw a decrease in agriculture, affecting food production for the entire nation and for peasants who no longer could count on agriculture as the means to sustenance.³⁴ At first, the government quelled unrest in the countryside by distributing land to peasants, but that became problematic as a sharp population increase created a national food and economic deficit.³⁵ World Bank President Robert McNamara even criticized the Mexican government, lashing out against the disparity in wealth distribution in Mexico and affirming that “[t]he richest 10% of the population had increased its share of the national wealth to just

²⁵ Castellanos, 125.

²⁶ U.S. Embassy in Mexico, “*The First Year of the Echeverría Administration*” Confidential Airgram [extract], December 30, 1971, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB105/Doc4.pdf>

²⁷ O’Shaughnessy, “Threat of Revolt: Mexico Awakens to Danger.”

²⁸ Castellanos, 266, Hodges and Gandy, 114, on the Anonymous Justice of Guerrero.

²⁹ Castellanos, 267.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 266.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

³² *Ibid.*, 268.

³³ O’Shaughnessy, “Threat of Revolt: Mexico Awakens to Danger.”

³⁴ Brachet de Márquez, 6.

³⁵ CIA Directorate of Intelligence, “*Mexico: Rural Discontent.*”

over half; while the poorest 40% had seen its slice of the national cake shrink from fourteen to eleven percent.³⁶ Despite the progress seen in both the “Mexican miracle” and widespread access to healthcare, population growth since 1950 negated these developments by further decreasing availability to the fruits of economic progress.³⁷ Furthermore, external debt increased consistently since 1960 due to the failure to contain inflation along with a significant decline in Alliance for Progress (AFP) funds from the U.S. After seeing the funds decrease from \$89 million to \$25.1 million, Mexico drastically cut social projects that the AFP once funded without appropriating other funds for their sustenance of much-needed expansion due to population growth.³⁸

The *Los Angeles Times* witnessed and reported on the corruption of the PRI as well as the extent of their control in Mexico. The PRI maintained a majority in Congress and was locked into the administrative machinery through trade unions with intimate connection to big business.³⁹ Despite a number of opposing political parties, groups outside of the PRI existed only “as long as they remain[ed] discreet in their activities.”⁴⁰ One-party rule allowed the PRI government “flexibility in the degree to which it adheres to human rights guarantees.”⁴¹ It dealt with challenges to its authority through infiltration, co-optation, repression, and concessions to pacify further threats.⁴² Sociologist Viviane Brachet-Marquez calls this a “pact of domination” which she explains as a relationship between periods of political crisis and concessions granted usually after or during the repression of groups asking for reforms and change.⁴³ The *Times* explained that that the key to the PRI’s consistent hold of power had been its “ability to satisfy the greatest number while offending as few as possible.”⁴⁴

Mexicans shared the *Times*’ critique of the government, calling for sweeping changes across the country. At the most basic level, the uncertainty of food provisions combined with rising prices to stir discontent and disillusionment with the government.⁴⁵ The PRI’s response to the 1968 student massacre was another incident that alienated many Mexicans, particularly those in the middle class. The 1970 election that placed Echeverría in power illustrates the uncertainty many Mexicans had with the PRI. The election had an embarrassingly poor turnout: two-thirds of eligible voters turned out for the election, while 20 percent voted for the opposition

³⁶ O’Shaughnessy, “Threat of Revolt: Mexico Awakens to Danger.”

³⁷ Brachet de Márquez, 84.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

³⁹ O’Shaughnessy, “Threat of Revolt: Mexico Awakens to Danger.”

⁴⁰ U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, “*FAA Section 32-Political Prisoners*,” Secret cable, April 19, 1974. <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB89/mexhr01.pdf>

⁴¹ U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, “*Human Rights in Mexico*,” Confidential Airgram, March 24, 1976, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB89/mexhr06.pdf>

⁴² Enrique C. Ochoa, *Feeding Mexico: The Political Uses of Food Since 1910* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 4.

⁴³ Brachet de Márquez, 7.

⁴⁴ Kent, “Discontent Boils Beneath Glossy Façade of Prosperity in Mexico.”

⁴⁵ “Mexico: The Weakening Seams.”

and 25 percent cast a blank vote.⁴⁶ Abstention increased to 43 percent for the 1973 congressional elections.⁴⁷ Others demonstrated different forms of resistance and opposition by storming city halls and PRI offices.⁴⁸ Critiques of the PRI often emphasized the role of the Mexican elite. Leftists accused the PRI of advancing the interests of Mexican millionaires rather than the people, while letting the country fall under U.S. domination.⁴⁹ The “new elite,” argued to be the PRI, “touches every Mexican and makes millionaires out of a fortunate few.”⁵⁰ ‘Official’ unions that were connected to the PRI had alienated many Mexicans, spurring workers to form independent unions. Independent unions grew from fourteen up to fifty-three percent during Echeverría’s term.⁵¹ The Catholic Church, considered an “officially repressed” entity in Mexican society during Echeverría’s term, also criticized the government and sympathized with the rebels. The Church interpreted guerilla acts as “outcries” of men “systematically barred from legal and democratic paths” that have resorted to violent means to make their demands heard.⁵² A cleric added, “[s]ocial conditions in the country are such that violent protest can surprise no one.”⁵³ Sociologists and political scientists were another group who came to share in the critique of the Mexican Revolution’s lost direction. A university lecturer asked, “Is it any wonder...that these people are sick of the old revolutionary rhetoric? Is it any wonder they have grown bitter?”⁵⁴

The guerillas in Guerrero and *¿Por qué?* had a more radical critique of the government and called for armed struggle to resolve problems in Guerrero and Mexico. The guerillas shared the critique of the *Times* and other Mexicans, directly accusing the PRI and blaming it for of the ills in Mexican society. During the 1960s discourse had shifted from attempting to achieve revolutionary changes through the PRI to calling for a new socialist revolution, indicating a rise in the Mexican left.⁵⁵ The goal of the new left aimed “to destroy the government,” explaining that “in Mexico government means the Institutional Revolutionary Party.”⁵⁶ In guerilla eyes, “all Mexico knows of the brutal repression that the *priista* government has exercised against the people.”⁵⁷ The “bourgeois revolution,” represented by the PRI in the eyes of the left, had been “incapable in all its existence” to end “social injustice... exploitation... misery... hunger... illiteracy, etc.”⁵⁸ For the guerillas

⁴⁶ Brachet de Márquez, 133.

⁴⁷ Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 273.

⁴⁸ Ochoa, 178.

⁴⁹ “Mexico: The Weakening Seams,” *The Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 1973.

⁵⁰ Kent, “Discontent Boils Beneath Glossy Façade of Prosperity in Mexico.”

⁵¹ Ochoa, 179.

⁵² Francis B. Kent, “Mexico Rebel Death Fails to Stem Revolt,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1972.

⁵³ Kent, “Mexico Rebel Death Fails to Stem Revolt.”

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Carr, 225.

⁵⁶ Kent, “Discontent Boils Beneath Glossy Façade of Prosperity in Mexico.”

⁵⁷ “Nuevo Golpe Guerrillero: La Emboscada Al Convoy,” *¿Por qué? Revista Independiente*, July 13, 1972.

⁵⁸ “El Gobierno Sigue Matando Gente En Guerrero.”

and *¿Por qué?*, Guerrero exemplified this corruption of revolutionary ideals. In the 1960s, Guerrero was the poorest state in the nation, sixty-two percent of Guerrero's population was illiterate and it was the leading source of labor throughout the country.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the state's natural resources had a history of exploitation by both government and foreign (particularly U.S.) companies, and local landowners.⁶⁰

The guerillas' radical approach to reform stemmed explicitly from the failures of other methods that had been attempted in both Guerrero and elsewhere in the Mexican countryside. To elaborate, the Jaramillista movement of sugarcane workers in the 1940s that occurred in the state of Morelos had attempted to work within a reformist framework involving President Lázaro Cardenas. Ruben Jaramillo, the movement's leader, used a reformist strategy to attain the land reforms that the Mexican Revolution promised. These methods, however, resulted in consistent failures, leading Jaramillo's movement to lean toward an armed struggle. The movement took up arms in order to achieve the goals the government would not provide and in order to respond to the violence and government repression while pursuing land reforms.⁶¹ The Jaramillista movement would prove to be the first manifestation of Zapatismo after the Revolution, carrying out Emiliano Zapata's ideals of "land and liberty" deviating from classical revolutionary dialogue only because it opposed the party who claimed to carry out those very ideals.⁶² The shift in dialogue toward a rural focus acknowledged the significance of the Mexican countryside and its conditions for change.⁶³ When Guerrero politicians offered Genaro Vazquez the opportunity to discuss possible alternatives to guerilla warfare, he rejected the offer, arguing that the people have had no other response but "silence, persecution, imprisonment, and even collective and individual assassination of my comrades."⁶⁴ More than reforms would be necessary for change in the guerillas perspective, and called instead for a revolution fought through armed struggle.

From the perspective of both the guerillas and United States observers, Guerrero was poised as a key location for a revolutionary struggle to take place. From the start, Guerrero's terrain and social conditions posed a problem for the Mexican government. The American Embassy in Mexico acknowledged its "wild and remote terrain" made it "difficult to reach the population and control it."⁶⁵ In 1971, the *Los Angeles Times* characterized Guerrero as a "virtually lawless, bandit-ridden...state."⁶⁶ According to U.S.

⁵⁹ Castellanos, 103.

⁶⁰ "Nuevo Golpe Guerrillero: La Emboscada al Convoy."

⁶¹ Ochoa, 159. See Padilla, 2008, For an in-depth analysis of the Jaramillista movement and its experiences with state conflicts.

⁶² Hodges and Gandy, 43.

⁶³ Carr, 227.

⁶⁴ "Genaro Vazquez Rechaza el "Dialogo", *¿Por qué? Revista Independiente*, August 26, 1971.

⁶⁵ U.S. Embassy in Mexico, "Defense Secretary Denies Existence of Guerrillas in Mexico,"

Confidential Telegram, May 27, 1971.

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB105/Doct.pdf>

⁶⁶ Francis B. Kent, "Evidence Mounts that Mexico is on Verge of Guerilla Warfare," *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1971.

government sources, the guerillas had a significant presence in Guerrero. They noted the guerillas were “still a serious problem,” adding the “forbidding” mountainous terrain of the region and the “support, or at least tolerance, of the general population” to the complexity of the problem.⁶⁷

The *Los Angeles Times* and U.S. observers provided descriptions of the guerillas and concerns over their mobilization at the height of the Dirty War. The *Times* described the guerillas as composed “almost wholly of peasants” and compared the ACNR (consisting of peasants in their forties) to the “at least eight” other guerilla movements in the country composed of young people.⁶⁸ U.S. government documents support these descriptions but focus on the guerillas as the root of the problem in Mexican society, labeling them “terrorists” and studying how their rate of growth, geographic dispersion, and potential for organization alarmed the Mexican government.⁶⁹ Mexican officials monitored the “activities” and worried that coordination among each group could prove problematic.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the sources compared events in Mexico to “bloody” conflicts elsewhere in Latin America. The *Times* remarked that Mexico now “joined the growing fraternity of Latin American nations facing open revolt” where “partisans of armed revolution and...defenders of the status quo” fought off one another.⁷¹ It also hinted that Mexico followed the path of other countries in the hemisphere where similar “forces” produced “left-wing violence, economic and political chaos and, ultimately, military takeovers.”⁷² While the Mexican government downplayed the threat of the rebels due to their miniscule numbers, the *Times* reminded readers that the number of Guerillas initially involved with the successful Cuban Revolution of 1959 “totaled fewer than 20.”⁷³

The “hit-and-run” raids launched by the guerillas, particularly by the ACNR, posed a threat to both the government’s legitimacy and military control over the region.⁷⁴ In late June of 1972 The *Times* reported the guerillas launched “the[ir] first meaningful blow,” when they ambushed an army patrol killing ten soldiers.⁷⁵ In 1971, the paper reported the ambush of an army column that resulted in the deaths of eighteen soldiers and others wounded.⁷⁶ Ambushes were used as a means to capture weapons from the military and also served to undermine the authority of the military in the region. In one instance, near Atoyac, “at least 26 soldiers were killed” by the

⁶⁷ State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, “*Mexico: Terrorism Still on the Rise*,” Secret Intelligence Note, November 29, 1972, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB105/Doc7.pdf>

⁶⁸ Kent, “Discontent Boils Beneath Glossy Façade of Prosperity,” and Kent, “Evidence Mounts That Mexico is on the Verge of Guerilla Warfare.”

⁶⁹ U.S. Embassy in Mexico, “*The First Year of the Echeverría Administration*.”

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, “*Mexico: Terrorism Still on the Rise*.”

⁷¹ Francis B. Kent, “Kidnapping Jars Stable Mexico Political Scene,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1971; O’Shaughnessy, “Threat of Revolt: Mexico Awakens to Danger.”

⁷² “Mexico: The Weakening Seams.”

⁷³ Kent, “Evidence Mounts That Mexico is on the Verge of Guerilla Warfare.”

⁷⁴ Francis B. Kent, “Mexico Tells of Guerilla Chief’s Death,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1972.

⁷⁵ Francis B. Kent, “Revolutionary Activity on Rise in Mexico,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1972.

⁷⁶ Kent, “Revolutionary Activity on Rise.”

guerillas while capturing “over 50 weapons.”⁷⁷ Guerillas often reported their attacks against the army as “responses” to government inflicted violence. An ambush on the army “did not represent solely the release of vengeance, but a planned action of a guerilla command, which is necessary to understand in light of the national situation.”⁷⁸ These attacks responded “to the crimes and abuses of the federal forces and the state police, the dispossessions of the rich class and the government of the work and product of the peasant, and the depreciation of the problems of the poor class.”⁷⁹

These battles, however, had mixed results as the rebels often captured military weapons but suffered high numbers of casualties. In most reports, gun battles between the army and the guerillas were mostly reported as a loss for the rebels. In one instance, the army “inflicted heavy casualties” on an unspecified number on the guerillas, while a soldier only suffered a minor wound. Similarly, after the rescue of Senator Ruben Figueroa, U.S. documents reported a gun battle resulting in wounded and arrested PdIP members. Despite their efforts to eradicate the rebels, Army operations against the ACNR remained “largely unsuccessful” and peasant support for the guerillas grew among the peasants.⁸⁰

When Vazquez died, many had the impression that guerilla activity in the region would subside; however, ongoing abuses by the military made many peasants sympathetic to the guerillas, viewing their struggle as a righteous one. *¿Por qué?* and the guerillas often characterized the peasants and people detained by the army as innocent and harmless. In one reported instance, a peasant who was imprisoned and experienced maltreatment at the hands of the authorities told *¿Por qué?* that he did not know Cabañas (the leader of the PdIP), “but after experiencing firsthand the attacks of the army, we see his struggle is reasonable.”⁸¹ Articles often emphasized when victims were women and children, unable to defend themselves in the face of repression. The people refused to surrender their ideas in the face of repression despite the “demagogic alms” and torture they faced.⁸² For *¿Por qué?*, the poor of Guerrero saw the PdIP as “saviors, their heroes, which is why they protect and help them.”⁸³ The guerillas were the people’s “legitimate representatives.”⁸⁴ U.S. government sources help to corroborate popular support of the guerrillas and challenged the Mexican government’s assertion that interventions in Guerrero were working; sources stated that Cabañas “enjoys widespread support and sympathy among the peasants.”⁸⁵

⁷⁷ State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, “Mexico: Terrorism Still on the Rise.”

⁷⁸ “Nuevo Golpe Guerrillero: La Emboscada Al Convoy.”

⁷⁹ “Desde la Sierra, La Guerrilla Advierte: Ojo por Ojo,” *¿Por qué? Revista Independiente*, August 17, 1972.

⁸⁰ U.S. Embassy in Mexico, “The First Year of the Echeverría Administration.”

⁸¹ Ysaías Rojas Delgado, “Guerrero: Estado de Represion,” *¿Por qué? Revista Independiente*, September 28, 1972.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ “Nuevo Golpe Guerrillero: La Emboscada Al Convoy.”

⁸⁴ Leon Guzman, “La Guerrilla Cumple su Advertencia: Caen 34 Militares,” *¿Por qué? Revista Independiente*, September 7, 1972.

⁸⁵ CIA National Intelligence Daily, “Guerrillas Are Nuisance to Mexican Government,” Top Secret Article, September 10, 1974. <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB105/Doc24.pdf>

After Vasquez's death, Dr. Eugenio Martinez, a surgeon arrested for his involvement with guerillas asserted that "While there is hunger and poverty in Mexico, the struggle will continue...Genaro was just one leader. There will be others. And although others will be arrested, still others will triumph."⁸⁶ Far from simply fighting off the rebels, peasants claimed that "thousands and thousands of soldiers will have to remain there for life, since the Guerreran peasantry supports the insurgent movement."⁸⁷ ¿Por qué? explained that the working people have now taken arms to fight against the landowners and the Army.⁸⁸

The government initially denied the existence of guerillas in Mexico but as the movement gained momentum, and their presence could no longer be ignored, officials tried to criminalize and de-politicize the movement. In 1971, the Mexican Department of Defense declined to acknowledge the presence of guerillas, but warned that "if they were to appear we would have to combat them rapidly."⁸⁹ Gradually, the government shifted its discourse to depoliticizing their movement, denying any revolutionary ideas the guerillas promoted, insisting they were "common criminals," "bandits" or "cattle-rustlers."⁹⁰ Scholars like Michael Bhatia have asserted that 'name-calling' of agents outside of the government as tools used to "other" a group and distance their goals from those of the nation, thus de-legitimizing a particular political group's existence or goals.⁹¹ Name calling language became a key tool in marginalizing the guerillas of Guerrero and the words "terrorist," "bandit," and "rebel" were frequently invoked when referring to individuals within the movement. By labeling the guerillas as 'terrorists,' the government attempted to justify the violence that was being perpetrated in the dirty war.

In many cases, the Government's mission to repress the guerillas often impacted the general public, many of whom had nothing to do with revolutionary activities. U.S. government documents noted that "occasional extra-legal actions by the security forces have also affected agrarian, labor and student strike leaders" and remained "uncompromising" with those who have taken arms against the state.⁹² The government went beyond normal procedures, detaining suspects "whose only connection with anti-governmental activity may be blood relationship with wanted guerillas."⁹³

⁸⁶ Kent, "Mexico Rebel Death Fails to Stem Revolt."

⁸⁷ Baloy Mayo Ventura, "24 Mil Soldados En Guerrero: Zona de Desastre o Estado de Sitio?" ¿Por qué? *Revista Independiente*, August 12, 1971.

⁸⁸ Ysaías Rojas Delgado, "¿Fueron Guerrilleros? Caen Otros 25 Soldados," ¿Por qué? *Revista Independiente*, October 19, 1972.

⁸⁹ U.S. Embassy in Mexico, "Defense Secretary Denies Existence of Guerrillas in Mexico," and "Exclusiva Sensacional: Guerrillas en Guerrero," ¿Por qué? *Revista Independiente*, July 22, 1971.

⁹⁰ Kent, "Mexico Tells of Guerilla Chief's Death" and "Exclusiva Sensacional: Las Guerillas en Guerrero;" Kent, "Evidence Mounts that Mexico is on Verge of Guerilla Warfare."

⁹¹ Michael V. Bhatia, "Fighting Words: Naming Terrorists, Bandits, Rebels and Other Violent Actors," *Third World Quarterly* 26 (2005), 7.

⁹² National Security Council, "Review of US Policies Toward Mexico;" U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, "FAA Section 32-Political Prisoners."

⁹³ U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, "FAA Section 32-Political Prisoners."

Reports later published demonstrate instances of people imprisoned simply by having the last name as leaders in the rebel movements (Cabañas or Barrientos).⁹⁴ In one instance, seventeen prisoners were detained for over a week with the only crime of “living close to where the second ambush to the army of the PRI-government was successful.”⁹⁵ They also observed that the government “occasionally detain[ed] persons belonging to political oppositional groups,” holding the editors of a newspaper imprisoned for nearly three weeks without charges.⁹⁶ *¿Por qué?* accused the government of “unjust and illegal imprisonment” of persons with the crime of “sustaining political ideas that disagree with those imposed by the anti-progressive and anti-popular regime that dominates.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, in order to facilitate the arrests of political dissidents, the Mexican legislature deleted articles of its penal code prohibiting the arrest of individuals charged with “social dissolution.”⁹⁸

The Mexican government often responded to these challenges in Guerrero, using excessive military force against political dissidents and suspects. In Atoyac, reports of “persecution campaigns” dating back to 1967 were often masked as social assistance campaigns and government outreach programs designed to aid the poor.⁹⁹ After attacking the army, guerrillas claimed that the military “tortured, killed or imprisoned women, peasants, and students”, all of whom they claimed were innocent.¹⁰⁰ They also noted when “death squads” ripped “hundreds of peasants and humble people of the town, not excluding women with children in arms” from their homes forcefully.¹⁰¹ To this day, the National Commission on Human Rights in Mexico deals with 532 cases of disappeared revolutionaries during the dirty war era, 332 belonging to the state of Guerrero.¹⁰²

The military was the primary force the Mexican government used to repress the population. As the threat of political violence continued, the government responded with a “massive application of military manpower.”¹⁰³ The army increased its forces by sending more battalions to the region. Official sources report the presence of 12,000 soldiers, or 25 battalions, under the guise of performing their “social service”.¹⁰⁴ By 1971, the Mexican Department of Defense had sent more than eight thousand soldiers to the Sierra to act as “explorers” bringing the number of soldiers in that state to

⁹⁴ “Informe Historico a la Sociedad Mexicana: *Tema 9- Se Acreditan las Condiciones de un Conflicto Armado Interno en que Aplica el Derecho Humanitario Internacional*,” Official Report Released on Mexico’s Dirty War. <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB209/informe/tema09.pdf>

⁹⁵ Ysaías Rojas Delgado, “Guerrero: Estado de Represión.”

⁹⁶ U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, “*Human Rights in Mexico*.”

⁹⁷ “Genaro Vasquez Rechaza el Dialogo.”

⁹⁸ U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, “*Human Rights in Mexico*.”

⁹⁹ “Desde la Sierra, La Guerrilla Advierte: Ojo por Ojo.”

¹⁰⁰ “Comunicado Guerrillero: 40 Armas Quitadas al Ejercito,” *¿Por qué? Revista Independiente*, September 14, 1972.

¹⁰¹ “Genaro Vasquez Rechaza El Dialogo.”

¹⁰² Carlos Borbolla, *La Guerra Sucia: Hechos Y Testimonios* (Colima, Col. Mexico: Universidad de Colima, 2007).

¹⁰³ CIA National Intelligence Daily, “*Guerrillas Are Nuisance to Mexican Government*.”

¹⁰⁴ Hodges and Gandy, 113.

24,000, a third of the Mexican Army.¹⁰⁵ Referring to the soldiers as “explorers” was intended to portray their presence as harmless, suggested they were meant to aid the community, and was meant to assuage public fears regarding an increased military presence. This was not the case, however, as the army subjected the population to vigilance by “systemic strafing...confinement in towns called strategic, as well as small bombardments by the Air Force.”¹⁰⁶ Further illustrating the war-like nature of the conflict, the Army employed the tactic of the “Vietnamese village” in which peasants were forcibly relocated to a region that allowed better military control.¹⁰⁷ The government tolerated abuse and death in jails “so long as it does not result in embarrassing public disclosures,” U.S. Embassy documents explained that this was a “centuries-old pattern” for Mexico.” and explained that “no administrative controls [would] inhibit such practices, except consular access” (in the case of a foreign nationals) leaving Mexican citizens imprisoned at the hands of an unchecked government.¹⁰⁸

As in other dirty war cases throughout Latin America, human rights violations took place in Mexico. In 2000, after the National Action Party (PAN) has assumed office, President Vicente Fox Quesada called for an investigation on the dirty war. The group who conducted the study, The National Commission on Human Rights (CNDH) published the report in 2006. The report uncovered 492 instances of disappearances across the nation: 184 in the cities and 308 in the countryside; the state of Guerrero alone accounted for 293 of these disappearances.¹⁰⁹

In Guerrero, reports of torture and other human rights violations were commonplace. Security forces had little to fear or discourage them from using physical force on prisoners and they often chose extreme violence against political dissidents in order to achieve their goals. Declassified U.S. documents demonstrate knowledge of disappearances, human rights violations and even murder perpetrated by the military. The documents observed that some of these abuses and “de facto lack of guarantees to detainees” immediately following “arrest... extortion... [and] action against political terrorists” along with “relatively minor harassment against legal political opposition.”¹¹⁰

Alberto Ulloa Bornemann had been an active participant in the PdIP with Lucio Cabañas, until he was caught by government forces. His memoir describes the psychological and physical torture of political dissidents apprehended by the authorities and taken to Mexico City’s notorious Military Camp Number One. Recalling one of these instances, he remembered how those conducting the torture turned off the radio “so that the rest of us prisoners could hear the screams of the wretch whose turn

¹⁰⁵ “24 Mil Soldados En Guerrero: Zona de Desastre o Estado de Sitio?”

¹⁰⁶ Leon Guzman, “La Guerrilla de Lucio Cabanas,” *¿Por qué? Revista Independiente*, January 27, 1972.

¹⁰⁷ Hodges and Gandy, 113.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ “Informe Historico a la Sociedad Mexicana- 2006,” Official Report Released on Mexico’s Dirty War. <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB209/index.htm>

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

had come.”¹¹¹ Both Ulloa and Jose Bracho, another captured participant of the PdIP, cited the use of electric shocks on their bodies as a physical torture tactic.¹¹² Imprisoned at the same military camp as Ulloa, Bracho was later transported to the jail at Chilpancingo, Guerrero after being injected with an unknown substance at the former detention center.¹¹³

The inequalities surrounding distribution of wealth and a lack of basic provisions spurred peasants in the Guerreran countryside to rise up and fight for representation. Despite, or perhaps because of its continual neglect, rural Guerrero became a key place for political activity between 1961 and 1978. Rural activism not only challenged the authority of President Luis Echeverria’s government but it stood to undermine the rule of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional. The PRI recognized this challenge to their political hegemony and sought to curtail it, unleashing a Dirty War on the population and expurgating the narrative of rural political opposition in Guerrero from the historical record.



¹¹¹ Ulloa Bornemann, 29.

¹¹² Ibid., 28. “El Guerrillero Jose Bracho Narra a *¿Por qué? La Muerte De Genaro,*” *¿Por qué? Revista Independiente*, March 1972.

¹¹³ “El Guerillero Jose Bracho Narra a *¿Por qué? La Muerte De Genaro.*”