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COMMUNITY, POWER, AND MEMORY IN DÍAZ ORDAZ'S MEXICO: THE 1968 LYNCHING IN SAN MIGUEL CANOA, PUEBLA

By

Kevin M. Chrisman

A THESIS

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COMMUNITY, POWER AND MEMORY IN DÍAZ ORDAZ'S MEXICO: THE 1968 LYNCHING IN SAN MIGUEL CANOA, PUEBLA

Kevin M. Chrisman, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2013

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On September 14th, 1968, approximately 1,000 enraged inhabitants wielding assorted makeshift weapons formed a lynch mob that brutally murdered four people and injured three others in San Miguel Canoa, Mexico. According to the generally accepted account, Canoa's inhabitants feared that recently-arrived Universidad Autónoma de Puebla employees, in town on a weekend mountain-climbing expedition, were in actuality communist agitators threatening the town's social order. The lynching in Canoa received limited press coverage and was subsequently overshadowed by the much larger government orchestrated Tlatelolco massacre that occurred in Mexico City, on October 2, 1968. While Tlatelolco remains an important historic event from late 1960s Mexico, the Canoa lynching and its aftermath reveals powerful social tensions that enveloped rural Mexico during the Cold War. These tensions not only contributed to the lynching but also served as an engine that produced competing narratives about the incident and the larger issues of community, power and memory.

I propose Canoa was not culturally isolated or separated as a traditional rural community but intricately connected to mainstream Mexican politics, migration, and culture. Canoa's residents were deeply connected to the national political environment

presided over by President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, and local and regional sociopolitical concerns. These layers of political culture filtered into Canoa and were interpreted by the town's residents according to their unique historical experiences. By contextualizing the Canoa lynching into the larger narrative of the Cold War as related to Mexico, I hope to not only add to the historiography of the Díaz Ordaz and Luis Echeverría years but also place Canoa into the greater narrative of 1968 and the student movement.

A later film about the lynching reshaped the historic memory of the events. The film *Canoa* (Cazals, 1975) became the dominant public memory of the lynching. Due in part to Cazals' documentary-style production, this dramatic fictional depiction influenced how Mexicans perceived the rural countryside during the Cold War, and sanitized the memory of the Canoa lynching in a manner that reflected the policies of President Luis Echeverría. This study focuses on the power of film representation in the production and consumption of public memory.

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DEDICATION

For my family,

and to the friends, mentors, and

loved ones who helped me along the way.

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This thesis would not have taken form without the dedicated assistance lent to me by family, friends, mentors, colleagues, professors, archivists, and strangers both here in the United States and in various parts of Mexico. I am indebted to their kindness, patience, encouragement, and criticism. This project first developed in 2011 in Lincoln, Nebraska during one of my frequent visits to the office of my adviser James Garza, who asked me one morning the central question of my research: "What about Canoa?" I must first take this opportunity to thank him for suggesting this wonderful topic, and for guiding me through the steps required to produce my first major academic project.

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My research was partially funded by a Valeda K. Wood Travel Fellowship from the History Department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am truly indebted to the faculty members who assisted me in this project. I owe special thanks to William Thomas III, Dawne Curry, Patrick Jones, Tim Mahoney, James Le Sueur, Gerald Steinacher, Lloyd Ambrosius, Waskar Ari, Tim Borstelmann, Sandra Pershing, and Barb Bullington for their constant support. I would also like to thank my thesis committee member Sergio Wals. Many graduate students talked me through various parts of this project, including Pablo Rangel, Luke Chennel, Rebecca Wingo, Jake Friefeld, Mikal Brotnov, Brian Gribben, Robert Jordan, Brian Sarnacki, and Andy Wilson. Additional thanks to Daron Olson, Theodore Weeks, Michael Torney, Alejandro Mendez, and Marcelene García-Huerta.

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INTRODUCTION

Pascual García and his young brothers awakened to a frightful chorus of shouting from outside their home and the disturbing image of a man chopping down their front door with an ax. The boys were crying as people from the infuriated crowd finally breached the lone exit, a simple wood paneled door their father Lucas García García had barricaded with a wooden pole. Their crying continued, especially after a man approached their father with a machete in hand and delivered a sharp blow to his jugular. His body slowly tumbled into a heap onto the dirt floor that quickly became permeated with blood.[1] The crowd pelted his body using sticks and machetes until someone pointed a shotgun at his chest, and ended his life in front of his wife and four children.

This macabre scene began the evening of September 14th, 1968, when approximately 1,000 enraged inhabitants wielding machetes and shotguns, and other assorted makeshift weapons formed a lynch mob that brutally murdered four people and injured three others in San Miguel Canoa, Mexico.[2] According to the generally accepted account, Canoa's inhabitants feared that recently-arrived Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (UAP[3]) employees, in town on a weekend mountain-climbing expedition, were in actuality communists agitators threatening the town's social order. The lynching in Canoa received limited press coverage and was subsequently overshadowed by the much larger government orchestrated Tlatelolco massacre that occurred in Mexico City, on October 2, 1968. Hundreds of demonstrators from the *movimiento estudiantil* (student movement) were gunned down in the Plaza de Tres Culturas in that incident.

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[1] Guillermo Ochoa, "La Fiesta de la Sangre: Cuando Los Machetes se Dieron Gusto en Canoa," *¡Siempre!* No. 1193, (May 1975), 14, Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, Distrito Federal.
[2] Canoa, San Miguel Canoa, or San Miguel de Canoa all refer to the same town.
[3] La Universidad Autónoma de Puebla changed its name in the 1990s to Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, BUAP.

While Tlatelolco remains as the most important event from the late 1960s Mexico, the Canoa lynching and its aftermath reveals powerful social tensions that enveloped rural Mexico during the Cold War period. These tensions not only contributed to the lynching but also served as an engine that produced competing narratives about the incident and the larger issues of community, power and memory. Ultimately, the incident would produce a powerful visual narrative that reinforced common tropes about rural Mexico. By placing Canoa in the narrative of Cold War Mexico, I hope to not only add to the historiography of the Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría years but also situate Canoa in an environment directly connected to the pulse of Mexican mainstream society. Historical evidence suggests Canoa repeatedly experienced periods of violence influenced by episodes of national tension and unrest. The events in 1968, for example, represent the third recorded lynching in Canoa's history, with the others coinciding with major national events in 1856 (La Reforma) and 1924 (The 1910 Revolution).[4] In many ways, Mexico's national policies and the tensions they produced were magnified in rural villages. Canoa was certainly no exception. Exploring the role of community and its relationship with power at both a local and national level works to decentralize the heavy focus of power and history emanating from Mexico City.

This project draws heavily on research conducted during a summer research trip to Mexico in 2012. The majority of documents and collections were obtained from the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) in Mexico City, and the Archivo General del Estado de Puebla (AGEP). Valuable material was also obtained from the Biblioteca

[4] Felipe Galvez, "San Miguel Canoa: Matanza en tres tiempos: 1856, 1924, 1968," *Proceso*, Vol. 1143. (Sept. 1998).

Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, in Mexico City, and the Filmoteca on the campus of UNAM. The latter entity provided a substantial amount of documents related to *Canoa*, the film adaptation released in 1975 by director Felipe Cazals and screenwriter Tomás Pérez Turrent. This film presented Mexican audiences with a dramatic fictional depiction of the hiker's nightmare. The film remains an intricate component of Canoa's legacy, and a powerful depiction of 1968 Mexico. I contend *Canoa* has become the official public memory of the lynching. Due in part to Cazals' documentary-style production, the film influenced how Mexicans perceived the rural countryside during the Cold War, and sanitized the memory of the Canoa lynching. Consumption of Canoa's history through film impacted how many Mexicans perceived and understood the lynching and their cultural surrounding of the Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría years.[5] Analyzing the development of Mexico's public memory of the lynching provides a fascinating window to explore the competing narratives created in the lynchings aftermath. Ultimately, Cazals' film transmitted the dominant historical memory of the events in Canoa, and became a source in which people viewed the culture of rural Mexicans during the presidency of Díaz Ordaz and the larger Cold War. *Canoa*'s parable also provided a visual template for journalists and historians that filtered memory through Cazals' version of events. The result is similar to the process of photocopying where the loss of quality from the original image is never seen, yet the copied version continues to be reproduced. My thesis attempts to move beyond *Canoa* and Cazals' vision to explore how these competing histories of the lynching became remembered or forgotten.

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[5] See Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture* (London: Routledge, 2009), 2.

In order to construct a detailed narrative of the lynching, I have relied heavily on oral history as remembered by victims and witnesses. This dependability is hindered by the trickiness of memory. Most interviews were conducted shortly after *Canoa* was released in Mexican theatres in 1975. The film created a renewed public interest into the lynching and provoked historians and journalists to conduct interviews that were released in prominent magazines, newspapers, and historical societies. These accounts described in great detail various individual reflections of the lynching that when taken collectively offer a broader perspective. They also reveal possible theories on what provoked the lynching, and different perspectives from the dominant social actors. I have relied on these interviews to present a richer narration than what concise top-down government and newspaper reports describe. Depending on these interviews remains a tricky process, as these memories, filtered through time and possibly altered by the film's release, and provided the only on-the-ground reports available.

Memory remains an issue to contend with in regards to the historical reconstruction of events that took place after the lynching. Witnesses imagined and reimagined their stories in order to make sense of the traumatic experiences they endured. In some instances, survivor testimony varied substantially on detail, or remained mute on certain portions. The passage of time inversely affected the memory retrieval process for the principal victims. Predictably, various witness accounts produced multiple competing narratives. As a result, the interview process itself comes into question, as the actual structure, focus, and content presented to the reader packages the narrative in a certain direction. Questions may arise concerning the validity of their story; however there is no question their unique experiences are valuable and their recollections and opinions should

not be discounted simply because of the passage of time. In fact, many crucial details concerning the lynching and its immediate aftermath surfaced decades later in subsequent interviews. To provide a more objective analysis, I have attempted to corroborate the competing narratives with government reports and other historical evidence. Based on my research, it appears that government reports I obtained from the AGN do not appear in any available historical accounts that construct the Canoa lynching, which instead tend to focus solely on eyewitness accounts or newspapers.[6] Newspaper records provide another twist. Very few national newspapers covered the lynching or its aftermath, which raises certain questions about the paucity of available information. Only a few local newspapers in Puebla followed the events or aftermath in depth. Combining these various angles will contribute to a more holistic view that incorporates the Canoa lynching into the large context of the Cold War in Mexico.

While there remains to be written a comprehensive historical analysis of mob violence and vigilante justice as related to Mexico, lynching scholarship has contributed substantially in other geographical regions.[7] These studies explore the various regional, racial, ethnic, economic, and political factors that influenced mob mentality, participation, and support for lynchings over various time periods. Michael Pfeifer's analysis of lynchings in Wisconsin during the 19th Century suggests the relative decline in public support for lynch law was influenced in part by the growth in police strength to

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[6] A collection of documents available at the AGN titled "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, were assembled by a researcher in 2006. However, during my investigation, I have yet to uncover a historical account of the lynching based on these primary sources. See citation 19.

[7] See for example Ashutosh Varshney, ed., *Collective Violence in Indonesia* (Boulder: Lynn Rienner Publishers, 2010); William D. Carrigan, ed., *Lynching Reconsidered: New Perspectives in the Study of Mob Violence* (London: Routledge, 2008); Thomas E. Smith, "Reform and Empire: The British and American Transnational Search for the Rights of Black People in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," (PhD diss., University of Nebraska, 2006); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

protect suspected criminals from the lynch parties.[8] In broader terms, one could argue lynch mobs are interconnected and dependent on a binary relationship with state power and their representatives. State control over the judicial process and effective law enforcement practices inversely influences communal violence. Lynching parties may otherwise believe vigilante justice offers a justifiable form of punishment when the state appears absent in domestic affairs, and unable to adequately protect their community. Canoa's general lack of state power and police enforcement of criminal law produced a social environment where many citizens felt the necessity to take the law into their own hands to defend their community.

Mexico's national Cold War policies were not exempt from effecting seemingly unconnected rural peripheries in Mexico's countryside. In many ways, these policies were magnified in rural villages. Recent scholarship examines the binary relationship between state formation and its link with the Mexican countryside.[9] As Jeff Rubin argues, the Mexican state still struggles to incorporate rural communities that sustain a unified grassroots opposition. In the case of Juchitán, an ethnically Zapotec city in southern Mexico, the community was able to successfully repel Mexican state hegemony and refashion its own autonomous power structure based on its long tradition of radicalism and struggle against domination. As Rubin argues, the regime became decentered, as national politics coexisted with a strong oppositional regional party. It can be argued rural communities with traditionally conservative backgrounds are equally exempted by the ambivalence of Mexico's state formation albeit in different ways.

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[8] Pfeifer, Michael J. "Wisconsin's Last Decade of Lynching, 1881-91: Law and Violence in the Postbellum Midwest," in *Lynching Reconsidered: New Perspectives in the Study of Mob Violence*, edited by William D. Carrigan, 9 (London: Routledge, 2008).

[9] See Jeffrey Rubin. *Decentering the Regime: Ethnicity, Radicalism, and Democracy in Juchitán, Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

The lack of state power in rural communities afforded opportunities for localized power brokers to fill the state's void. As Monique Nuijten argues, these particular social agents of power are ineffective at linking rural townspeople to the national bureaucratic system. However, these agents form an *image* of an effective power broker that understands the national "political-bureaucratic labyrinth" that is necessary for local power to function and persist. These quasi-state actors play a role in fulfilling the fantasies of a strong and powerful state.[10] Nuijten theorizes these reproductive regimes of power are susceptible to insecurity about their own vulnerable position of power. These fears normally cause irrational and unpredictable decision making, a proliferation of fretful imaginings, conspiracy theories, and town gossip produced during moments of conflict.[11] These symptoms of political vulnerability were quite evidence in Canoa.

Rural villagers are consciously aware of their position within a village power structure as evident in instances of communal rebellion, violence, and homicide. Both William Taylor and Luis González have presented detailed microhistories analyzing small Mexican villages. Their work elucidates a tremendous amount about rural societies. Both argue that Mexican villages were victimized by the big city, and felt culturally isolated or separate from the outside world.[12] However, San Miguel Canoa was not culturally isolated or separate as a traditional rural community. I argue it was intricately connected to the mainstream through media, politics, migration, and culture. These residents demonstrated, through their collected act of frustration, a deep connection to the global Cold War, the national political environment under President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz,

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[10] See Monique Nuijten, *Power, Community, and the State: The Political Anthropology of Organisation in Mexico* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 3.
[11] Ibid.
[12] William B. Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 153.

and local and regional sociopolitical concerns. These layers of political culture filtered into Canoa and were interpreted by the town's residents according to their own historic experiences. As James C. Scott argued, rural inhabitants seek an entitled state of *living* based on the resources available within the village, often at the expense of social status and autonomy. They understand the inequitable system they are a part of, and live through this system in the precarious nature of gossip, envy, and the full knowledge they pose a massive threat to the upper echelon.[13] In critical moments when the villager's livelihood feels threatened, they are susceptible to the same level of insecurity and vulnerability as their political leaders.

Enrique Meza Pérez, the village priest in Canoa at the time of the 1968 lynching, functioned as the town's most prominent power broker and served as a moral and political agent deeply connected to the local community and politically aligned with regional and national governmental figures.[14] He provided valuable services for the community that did not exist prior to his arrival in 1953, including electricity and education. He also implemented a construction project that piped in potable water from the nearby mountains.[15] Canoa's predominantly agricultural society contained fewer than 7,200 inhabitants in 1968, of which a large majority were indigenous people who spoke primarily Náhuatl.[16] Census records from 1960 indicated of 5,051 inhabitants, 3,090 were classified "monolingual indigenous."[17] Like most small, conservative rural

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[13] James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 5.
[14] Declarations from the priest Enrique Meza Pérez, in Jesus García Olvera, "Canoa, una película que deforma la realidad de lo que pasó," *Impacto*, no. 1361, (Mar.1976), 24. A photograph shows Meza shaking hands with Puebla's governor Aarón Merino Fernández.
[15] Olvera, *Impacto*, 25.
[16] Olvera, *Impacto*, 24.
[17] Osvaldo Romero Melgarejo, *La Violencia Como Fenómeno Social*, 90.

communities in Mexico, the local church acted as the most powerful social institution. As a religious and political figurehead, Meza fulfilled the role as the local intermediary that linked Canoa's inhabitants to regional power centers and the larger Mexican state. Examining the Canoa lynching and its aftermath reveals Meza felt vulnerable about his power and felt susceptible to insecurities fueled by local, regional, and national tension. Meza demonstrated these insecurities at many critical moments before, during, and after the lynching. His irrational decision making and examples of his erratic behavior raise suspicions concerning his level of participation the night of the lynching.

Canoa's power structure depended upon strong public support for the town's main social institution, the village church. Like most small towns in Mexico, the church represents the vital heart of communal activity. For the largely indigenous population in Canoa, the church centered as place for worship, socialization, marriage, communication, and cultural life. Enrique Meza retained the role as village leader and offered spiritual guidance in the daily affairs of his followers. In general, village priests can obtain an enormous amount of influence and power. In Mexico, politically elected officials may not run consecutive elections. Priests, on the other hand, are appointed by ecclesiastical authorities, and are not limited by terms of office. Therefore, village priests have the ability to gain power by allying with strong political circles that can also use a priest's communal influence to gain support. Thus, the priest fills the critical role as a state actor in rural spaces where the national state regime cannot extend its formal influence.

Canoa provides a perfect example of the strategic relationship between the state and the traditional power structure. Enrique Meza played an intricate role in the village's decision making processes, both religious, politically, and socially. In tandem

with village mayor, Martín Arce, the priest acted as a self-appointed power broker with backing from the state but *without state power*. Meza projected an image of his power in Canoa. After the lynching, Meza's portrait of state authority revealed a paper dragon when he requested Puebla's assistance from Puebla's military headquarters. However, Meza used his public connections and prominent position to sway local political decisions, increasing his role in Canoa's communal affairs. Meza's power was derived and also dependent on the village voice that supported his social institution. The religious supporters of Canoa offered tacit approval and a continuation of support for the priest's policies and leadership position in town.[18]

1968 represents a defining moment in Mexico's post-revolutionary history, a period marked by substantial social and cultural change fueled by industrial development beginning in the 1950s and 1960s. Mexico's import-substitution industrialization economic policy gave rise to the emergence of a middle class and a new consumer culture.[19] Material gain became the national signifier of development. However, this came at the enormous expense of Mexico's urban and rural poor who remained relatively untouched by the so called 'miracle' period. Their disaffection and isolation from the fruits of capitalism, coupled by the denial of democratic opportunities under the authoritarian Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) ruling party, stirred lingering resentment that gave birth to a flourishing counterculture.[20] Sustained economic growth filtered through a political climate of subordination under President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz

[18] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), 38.
[19] Eric Zolov. *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1-5.
[20] Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 1-5.

and the ruling party.[21] During the *sexenio* of Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970), Mexico set preparations to demonstrate to the world its advances in economic and industrial modernization when it hosted the Summer Olympics in 1968. However, behind the façade of the Mexican "miracle" existed mounting political and social tensions, and an escalation of state government repression directed against dissident students and other young people from the middle class who questioned the role of government, and the authoritative nature of the presidency.[22] The patriarchal framework of the PRI sustained major challenges beginning in the 1950s by an exuberant counterculture that questioned societal norms and sought to transform the authoritarian system.[23] The revolutionary party experienced a political crisis, with its power openly challenged and its very legitimacy questioned. The rise of the *movimiento estudiantil* or student movement, provoked serious challenges to the authoritarian status quo, and questioned the ruling party's political legitimacy on a national stage. The movement demonstrated an ability to independently organize and protest against vast political corruption and societal failures. This period of diverse cultural change was a significantly tense moment in Mexican history, especially in the rural countryside where social anxieties were magnified. It was these social anxieties that led to the events on that September night.

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[21] Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power,* trans. Hank Heifetz (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 681-686.
[22] Zolov, *Refried Elvis,* 8.
[23] Zolov, *Refried Elvis,* 5.

CHAPTER 1: THE NIGHT OF MACHETES

On Saturday September 14th, 1968, Julián González, Roberto Rojano, Jesús Carillo, Ramón Gútierrez, and Miguel Flores Cruz, employees from La Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (UAP), traveled on a weekend hiking excursion to a dormant volcano named "La Malinche" or La Malintzin. The men planned on celebrating Mexican Independence Day in the mountains, following a common tradition for urban Mexican families who often travel to the country on weekends. Their ambitious adventure stalled almost immediately. Another group of employees who had initially agreed to join them cancelled at the last minute, delaying their departure until late afternoon. By the time the five young men finally bought their tickets and departed from the bus terminal in Puebla, it was 5:30pm and the sky looked threatening with rain.[1]

The UAP crew exited the bustling capital of Puebla in a bus filled to capacity traveling across a newly completed highway that connected the capital to San Miguel Canoa, the town at the skirt of La Malinche.[2] It is believed that in colonial times, two pre-Hispanic irrigation channels flanked Canoa on both sides which friars once traversed by canoe to spread their evangelism to the predominantly indigenous community. The friars named the town after San Miguel, their patron saint, and the device that facilitated their work.[3] Aboard the bus, the other passengers were probably lower class farmers and charcoal venders returning from the busy commercial district Mercado Hidalgo, and day

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[1] Ruben Osorio, *El Linchamiento de San Miguel Canoa, 14 September 1968: Documento Para La Historia de la Barbarie en Mexico*, (Chihuahua: La Sociedad Chihuahuense de Estudios Historicos, 1976), 9 (hereafter cited simply as Osorio, *El linchamiento*); See also, Guillermina Meaney, *Canoa: El Crimen Impune* (México: Editorial Posada, 1977), 119.
[2] Tomás Pérez Turrent, *Canoa: Memoria de un hecho vergonzoso: La historia, la filmación, el guión* (Puebla: Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1984), 10.
[3] Elsa R. de Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas," *Contenido* (June 1976), 78-79.

laborers returning from the municipal textile industries of Puebla.[4] Contented by finally starting their adventure, the employees collectively rejoiced and sang to the great irritation of a man who told them to shut up. From the bus windows, the urban adventurers probably imagined the landscape to be particularly dreary and mundane. Just beyond the endless rows of cornstalks, the trash-laden grass, and taut electric wires, La Malinche, the destination for the weekend adventurers, loomed amongst the cloudy sky. The bus dropped the men off in the small town underneath the mountain.

Around 6:00pm, a torrential downpour engulfed Canoa and indefinitely suspended the hiker's excursion.[5] The hikers immediately sought shelter from the rain in a nearby store. The threatening weather did not perturb their ambition to climb La Malinche. With ample time to return to Puebla, the men decided to wait out the storm for several more hours. By evening, the downpour continued, but the adventurers unwavering determination provoked them to ask the storeowner if he had an available room for lodging. The storeowner declined to afford them lodging based on the limited space he could provide them. However, he gave the men a suggestion to consult with the local priest, Enrique Meza Pérez or Canoa's municipal president Martín Pérez Arce for available lodging.[6] The men heeded the storeowner's advice and visited the local Franciscan church.

The towering church spires were visible just north from their current location at the store and its close proximity contributed to their decision to venture there to ask the

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[4] Osvaldo Romero Melgarejo. *La Violencia Como Fenómeno Social: El Linchamiento en San Miguel Canoa,Puebla* (Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala, 2006), 116.
[5] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, Dirección Federal de Seguridad (hereafter DFS), Foja 1, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (hereafter AGN).
[6] Osorio, *El linchamiento*, 10.

priest for room in the church. No evidence suggests the men ever attempted to locate Pérez Arce. González and Gútierrez went searching for batteries needed for their flashlights, a major indication to their lack of preparation for their trip. Flores Cruz, Carillo, and Rojano departed for the church. As the trio approached one of two church entrances, the group encountered three or four inhabitants posted outside like sentries. They wore overcoats and sombreros as protection from the rain and had their faces completely covered.[7] The UAP men asked to converse with the priest. At that moment, one villager revealed a shotgun concealed under his overcoat and pointed the barrel at Carillo. The villager threatened the men to scram or face the impending consequences.[8] The frightening gesture afforded the trio little alternative but to seek temporary shelter provided at the store they had just departed from. Meanwhile, after securing their batteries, González and Gútierrez walked hastily in the torrential downpour towards the church but went to a different entrance. They did not encounter hostile villagers. Instead, they met with the village priest, Enrique Meza Pérez.

During their brief interview with the priest, Meza asked González and Gútierrez for identification, in which both identified themselves as employees at the UAP. After hearing their university affiliation, the priest immediately denied their request for lodging.[9] Meza then returned to the parish, apparently overcome by an illness that forced him to lie down in his quarters.[10] The priest's quick rejection to their request provided González and Gútierrez the same discouraging alternative but to return to the rainstorm and take shelter in the local store. Reflecting about this encounter years later, Flores

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[7] Meaney, *Canoa*, 124.
[8] Meaney, *Canoa*, 124.
[9] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 3, AGN.
[10] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 12, AGN.

Cruz believed his friends had committed a crucial error by stating their affiliation with the UAP, discerning his full awareness of the dangers of being associated in any way to the large scale student movement in Puebla and Mexico City.[11]

Evidence suggests this relatively brief encounter with the village priest was in fact the pivotal moment that permanently transformed the weekend adventure into an impending nightmare. The enormous magnitude of this event requires a diverging analysis crucially overlooked in the generally accepted narrative that does not take into consideration the local political situation in Canoa. Government security reports indicate that just days prior to the UAP men's arrival, a group of student activists from the UAP School of Economics visited Canoa. The students held a political rally in town to generate support for the university-wide student strikes.

In all likelihood, the UAP School of Economics students wanted to link with *La Central Campesina Independiente* – (CCI), the Independent Farmers Syndicate. In the 1960s, the CCI developed a considerable following in Puebla, especially in areas around Canoa, including Cholula and Tehnacán. CCI organizers successfully pressured state authorities to address and find solutions for peasant agricultural problems. The PRI, Mexico's ruling party, felt particularly threatened by the farmer collective's developments and the political inroads they made in Puebla. One internal PRI document warned of the CCI's "drastic means" to raise support for their cause, and their "constant danger of proliferation" that threatened the PRI's political hegemony.[12] In Canoa, the

[11] See Osorio, *El linchamiento*, 10; Flores Cruz said, "I believe that this was the error," that inevitably caused the lynching.
[12] "Estado de Puebla: Aspectos Politico Economico y Social," DGIPS, Caja 1511A, exp. 1, foja 93, AGN.

CCI held considerable support among resident farmers, much to the dismay of the ruling PRI power structure and Enrique Meza.[13]

In 1968, Canoa's internal political situation stood starkly divided between those that supported the priest Enrique Meza and the PRI, and the local CCI.[14] Historical evidence suggests Enrique Meza often used his religious sermons to publically criticize and condemn the CCI and referred to these local supporters as lazy individuals who did not want to work.[15] Other resident's remember Meza demonizing the CCI supporters as communists, linking the local CCI directly with the larger national threats of communist subversion.[16] Other historical evidence suggests Padre Meza inculcated his pulpit with fear that one day men would arrive to rob *San Miguelito*, the patron saint watching over their community.[17] This potential theft was not an unprecedented claim in Mexican history, especially in small agricultural communities susceptible to local fears and clerical anxiety.[18] This negative portrayal discouraged many local CCI supporters from attending Meza's sermons. Meza further ostracized those absent from church by denouncing them as "loose," indicative to Meza's considerable influence in Canoa, and his ability to

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[13] The PRI supported the official campesino union, the Confederación Nacional Campesina.
[14] Carlos E. Sevillas S., "Soy inocente, jura en San Juan de Dios Pánfilo Zepeda G.," *Novedades de Puebla,* April 8, 1976, 4.
[15] Carlos E. Sevillas S., "Soy inocente, jura en San Juan de Dios Pánfilo Zepeda G.," *Novedades de Puebla,* April 8, 1976 , 5.
[16] Meaney, *Canoa: El crimen Impune,* 47; A pdf version is available for download at <http://www.segen.buap.mx/au/cuadernos/cua-10-carhist.pdf [accessed: April 10, 2013]; Meaney interviewed Canoa's residents and kept their names anonymous to protect their identities.
[17] Interview with Cecilia X, a Canoa resident and friend of Tomasa Arce in Ochoa, "La Fiesta de la Sangre,"15.
[18] See for example Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

centralize his power by demanding strict religious and political conformity by the town's residents.[19]

When the UAP School of Economics activists visited Canoa in early September, certain sectors of Canoa's population took exception to their arrival. It remains uncertain if the student group received any public support for Canoa's local CCI or other residents. However, some residents alleged these students hoisted a red and black flag on Canoa's "national insignia," (en el sitio de la Insignia Nacional) probably a centrally located flagpole.[20] Astonishingly, this allegation paralleled an event that occurred just days prior on August 27, 1968, in Mexico City's Zócalo, when a student demonstrator lowered the Mexican flag and replaced it with a red and black strike flag.[21] During this demonstration, members from the crowd entered Mexico City's National Cathedral and, with permission from church authorities, rang the church bells. Undoubtedly, these events demonstrated the student movement's strength in reclaiming these symbolic public spaces. However, many Mexicans later felt appalled by these actions and viewed the incident with the flag and the ringing of the church bells in particular as public desecrations against Mexico's symbolic institutions. These perceptions were shaped largely in part by a carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign carried out a few days later by the ruling government party, the PRI.[22]

Television commercials, radio announcements, and widely distributed flyers around Mexico City shared Díaz Ordaz's public declarations, that "Mexico has been

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[19] Carlos E. Sevilla S., *Novedades de Puebla*, April 8, 1976, 4.
[20] "Estado de Puebla, Información de Puebla," Investigaciones Politicas y Sociales (hereafter IPS), caja 1509A, exp. 4, September 15, 1968, AGN.
[21] Elaine Carey. *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 100; See also Zolov, 127.
[22] "Comentarios al Informe Presidencial," IPS, caja 1511A, exp. 3, September 1, 1968, AGN.

desecrated." The president accused "a mob incited by the communists committed two infamous outrages against us." He depicted the demonstrators as "urban guerrilla communists" who "forcibly entered" the national Cathedral, "desecrating the high altar and momentarily seizing the sacred building and national monument." Díaz Ordaz continued on, describing the red and black strike flag as a "communist flag" waving on the central flagpole in the Zócalo, where "only our tricolor flag is entitled to fly." Díaz Ordaz's highly nationalistic statement ended with a provocative affirmation that millions of Mexicans who believe in God and love their country condemned these egregious acts and insults. In connecting the Mexican student movement with recent international developments involving communist movements, Díaz Ordaz stated, "We reject the Communists without a country and without faith. Save our Mexico. Our nation will never be Czechoslovakia or Cuba."[23] The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia on August 20, 1968 was certainly fresh in everyone's minds when Díaz Ordaz made his passionate denunciation of the protestors who were also linked to the revolutionary tendencies of Ernesto "Che" Guevara and the Cuban Revolution of 1959.

This wave of government propaganda extended to Mexico's regional peripheries and clearly played a major influence in the accusations levied against the students from the UAP School of Economics who visited Canoa. In all probability, the UAP activists never possessed a red and black flag, or insinuated any of the supposed actions levied against them. However, the allegation itself indicates Mexico's rural countryside felt deeply connected to the national political tensions emanating from Mexico City. The government sponsored propaganda program launched against the students protestors in

[23] Ibid.

the Zócalo penetrated into rural communities and deeply affected the attitudes and opinions of everyday Mexicans who connected events in the big city with their own. The national demonization of student protestors combined with Enrique Meza's denunciation of local CCI supporters undoubtedly affected the opinions of some residents in Canoa when the students from the UAP School of Economics arrived in town.

Significantly, government reports also alleged the School of Economics students robbed some animals and looted from a local store during their time in Canoa.[24] It remains uncertain whether these or any other allegations contain any amount of legitimacy beyond hearsay and speculation. It is extraordinarily difficult to envision a group of middle-class university students as expert cattle rustlers. More problematic is imagining their attempt to transport the livestock back to Puebla. However, by moving beyond mere speculation and by contextualizing why these specific *types* of accusations were stated elucidates the lingering social and economic frustrations felt among the residents of Canoa.

Throughout Mexico's rapid modernization and transformative economic period known as the Mexican "miracle," Canoa's peasant farmers suffered from crop failures and severe hunger due to a combination of improper crop rotation and cultivation techniques.[25] According to anthropologist Osvaldo Romero Melgarejo, these problems devastated Canoa's local economy that depended upon domestically cultivated agriculture. These severe economic problems persisted into the 1960s and deeply effected peasant farmers. Canoa's migrant trade laborers also felt the economic pinch. In

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[24] "Estado de Puebla," DFS, caja 1509, exp. 4, AGN; See also "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 1, AGN.

[25] Osvaldo Romero Melgarejo, *La Violencia Como Fenómeno Social: El Linchamiento en San Miguel Canoa, Puebla*, (Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala, 2006), 111.

1968, Puebla's textile industry suffered from an economic crisis that forced many manufacturers to close their doors and layoff their workers. This affected a large sector of Puebla's population, and inevitably affected migrant laborers from Canoa who sought work in the state capital to support their families.[26] In Canoa, a tiny ruling class controlled the agricultural sector, and designed an economic system that levied taxes against domestic animals and property. This system disproportionately affected the predominantly agrarian farming community and further depressed the financial income for some farmers. A small group of local strongmen, *caciques*, monopolized the *pulque* industry, the alcoholic beverage made from the fermented agave plant. These *pulqueros* controlled an enormous amount of power, and concentrated their wealth at the expense of regional farmers.[27] These caciques enjoyed full cultural, political, and religious backing by their chief ally and local power broker, Enrique Meza Pérez.[28]

The chieftainship of caciques dominated the region by using a system of political and economic corruption specifically targeting rural farmers. These caciques hired *pistoleros* or armed gunmen, who organized an intricate criminal system that rustled cattle from local farmers.[29] This system of political corruption deeply effected everyday residents in Canoa during the 1960s. Misery and famine compounded with the overwhelming political depravity of the time. These anxieties fueled a cauldron of mounting social anxiety boiling in Canoa. The School of Economics political activists

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[26] Tirado Villegas, Gloria A. "¿Por Qué Rememorar El 68?" In *El 68 En Puebla: Memoria y encuentros* edited by Enrique Agüera Ibáñez, (Mexico, BUAP, 2008), 120.
[27] William B. Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 160.
[28] Melgarejo, *La Violencia Como Fenómeno Social*, 110.
[29] Olvera, "Canoa, una película que deforma la realidad de lo que pasó," *Impacto*, 25.

from the UAP became a convenient scapegoat for Canoa's residents to release their pent up frustrations.

Strong religious devotion remains a cultural trademark of Puebla, as evident by the number of religious organizations that often shared strong political connections with the ruling party. In the 1960s, this included the Christian Family Movement that shared political ties with the National Action Party (PAN), and groups called The Students (Las Cursillistas) whom the PRI indicated were the "best propagators" of political slogans for the high clergy in Puebla.[30] Documents indicate the PRI shared strong ties with Puebla's clergy, who were bitterly anticommunist and felt very concerned with liberal-leaning universities who they felt needed to be coopted into their party. These groups likely contributed to the regional fears of communism.

Canoa's inhabitants were not politically or culturally isolated from these national events and in fact were direct participants and deeply connected to the national pulse emanating from Mexico City. Evidence suggests these national fears were filtered through the traditional church power structure in Canoa, led by Enrique Meza. According to Serafín Flores Manzano who lived in Canoa and used to frequent Meza's church, the priest used to tell his pulpit, "When communist arrive you all have to know what you need to do."[31] Meza's warnings indicate major insecurities about his position as a religious figurehead. His sentiment echoed the growing national anxieties which he knowingly funneled into his pulpit as a measure to protect his power. This certainly fed local tensions Canoa's residents held for outsiders and in particular, student political organizers.

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[30] "Aspectos Politico Economico y Social," DGIPS, Caja 1511A, exp. 1, AGN.
[31] Elsa R. de Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas," *Contenido*, (June, 1976), 81.

Rural Mexicans also felt pressured by national economic policies that disproportionately targeted the rural countryside during Mexico's "Miracle" period. During this period of sustained economic development and expansive industrial production, Mexico experienced a dazzling annual growth rate of six percent for a twenty year time period.[32] Mexico's industrial development fueled the growth of factories in large cities, pushing many workers from the countryside to pursue jobs in the big city. In order to feed the rapidly urbanized workforce, the Mexican government instituted food subsidies that devalued commodity prices, crippling the income of rural farmers. The sacrifice of the rural countryside gave birth to Mexico's middle-class and fueled a thriving consumer culture. Yet, this apparent economic success came at a tremendous expense to rural Mexicans who were adversely affected by these national economic policies and pushed into economic decline. In the mid-1960s, food production began to decline and loan guarantees to *ejidos* dropped sharply. Price guarantees for grains dropped 25 percent from 1964 and 1970.[33] Díaz Ordaz responded to the growth of rural tensions by slowing land distribution. Real life wages decreased during this time period for rural peasants and domestic laborers.[34] For some rural Mexican farmers, the real miracle involved surviving decades of abject poverty.

The accusations brought forth against the UAP student protestors suggest a direct link between national political fears and local socioeconomic problems. Many residents from Canoa felt frustrated and angered by the system of corruption within their community. These tensions mixed with the national fears of communism and the student

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[32] Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 7.
[33] Enrique C. Ochoa, *Feeding Mexico: The Political Uses of Food since 1910* (Wilmington: SR Books, 2000), 168.
[34] Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 7.

movement in general. As William Taylor observed, indigenous communities under stress from external threats often channel their frustrations and aggression outward, often towards outsiders.[35] When the young student activists from the UAP School of Economics visited Canoa in early September, 1968, some residents most likely viewed the urban outsiders with suspicion and contempt and connected their presence with the fears and frustrations mounting in their society. The residents funneled their anger at a group of outsiders already publically demonized in the national press. The UAP students became convenient scapegoats for some residents of Canoa to divert attention from the real political and social struggles in their community. Cattle rustling and petty shoplifting are also examples of crimes typically committed by individuals out of financial desperation. Farmers already struggling to support their families were further victimized by overt corruption and banditry. Thus, Canoa's inhabitants were deeply connected with Mexico's national currents and felt economically chastised and abandoned by a system of government that did not address their concerns.

The UAP employees visiting Canoa had inadvertently stepped into a cauldron of social angst kindled by years of economic and political frustration and mounting social fears of cultural change. Unbeknownst to González and Gútierrez, identifying themselves with the UAP produced significant alarm for Enrique Meza. The priest was undoubtedly familiar with the recent events in Mexico City's Zócalo just weeks prior. As a religious leader in a deeply conservative community, it is likely Meza viewed the red and black flag incident in Mexico City as a national desecration, in line with the message extolled by Díaz Ordaz. The events from the week prior involving the activists from the

[35] Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion,* 153.

UAP School of Economics may have strengthened Meza's insecurities about the threat of local insurrection. Meza might have imagined the threat of communism had literally knocked on his door.

Meza held a considerable amount of power as head of Canoa's largest social and religious institution. His intricate connection with communal affairs made him the preeminent moral and political authority many inhabitants undoubtedly respected. Meza declared years later Canoa's residents "all obeyed me and respected me."[36] Therefore, his decision to deny the young men lodging sent a powerful message to Canoa's residents that the groups of young outsiders were not welcome guests of the church or the larger community. This event might have provoked some residents to view the priest's decision as a formidable warning to other residents. It remains unclear who instructed the armed inhabitants to be posted outside the church entrance or whether they stood there on their own accord. The chronology of events seems to indicate certain members of the community already felt threatened by the men's arrival even before their meeting with the priest.

Despite being hampered by the continuous rain, threatened by the barrel of a shotgun, and denied lodging by Padre Meza, these setbacks did not immediately provoke enough consternation among the men to gather their belongings and leave. The men reunited briefly in the store across the center plaza before being told to leave by the store owner who was about to close.[37] The crew eventually found temporary solace in Pascual Romero Pérez's store located on the main road into Canoa. The store contained Canoa's

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[36] Carlos E. Sevilla S., "¡Pero no más 'Canoas'!" *Novedades de Puebla*, April 10, 1976, 2; Meza pompously proclaimed,"En Canoa todas me obedecian y me respetaban…"
[37] Meaney, *Canoa*, 126.

lone *caseta telefónica*, a telephone booth that afforded the men an opportunity to call for a ride. However, no evidence suggests they contemplated phoning anyone. Instead, the men lingered around and talked about their recent experience at the church.

González shrugged off the standoffish behavior they received as typical for communities like Canoa.[38] His comment sheds light on a created cultural separation between the emerging modern Mexico that he was a part of, and the traditional, rural Mexico often associated with indigenous people. These are the common tropes associated with Mexico's countryside, which often depicts Indians as hostile, potentially violent, untrustworthy, and suspicious of outsiders. When people encounter new landscapes, they often have a preconceived notion in their heads of what it is like. It is possible González and the others created an image of Canoa and its residents according to their own personal standards or based on these common tropes associated with indigenous communities.

In the case of Canoa, two competing versions of Mexico collided together. Both *poblanos* and Canoa's inhabitants likely viewed each other as culturally separated entities. Viewed from within their confines in Puebla's rapidly modernizing society, the UAP men probably viewed Canoa as the rural example of the town that progress had forgotten, as a closed off community unwelcoming to outsiders. Yet, Canoa's residents were not exempt from the growing political tension and profound cultural transformation occurring right before their eyes in Puebla and Mexico City. Most young middle class youths and student from universities were part of *La Onda*, the wave and cultural awakening. Clothing, language, hair styles and music were all extensions of this new

[38] Meaney, *Canoa*, 127; González said, "…pero así es la gente aquí."

counterculture forming in Mexico.[39] Thus, when the urban adventurer's entered Canoa, their very style, actions, and mannerisms expressed and represented a negative perception of their social status and cultural values as Mexicans.

Meanwhile, to brighten the dampened mood, Miguel Flores Cruz put a *peso* into the Rocola jukebox. The men danced and sang to typical ranchero songs. They snacked on tortas, sardines, and refreshments and after some conversation, decided to finally abandon their grand excursion. They imagined salvaging their weekend together by returning to Puebla to visit their friend Panchito who owned a ranch on the city's outskirts.[40] This optimism faded quickly when the owner Don Pasqual Romero informed the excursionists that the last available bus back to Puebla had just departed, effectively leaving the men stranded.[41] The owner indicated the only other mode of transportation—other than walking for hours in the rain—was by taxi. According to Pascual, taxis normally arrived in Canoa with passengers but returned to the capital empty.[42]

As the storm continued, a bus arrived into Canoa dropping off its last passengers who entered Don Pascual's store. The bus had made its last stop and did not return to Puebla. The passengers were Pedro García, his two nieces María and Josefina de los Angeles, and a young man named Odilón Sánchez, a painter from Mexico City's Olympic Village and boyfriend to Josefina. González was probably nervous about the possibility of being stranded and approached Pedro García and explained their gloomy situation. Pedro's friendly attitude was a welcome relief to the downtrodden vacationers. He indicated that his brother Lucas García lived approximately 300 meters from Canoa's

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[39] Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 113.
[40] Osorio, *El linchamiento*, 10.
[41] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 1, AGN.
[42] Osorio, *El linchamiento*, 10.

central plaza where he intended to stay for the night.[43] Pedro offered the men room at his brother's house for the night, and even offered to join them on their hiking excursion the next morning.[44] The offer sounded extraordinary. Despite their perpetual bad luck and unfriendly welcome by Canoa's residents, the opportunity to prolong the men's adventure seemed tempting, especially when they considered their bleak alternatives. Still, they took a quick vote on whether to stay, resulting in a 3-2 decision in favor of extending weekend adventure. Ironically and most unfortunately, the two dissenting voters who wanted to return to Puebla never had the opportunity to do so.[45]

As the UAP men finished their drinks and walked to Lucas García's house, a local resident and member of the CCI, a group of inhabitants shadowed them until they reached their destination.[46] According to one eyewitness, these residents returned to the church and alerted the priest, Enrique Meza Pérez.[47] The UAP men entered García's small one-room shack and exchanged pleasantries with his wife Tomasa and their four young children. Near the zócalo, word spread quickly that the suspicious outsiders seeking shelter at García's home were allegedly the same students from the UAP School of Economics that held the political rally in town just days prior.[48] Certain residents organized direct action against the young outsiders. It is reasonable to suspect only a handful of individuals participated with the initial planning stages of the violence. Possibly acting with the approval of the town's priest, Enrique Meza, these perpetrators

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[43] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 3, AGN.
[44] Osorio, *El linchamiento*, 11.
[45] Osorio, *El linchamiento*, 11.
[46] Carlos E. Sevilla S., "Soy inocente, jura en San Juan de Dios Pánfilo Zepeda G.," *Novedades de Puebla*, (Apr.1976), 4.
[47] Elsa R de Estrada. "Ecos de un linchamieto en el pueblo de las bocinas," *Contenido*, (June 1976), 82.
[48] "Estado de Puebla," DGIPS, Caja 1509A, exp. 4, AGN.

harnessed Canoa's social tensions and fears of communism as a mechanism to launch a communal attack on the suspicious outsiders.

Around 8:30 pm, the storm finally subsided enough for Odilón, Miguel, and the girls to climb Lucas' terrace. The group comingled and gazed upon the lights emanating from the city capital. Around 10:00 pm, the group heard an explosion that might have been a gunshot. The church bells started ringing in an alarming, methodical cacophony. Inside the house, Lucas prophetically recognized the bell toll signaled someone's death.[49] Moments later, the men overheard two distinct voices shouting in Náhuatl and Spanish, blared from Canoa's megaphone system. Various narratives offer conflicting interpretations as to what was actually shouted.[50] Miguel Flores Cruz heard the Spanish speaker warning Canoa's residents that the town had been infiltrated by agitators, students, communists, and thieves.[51] Another report indicates the woman speaking *mexicano* stated, "Wake up, people! The communist have come and they are killing the priest!"[52] The warnings deliberately invoked fear to stimulate an immediate response from Canoa's residents. The vocal threats mentioned students and thieves, confirming the UAP employees had been confused for the student activists who visited Canoa a week prior.

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[49] Ochoa, "La Fiesta de la Sangre," 15.
[50] Multiple sources indicate a variety of different statements that were reportedly blared from the megaphone. For instance, the communists in town are going to put a flag up in the zócalo, or was it the church? They are going to rob livestock, and steal the town's children. They are going to Burn *al Santo Patrono*. They were also going to rob a store, and kill the priest. Whether in fact these statements were made into the megaphone is difficult to judge, but they reveal the layers of political and economic frustration that existed.
[51] Osorio, *El linchamiento*, 15.
[52] Quoted from Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas," *Contenido*, 82; "¡Despíertense, pueblo, que han llegado los comunistas y están matando al señor cura!"

Newspaper records indicate Andrea Arce and Miguel Monarca operated the loudspeaker and provoked the inhabitants.[53] These two individuals timed their verbal warnings to coincide with the church bells, suggesting multiple parties coordinated the general alarm. The central planners recognized the necessity to address the larger community by communicating in two languages to warn as many residents as possible. The excursionists felt unsettled by the unusual public reaction but did not initially believe the frantic loudspeaker pronouncements had anything to do with them.[54]

However, a lynch mob had formed under the church spires carrying torches, shotguns, machetes, and other various makeshift weapons. The mob contained roughly 1,000 men, women, and children as young as eight years old.[55] The tolling church bells and blaring megaphones continued to incite the fearful inhabitants who gathered near the central plaza to defend Canoa.[56] Once gathered there, the megaphone announced the location of the supposed communists and thieves, directing the mob to Lucas García's house. The angry crowd quickly surrounded the one-room building, shouted obscenities and demanded Lucas turn over the communists the mob wanted to burn.[57] Lucas and his brother valiantly defended the employees and refused to hand them over, barricading the lone exit. The brothers desperately tried to calm the unruly mob and explained that the men from the UAP were just employees and not students. Their efforts to defuse the

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[53] "Identifican a los Instigadores del Linchamiento en San Miguel Canoa," *El Día de Puebla*, September 19, 1968, reprinted in Aurora Cano Andaluz, *1968: Antología periodística* (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1993), 178, Hemeroteca de la Universidad Michoacána de San Nicolas de Hidalgo, Morelia, Mexico.
[54] "Piden Castigo Para los Criminales de los Empleados de la Universidad," *El Sol de Puebla*. September, 17, 1968.
[55] Osorio, *El linchamiento*, 16.
[56] The megaphone system still exists and visible as of 2012. The speakers are positioned on high metal beams on top of buildings centered near the central plaza. Other speakers appear down major roads leading into Canoa. The megaphone system is also visible in the Google Street View application.
[57] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión pública, DFS, foja 1, AGN.

situation failed, and their defiance to the mob's orders only aggravated their rage. Inside the house, Lucas' family and the UAP employees were absolutely terrified. Gonzalez and the others searched for hiding places within the house, but there was no escape.[58] The wooden door began to give way to the ax blows. García defended himself with a weapon and met the enraged intruders at the entrance.[59] The mob immediately attacked García, who received a machete blow to his jugular and a shotgun blast to his chest. He died immediately in front of his wife and children. An elderly man approached Carillo and delivered an ax blow to his stomach that knocked the air out of him. As Carillo doubled over onto the floor, the old man leaned over his body and whispered that he was going to kill him, and make him pay.[60]

The hysterical mob ignored the hopeless pleas from the UAP men who tried in vain to clarify their status as employees and not students from the UAP. With gun barrels pointed towards them, the UAP employees were tied together and bounded by ropes around their necks. The mob pulled them like livestock, and led them like beasts into the open, presenting the frightened men to the enraged onlookers.[61] The form of public humiliation and dehumanization suggests certain perpetrators wanted to methodically punish the victims in a manner that held symbolic importance to the larger community. Parading the UAP employees as domesticated animals symbolized the frustrations certain residents felt to the severe economic and political corruption and the problems with cattle rustlers. Yet the mob also demanded the UAP men hand over their stash of propaganda,

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[58] Ochoa, "La Fiesta de la Sangre,"14.
[59] Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas," *Contenido*, 74. Or was it a stick, or a pitchfork? Tomasa García years later remembered a shotgun. The weapon may very well be irrelevant, but the conflicting views once again indicate the existence of competing narratives to the lynching.
[60] Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas," *Contenido*, 74.
[61] Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas," *Contenido*, 74.

convinced they were communist agitators and perhaps the same student activists from the week prior. This indicates the lynch mob consisted of individuals who joined with multiple personal motivations spurred by their own anxiety towards communism and the frantic announcements from the megaphone. In essence, the lynch mob consisted of individuals affected by multiple layers of social and political tension.

Gutiérrez and Carillo tried to escape the García household but managed only a few feet before being bludgeoned to death by the crowd. Medical examiners later indicated the men died after receiving multiple machete blows to their heads and neck.[62] Tomasa García and Lucas' two nieces were not excluded from the collective violence. They received physical attacks from the lynch mob despite not having any connection with the UAP, banditry, or communism. Tomasa credited her survival to her children, which she sheltered in her arms along with her nine month old baby.[63] Incredibly, Pedro García escaped from the house completely undetected, presumably by mixing into the crowd and confused among the mob as another assailant.[64] Upon exiting the house, González received a blow that knocked him out. He awoke to find the bodies of his friends dead and swollen from the attack that had ended their lives.

Rojano and González continued to trudge along, pulled like animals with ropes leashed around their necks. They received a relentless onslaught to their bodies by the crowd's sticks, stones, feet, and fists. Their stamina finally diminished under pain and exhaustion and they collapsed on a small bridge during their forced march back to the

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[62] Osorio, *El linchamiento*, 26.
[63] "Nada Habían Hechoes Esos Muchachos Para que los Mataran"; Dice la Viuda." *El Sol de Puebla.* 18 Sept. 1968, 1.
[64] Turrent, *Canoa: Memoria de un hecho vergonzoso,* 12.

central plaza.[65] As they lay on the ground, a few individuals poured gas on them and threatened to burn them alive. According to one account, the lynching party only wanted to wait for the victims to surrender in death so they could take their bodies to a local ravine and burn their corpses to destroy any vestige to their existence.[66]

Lynch mobs who burn a victim's body following an execution are continuing a process in the public spectacle, further humiliating and physically destroying the proper and natural form of the body. Destroying human characteristics also erases the memory of the victims. Burning corpses can be viewed through a religious lens as well as an act to rid a social evil from a community. However, in the case of Canoa, the perpetrators in the lynching party acted rather hastily, responding to a perceived and imminent threat to their community. Burning the UAP employees would have likely been an instinctual reaction to destroy the evidence that would link the perpetrators to the crime they were committing.

A defiant Flores Cruz refused to succumb to the bombardment he received from the angry mob. Amazingly, after three machete blows to his head, he remained standing and lost all sensation to the pain he continued to endure. Cruz credited his survival to his practice of dynamic tension exercises that strengthened his physical stamina to pain.[67] An insensible and seemingly invincible Cruz egged on the violent mob, shouting "Hit me, I am still standing! Hit me, I am not a liar," in direct defiance to the accusations and brutal, unimaginable violence he and his friends received.[68] His provocations temporarily diverted the mob's attention from thoughts of igniting the gas soaked Rojano

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[65] Ochoa, "La Fiesta de la Sangre,"14.
[66] Turrent, *Canoa: Memoria de un hecho vergonzoso*, 13.
[67] Osorio, *El linchamiento*, 16.
[68] Ochoa, "La Fiesta de la Sangre," 14.

and González. The mob turned to Cruz and beat him mercilessly for his taunts. An older woman accused Cruz of being *el diablo*; apparently under the impression no human could possibly endure the extreme physical punishment unleashed on his body.[69] Cruz eventually arrived at the grizzly scene of Odilón Sanchez, who died from a shotgun wound to the head.[70] As his body lay under the church spires, Cruz witnessed a ten year old child beating his dead corpse with a stick. The explosion of social violence involved a diverse sector of Canoa's population, indicating that the town's social anxieties affected entire families, including children. The communal violence unleashed lingering pent up social, economic, and political frustrations on an individual level that affected each person in different ways.

Cruz's relentless beating continued as he suffered blows to his head from hammers and rocks and other makeshift weapons. Rojano and González remained leashed by ropes and tied together, but could no longer maintain the sordid exercise. González overheard a man saying he was going to slice him with a machete. As the blade fell down he instinctively blocked the blade with his hand and severed three of his fingers before the blade sunk into his forehead. He somehow survived the encounter.[71] Rojano remained at the mercy of the crowd that dragged him and Cruz to Canoa's zócalo. The enraged mob formed a human wall around the UAP employees, cornering them from escape. The shouts and threats of murder continued between demands to see there cache of propaganda.

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[69] Ochoa, "La Fiesta de la Sangre," 14.
[70] Osorio, *El linchamiento*, 26; See also Turrent, *Canoa: Memoria de un hecho vergonzoso*, 12.
[71] Ochoa, "La Fiesta de la Sangre," 14.

At last, the police arrived on scene dispersed the angry mob from inciting more destruction. The arrival of the police did not deter some individuals from threatening to attack the initial police force as well. According to Miguel Flores Cruz, the immediate tension forced the police to withdraw from defending the UAP employees, at least temporary, for fear the violent mob would turn their outrage on them.[72] The communal anxieties that exploded into collective violence formed an attack against the *image* of Canoa's socioeconomic and political problems. To some of Canoa's residents, the police were no different from the bandits, and only represented another layer of political corruption. According to Flores Cruz, "there would have been a slaughter" had the crowd decided to press forth with its homicidal inclinations against the police.[73]

The individual who alerted Puebla's civil authority's to the communal uprising in Canoa leads to another separate, yet equally important incident that elucidates the power of public memory, and points to the existence of competing narratives to the Canoa lynching. On that night, Canoa's mayor, Martín Pérez Arce, visited Pascual Romero Pérez's store and placed the phone call that alerted the Radio Patrol Corps, the Red Cross, and the police headquarters in Puebla to the ongoing communal violence.[74] It remains unclear precisely what happened during this incident, but at some point during the encounter, Romero Pérez received a gunshot wound in the stomach. After the call for an ambulance was placed, a group of inhabitants created an impromptu barricade of rocks

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[72] Ochoa, "La Fiesta de la Sangre," 19.
[73] Ibid.
[74] "No Hallaron Culpabilidad en el ex Alcalde ni en el Obrero de Canoa," *El Sol de Puebla*, 13 Mar. 1969, 1; It is unclear what exactly provoked Martín Pérez Arce to place the phone call to Puebla's civil authorities. This portion of the narrative remains murky at best. Perhaps Arce felt a political responsibility to bring Canoa back under control. Or, perhaps he was trying to hide evidence, and the shooting of the storeowner was politically connected with the lynching.

in the street that prevented civil authorities from entering Canoa.[75] It is beyond coincidental that Romero Pérez, who owned the only telephone that could access the outside world, received a gunshot wound and could not identify his assailant.[76]

Within the chaotic center of the lynch mob, Julian González remembered hearing members of the crowd discussing Pascual Romero's gunshot wound, demonstrating the mob's apparent connection between the lynching and the shooting of the storekeeper. According to González, one resident speculated Romero took pity on the UAP employees and placed the phone call to Puebla for an ambulance. This implies Romero might have received his gunshot wound in direct response for his attempts at stopping the lynchings. It is possible certain perpetrators including Arce visited Romero's store as part of a conscious effort to prevent anyone from alerting the civil authorities in Puebla. González also remembered other inhabitants speculating Romero had accidentally shot himself and someone called the ambulance on his behalf. This scenario seems less probable, and does not explain the improvised roadblock that appeared to be in direct response to the emergency phone call. If the first ambulance arrived without a police escort, one can speculate the first call received to Puebla did not contain information pertaining to the swelling homicidal mob, otherwise the ambulance would unlikely enter town in disorder without appropriate protection.

El Sol de Puebla later speculated Pascual Romero received his gunshot wound when certain residents from Canoa arrived at his home, possibly including Arce, and demanded to use his telephone, but the store owner refused to do so.[77] Initial DFS

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[75] Turrent, *Canoa: Memoria de un hecho vergonzoso*, 12.
[76] "Estado de Puebla," DGIPS, Caja 1509A, exp. 4, Sept. 15, 1968, AGN.
[77] Trataron de Izar una Bandera Rojo y Negro y fue la Consecuencia," *El Sol de Puebla*, Sept. 15, 1968, 1.

government reports mentioned Romero Pérez's mysterious gunshot, but reported the victim was unsure where the shot came from.[78] This leads one to speculate the store owner may have personally known the shooter but did not want to cooperate with the initial police investigation. Romero Pérez recovered from his injuries in the same Civil Hospital of Puebla as the UAP employees. Only later, when the Judicial Police of Puebla named Martín Pérez Arce as the principle instigators of the lynching did Pascual Romero Pérez admit the former had visited his house to place the phone call.

Histories of the Canoa lynching often overlook this seemingly insignificant moment, but the conflicting interpretations raises important questions about the generally accepted narrative. The general paucity of information about the mysterious gunshot confirms the presence of a competing historical narrative separate from the generally accepted version. It reveals the boundaries of historical thought between what actually happened and what is thought to have happened.[79] The mysterious gunshot wound points to yet another instance where the production of public memory is twisted depending on the angle of historical interpretation. Accounts of the lynching that center solely on the testimony from the UAP employees tend to reinforce the dominant narrative that the only true victims of Canoa were outsiders. This dependency on the dominant public memory inadvertently marginalizes Canoa's resident victims, who remain in the shadows within the Canoa lynching's public memory.

The lynching in Canoa lasted approximately two and a half hours from the moment the church bells rang, and resulted in the deaths of Lucas García, Odilón

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[78] "Estado de Puebla,", DGIPS, Caja 1509A, exp. 4, Sept. 15, 1968, AGN.
[79] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 15.

Sanchez, Jesús Carrillo, and Ramón Gutiérrez. The victims received multiple contusions, hemorrhages, lesions, and puncture wounds created by the makeshift weapons carried by the mob. The survivors, Roberto Rojano, Julián González, and Miguel Flores Cruz, received medical attention to their grave injuries at Sanatorio Particular Guadalupe, a private hospital in Puebla.[80] On the night of machetes, Canoa remained in a state of disorder until 12:40 am as police investigators probed what sparked the violent outburst.[81]

This is the point where the generally accepted version of events ends, effectively painting the lynching as an isolated act of violence committed by people separated from the outside world. However, the lynching's aftermath reveals many crucial details in the historiography concerning the *movimiento estudiantil* in Puebla, and the diverging reactions to the lynching received in various parts of Mexico. The next chapter will examine the lynching's immediate aftermath and its relation to larger issues of community, power, and memory in Mexico.

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[80] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 5, AGN.
[81] Manuel Sánchez Pontón, "Perecen Cuatro Empleados Poblanos, Linchados en San Miguel Canoa," *Excélsior*, September 15, 1968; Notice the *Excélsior* title incorrectly stated four of the employees died.

CHAPTER 2: THE AFTERMATH

On the morning of September 15th, 1968, *El Sol de Puebla* ran a front page article that described the Canoa lynchings as a defensive response to the malicious actions committed by the UAP employees. The article was titled "They tried to raise a Red and Black Flag and this was the Consequence," painted the UAP employees as communist agitators. The unsigned article interviewed the only conscious victim available for comment in the hospital, Miguel Flores Cruz, who stated the UAP employees had been confused for students. However, as the title of the article indicates, the newspaper editors insinuated the UAP employees had received just punishment for their actions. The newspaper interviewed police authorities who claimed Canoa's residents stated the UAP employees had arrived in town and wanted to loot a store where they drank refreshments, inferring to the store owned by Don Pascual Romero. According to the article, the men wanted to place a red and black flag in the church tower and for these reasons were attacked by the angry mob.[1]

Few national newspapers outside Puebla reported the Canoa lynchings in detail. Only local news agencies in Puebla closely followed the incident's aftermath and the subsequent police investigations. Confusion and factual inaccuracies are apparent in some national press reports. One *Excélsior* article published on September 15th inaccurately reported four of the UAP employees died in the attack. In an apparent contradiction, the article indicated the physical destruction of the bodies made identification impossible, yet the article listed the names of the dead, including survivors Roberto Rojano and Julián González. Odilón Sánchez and Lucas García did not appear

[1] "Trataron de Izar una Bandera Rojo y Negro y fue la Consecuencia," *El Sol de Puebla*, 15 Sept. 1968, 1.

in the list of victims. Furthermore, the article reported the men tried to place a red and black flag on Canoa's church.[2] This unsubstantiated claim linked the UAP employees with the student movement and simultaneously conditioned the reader to believe the communal violence directed against the employees had some justification. The article subtly reinforced the stereotypes of people *del pueblo* as violent and reactionary individuals who in this case acted to defend the sanctity of their church. Furthermore, the article alluded to the incident with the red and black in Mexico City's Zócalo, suggesting the UAP employees were in fact communist agitators disturbing the social order of Canoa.

The news concerning the murdered UAP employees created a tense reaction in Puebla, especially on the UAP campus. A government report indicated a group of students called *Santillanistas*, a violent PRI-sponsored anti student movement group, attempted to "capitalize" on the UAP employee's deaths to draw support for their own movement. The reports do not indicate in what capacity the Santillanistas exploited the lynching; however their actions forced the suspension of a special ceremony for the victims held in the assembly hall at the UAP campus. The relatives of the deceased UAP employees asked university authorities to suspend the ceremony in order to avoid any potential conflict among student groups.[3] The Santillanistas' actions received widespread opposition and condemnation by university authorities and the bereaved relatives.[4]

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[2] Manuel Sánchez Pontón, "Perecen Cuatro Empleados Poblanos, Linchados en San Miguel Canoa," *Excélsior*, 15 Sept. 1968, reprinted in Cano Andaluz, *1968: Antología periodística.*
[3] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 2, AGN.
[4] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 4, AGN.

The Santillanistas gained notoriety in Mexico from Ernesto Santillana Santillana, the former police chief of Tijuana and officer from the Mexican Attorney General's Office. In the 1960s, the UAP rector, José Garibay Ávalos supported the Santillanistas as a measure to counter the student movement's widespread popularity, and to destabilize the extensive democratic actions across campus. The Santillanistas were also involved with many infamous murders and disappearances of UAP student protestors in the 1960s.[5] These virulent attacks drew tacit support from the Díaz Ordaz administration, who viewed the ongoing student movement as the largest threat to the stability of Mexico.

Only a few preliminary DFS reports mentioned the Santillanistas before government agents completely reversed the story and blamed the student movement. Subsequent DFS reports stated the *movimiento estudiantil* tried to capitalize on the deaths of the UAP employees during the ceremony held at the UAP campus.[6] The significant alteration in the official story points to the underlying prerogative of DFS security forces in 1968 Mexico. DFS agents undoubtedly focused their largest attention and concerns on the widespread student movement, viewed as a serious threat to the stability of Mexico. This alteration in the government records elucidates the monumental efforts by DFS security personnel to inflate the threat posed by the student movement in Puebla. Eliminating the Santillanistas from official reports protected state power and prevented any blowback caused by the failed attempt of a government-backed organization to

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[5] "Santillana: Historia de balaceras," *Proceso*, Mar. 21, 2006, available at http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=215935 [accessed: January 20, 2013].

[6] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 7, AGN; "Se aclara que en virtud que el día de ayer un grupo de estudiantes de los que estan apoyando el movimiento estudiantil del D.F. trataban de capitalizar en favor de su movimiento a los dos asesinados…"; This document did not mention the Santillanistas but instead linked the Mexico City student movement with "capitalizing" on the events.

capitalize on the deaths of UAP employees in Canoa. By blaming the ongoing student movement, the government security force reinforced the central position held by the Díaz Ordaz administration treating the student movement as the central threat to state power.

During the morning of September 16, 1968, on Mexico's Independence Day, approximately 100 family members, friends, and students from the UAP processed in a funeral ceremony and protest for Jesús Carillo and Ramon Gutiérrez. The funeral protest marked the first public engagement staged to draw attention to the grave injustice caused in Puebla's countryside. The group departed the UAP assembly hall and filed into Puebla's streets, eventually nearing the center zócalo. Members from the funeral procession carried posters and a blackboard improvised into a massive banner that read, "Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, justice here for the employees, killed by the fanaticism and the patriotism of satrap García Valseca, and PRI."[7] The message publically blamed the political corruption from the PRI and the state-controlled newspapers like *El Sol de Puebla* for creating a culture of fear that demonized the UAP and student protestors in general.

The funeral procession coincided with an annual military parade that celebrated Mexican Independence. The parade included Puebla's state governor Merino Aaron Hernandez, the head of Puebla's military zone General Eusebio Gonzalez Saldaña and other state officials. *El Sol de Puebla* reported the military needed to divert its intended parade route along September 16th Street to avoid the approaching funeral procession.[8] The grieving relatives and UAP employees undoubtedly planned their unsanctioned

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[7] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 5, AGN.
[8] "Piden Castigo Para los Criminales de los Empleados de la Universidad," *El Sol de Puebla*, Sept. 17, 1968, 1.

procession to coincide with the planned funeral parade in order to draw public attention to the lynchings. Multiple government reports indicated both marches proceeded without incident.[9] It is doubtful the military envoy which included many senior political and military personnel would attempt to disrupt the grieving funeral protestors, especially on a state-sanctioned holiday. The diverging military parade became an important scene in the film rendition *Canoa* which portrayed the event as an example of the state and army's benevolent intentions.[10]

A significant antecedent to the Canoa incident undoubtedly involved *El Sol de Puebla*, the main news daily of Puebla owned and operated by Jose García Valseca, the newspaper magnate. García Valseca shared overwhelming and unwavering support for the Díaz Ordaz administration, and his newspaper reflected the national Cold War policies of the Mexican government. *El Sol de Puebla* helped facilitate the spread of social anxiety directed towards student protestors from the UAP. Researcher Guillermina Meaney provided a list of newspaper excerpts relating to *El Sol de Puebla* in her first chapter of *Canoa: El Crimen impune.*[11] These excerpts sample the newspaper's pro-government and negative portrayal of student protestors dating back several months before the Canoa lynching. *El Sol de Puebla* and many other Valseca owned newspapers tried to mold public opinion against the student protestors. For example, following the red and black flag incident in the Mexico City Zócalo, *El Sol de Puebla* and 32 other journals in the news conglomerate La Organización Periodística García Valseca, placed a

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[9] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 5, AGN; "El acto se realize sin incidents."
[10] See John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 208.
[11] See Meaney, *Canoa*, 19-52. The researcher assembled various excerpts depicting the anti-communist and pro-government rhetoric disseminated from the newspaper from 7/28/1968-9/15/1968.

front-page "site in honor" commemorating the Mexican flag.[12] The newspaper explained that Mexicans and *poblanos* shared a mutual obligation to make amends to the national flag desecrated just days prior.

Within Puebla in 1968, *El Sol de Puebla* functioned as an important mouthpiece for distributing Mexican government propaganda, providing an interwoven mixture of apologetic praise for the Díaz Ordaz administration, and daily reminders to the threat posed by international communism and the student movement. Díaz Ordaz viewed the widespread student protests as a direct threat to the overall stability of Mexican state power. In his *Annual Informe*, the president urged Mexicans to "focus on reconquering the peace." His rhetoric painted the protesting student's as social agitators disrupting Mexican society. It was a vital necessity to restore harmony and social order before the Olympics officially commenced on October 12th, 1968.[13] Ordaz viewed the student movement as an embarrassment, and wanted to halt the protests before the world spotlight reached Mexico City. *El Sol de Puebla* reported a favorable opinion of Díaz Ordaz's policies which vociferously denounced communism. For example, a week prior to the lynching, the news daily printed an editorial described the threat of "Imperialist Communists" from the Soviet Union, supported by a "class of human robots" programmed to blindly obey the communist party line.[14] Media reports played an intricate role in spreading anti-communist sentiment throughout Puebla, including the rural peripheries. The distribution of anti-communist and anti-student movement

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[12] *El Sol de Puebla*, Sept. 3, 1968, 1.
[13] "Condena Presidencial a los Motines y Algaradas," *El Sol de Puebla*, Sept. 2, 1968, 1.
[14] Bernardo Escalante, "Comunismo Imperialista," *El Sol de Puebla*, Sept. 7, 1968.

sentiment filtered into Canoa through local regional newspapers like *El Sol De Puebla* and deeply affected the opinions of Canoa's residents, including Enrique Meza.

On 17 September, at 1:30pm, Enrique Meza Pérez presented himself at the Military Zone headquarters in Puebla.[15] Meza ventured to the capital in direct response to a front page article published the same morning in *El Sol de Puebla*, alleging the priest's implicit involvement in the lynching. The allegations derived from statements made from Roberto Rojano who labeled the priest as the lynching "mastermind."[16] A government report indicated Meza requested an immediate meeting with Col. Arturo Venegas, the chief of staff at the headquarters. During this extraordinary gathering between a rural village priest and city military colonel, Meza requested Venegas send a platoon of soldiers to San Miguel Canoa in order to protect the town's inhabitants from reprisal attacks by the "students."[17] At the military zone, Meza described his own version of events. He stated that on that night he did not realize what had happened because when he went to the parish he felt ill, and due to hearing loss, (y que como esta falto del oido) he decided to rest in the rooms."[18] He stated that at 9:30pm he heard women shouting "Matenlos, matenlos," (kill them, kill them) but he did not understand their motivations. He firmly denied the accusations brought forth in the press by Rojano, and appeared surprised one of the wounded signaled him out as the lynching mastermind.

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[15] Cited from "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 9-10, AGN.
[16] "Piden Castigo Para los Criminales de los Empleados de la Universidad," *El Sol de Puebla*, Sept. 17, 1968, 1.
[17] "Piden Castigo Para los Criminales de los Empleados de la Universidad," *El Sol de Puebla*, Sept. 17, 1968, 1; The military report incorrectly spelled his name "Mena."
[18] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 13, AGN; This document contains direct quotations from Meza's conversation with military officials.

According to a DFS document written about Meza's visit to the military headquarters, the priest proclaimed the surviving victims should be "grateful" (agredecer) for *his* personal intervention that stopped the lynching. Meza told Col. Venegas that despite the tremendous scandal in the streets and his illness, he overcame these obstacles, left the sanctity of the church and proceeded to intervene and calm the villagers down. Meza believed that if not for his involvement, Rojano and the others would have been killed.[19] Meza's personal statements confirmed he was aware of the lynching and present in the streets when it occurred. Col. Venegas could only listen to Meza's version of events, and explained to the priest he did not have the authority to exercise the army without approval from his superiors. Venegas suggested Meza submit an official letter in writing requesting military protection for Canoa. No indications suggest Meza followed through with the colonel's suggestion.

The government report indicated Meza's version of events contained "endless contradictions" signifying that military official's believed Meza fabricated his story to make sense of his experience. For example, Meza surmised someone had gained unauthorized access to the church's bell tower to ring the bells by climbing a set of scaffolding along the church's exterior. Meza undoubtedly heard the wild ringing, the blaring megaphone, and the thunderous chorus of enraged inhabitants. Yet his own statements confirm Meza waited to exit the church much later, possibly hours after the lynchings began. Meza told Col. Venegas he suffered from hearing loss, but could distinctly hear women encouraging the crowd to "kill them" off in the distance.

[19] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 13, AGN .

Subsequent interviews with Meza do not mention the meeting with Puebla's military zone, suggesting Meza eliminated this embarrassing detail from his version of events.

This rather bizarre and previously undocumented meeting raises several questions about Meza's behavior and political motivations to present himself at the feet of military power.[20] Meza probably felt politically vulnerable and defenseless against a reprisal attack for the crimes committed in his village. His actions offer a lens to view his psychological landscape, revealing a genuine fear for the student movement. It underscores how susceptible Meza appeared to threats of insurrection. Meza feared Canoa's social order was threatened, and acted in a manner that reveals his erratic determination to preserve the stability of Canoa. Perhaps Meza requested the military in order to avoid Puebla's police, fearing he might implicate himself within the ongoing criminal investigation. Nevertheless, Meza's fretful imagination saw the University protestors from Puebla or Mexico City retaliating for the lynchings. This fear demonstrates Meza was not exempt from the regional or national fears of communist insurrection. He also understood communism's connection and association with the student protestors. It is clear Meza felt personally threatened by Rojano's accusation in the media and visited the military to ensure his own power was protected.

But were Meza's fears of a violent retaliation from the student movement unfounded? After the events, Canoa's residents remained in a state of restlessness and fear for several months, spurred by the mixture of religious fanaticism and the proliferation of fretful rumors and anxiety that the student's would return to seek revenge.

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[20] In the course of my research I have yet to come across any instance where a Canoa researcher mentioned the curious meeting with Col. Venegas.

According to a former Canoa resident, rumors abounded the "students are coming."[21] The climate of fear and social anxiety draped over Canoa did not dissipate immediately after the lynching's occurred. Most likely, Meza's meeting at the military headquarters reflected the general insecurity and vulnerably felt within Canoa's community.

In a 2008 interview that marked the 40th anniversary of the Canoa lynching, Miguel Flores Cruz indicated after "the accident," certain people wanted to inflict a violent retaliatory attack on Canoa's villagers. Immediately after the lynching, the survivors contacted non-academic employees and students from the UAP who "wanted to go and burn the houses of this pueblo." As the group organized and readied to leave, the army intervened and prevented them from committing any acts of vengeance against the town![22] Eventually, their anger subsided due in large part to the collective efforts on the behalf of non-violent student protestors and members from the UAP University Council who acted in a constructive manner to assuage the mounting pressures surrounding the UAP campus and in Puebla.

In the immediate aftermath of the Canoa lynching, an intense public outcry emanated primarily from the UAP campus demanding the state government deliver justice for the lynched UAP employees. Led by the UAP University Council comprised from administrators, faculty, employees, and students, the organization responded to the immediate financial needs of the victims and the bereaved relatives. The University

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[21] Interview with Pánfilo Zepeda in Carlos E. Sevillas S., *Novedades de Puebla*, 4; Zepeda stated, "Soy inocente, jura…"

[22] Interview with Miguel Flores Cruz in Labarreda González, Jorge, "Entrevista Canoa," in *El 68 en Puebla: Memoria y encuentros*, edited by Enrique Agüera Ibáñez, (Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2008), 176; Cruz does not elaborate any further on this detail. This appears to be the first interview to indicate UAP employees had planned a violent retaliation against Canoa. Further research should address this crucial portion of the lynching's aftermath.

Council demanded Puebla's state government conduct a thorough investigation to bring the lynching perpetrators to justice. They also condemned the state-controlled newspapers, like *El Sol de Puebla*, for inculcating a negative public perception of university students, the UAP, and the large scale student movement. Analyzing the immediate public reaction from the UAP campus and within newspapers offers a lens to view Puebla's public reaction to the Canoa lynching as it buttressed against official state policy. The few national newspapers that reported the Canoa lynching or its aftermath framed the narrative to blame the student movement for causing the deaths of the UAP employees.

On the UAP campus, the Consejo Nacional de Huelga (CNH), or National Strike Council which represented the nationwide collective of student protestors in Mexico, continued their coordinated democratic action across the UAP campuses and attempted to link with the UAP employees. On the afternoon of September 17th, 1968, six student representatives from the CNH presented themselves at the Carolino building and approached workers from the House of Studies, offering their unconditional support for the employees lynched in San Miguel Canoa.[23] A contingent of employees from the UAP called a meeting to decide the appropriate response to the tragedy, and whether to accept help from the CNH. Approximately 240 UAP employees assembled in the Carolino building, presided by Alberto Gutierrez Ramos, the University Director of Employees, and Board Secretary Maria Estela Rebollar.

The assembly gathered for over two hours and agreed to a series of symbolic measures designed to protect the wellbeing of the UAP employees and demand justice for

[23] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 9, AGN.

what occurred to them. They first decided to send President Díaz Ordaz a letter information him the details of what happened in Canoa, and requesting immediate justice for the victims. The assembly arranged to make necessary financial contributions for any future legal action. The UAP employees who called the assembly understood the enormous political tension surrounding the UAP, the student protestors, and the Mexican state. These social tensions most likely influenced the assembly's unanimous decision to remain politically neutral and distant from the CNH to avoid receiving any negative reactions by federal, state, or local populations. Therefore, they decided to announce publically that they would not accept any intervention from the student movements from either Puebla or Mexico City. The assembly decided the lynchings of the UAP employee resulted from consequences completely unrelated to the protests movement.[24]

The Assembly's public stance of neutrality from the National Strike Council appears as a calculated political decision to avoid an escalation in the mounting social tensions in Puebla and larger Mexico. It sheds light on the tense political climate within Puebla and the local anxieties people shared about their association with the Mexican Student Movement. Neutrality from the CNH assured the UAP employee assembly to alleviate the mounting social pressures that produced a backlash of violence directed towards University affiliated employees. Though the assembly ultimately decided to distant themselves from the CNH contacts in Puebla and Mexico City, the CNH student representatives sent to the Carolino building had recognized the obvious connection between the widespread student protests and the communal violence that erupted in Canoa. The CNH viewed the Canoa lynching as an opportunity to link into the broader

[24] "Estado de Puebla," Sept. 17, 1968, IPS, Caja 1509A, exp. 4, AGN.

UAP employee community and to expand public support for their massive democratic initiative.

Later in the evening on September 17th, the University Council held an extraordinary midnight session in the UAP auditorium. Approximately 140 people attended the meeting, including Jose Sanchez de Lliana, the UAP Secretary General, who acted as Rector of the University and chaired the meeting. Ismael Acevedo Andrade, The Secretary and Director of the School Department also attended, along with thirty counselors, university employees and ninety students. The group collectively examined the events that occurred in Canoa. The meeting implemented a plan to fray the funeral costs for the bereaved relatives and to help the UAP employees injured in the attack. Using a tape recorder, the University Council heard the moving statements of Julián Gonzalez who recounted the bloody episode. After analyzing the events, the University Council agreed to the following decisions.

First, they solicited the cooperation of all teachers who served at the University to donate a day's salary and asked the University Directors to donate ten days of their wages. A $5 fee increase would be assessed per student enrolled at the university to help the bereaved. The state governor, Merino Aaron Hernandez would be asked to provide economic assistance for the injured UAP employees and also the victim's relatives. The University Council also wanted to workers compensation for the injured employees for physical disabilities in accordance with the Federal Labor Law. They also wanted a guarantee the men would not lose their jobs. Two lawyers from the UAP Law Department, Gilberto Gomez Castellanos y Jose Sanchez de Illian would provide council for the men in case of possible legal action. The University Council also wrote a public

declaration directed at the national press for which they demanded freedom of belief and expression, and a demand for objectivity and an end to their blatantly biased nature of their reporting. Furthermore, the University Council demanded justice for the murdered employees and for the criminal mastermind of the lynching to be apprehended and prosecuted.[25]

The special midnight session by the University Council also agreed to ask the state to demand financial compensation from the clergy (exigir al clero una indemnización) after all financial resources are exhausted.[26] This profound decision indicates the University Council also alleged Enrique Meza to be the principal architect behind the Canoa lynching, and directed state investigations to hold him accountable for the crimes committed under his guidance.

The University Council's decision to condemn the state-controlled newspapers confirmed the presence of a widely held belief across the UAP campus that viewed the news agencies as culpable for spreading the seeds of hatred towards students and the University. The Council's response echoed the public protests from UAP employees, students, and grieving families in the funeral marchers a few days prior, which blamed García Valseca's news conglomerate for contributing to the lynching. Government documents labeled the University Council's assembly "extraordinary" for its total effort by the part of UAP administrators, employees and students to assist the victims of Canoa and seek legal justice for those that contributed to the events. The joint effort eventually

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[25] "Estado de Puebla," 18 Sept. 1968, IPS, caja 1509A, exp. 4, AGN; See also "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 16-17, AGN; Government reports diverge slightly pertaining to the sixth guideline agreed by the University Council.
[26] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 16, AGN.

raised an estimated 40,000 pesos for the UAP victims and their families.[27] The University Council's assembly symbolically represented the opinions widely held across the university and sent a powerful message to the press to stop its biased representations and characterizations of the UAP and its student body.

The next day, *El Sol de Puebla* responded to the University Council's midnight assembly and their "Official Declaration" to the public. The article obfuscated the content within the major decisions from the University Council, and did not report in detail about the university-wide financial plan to help the victims. Not surprisingly, *El Sol de Puebla* did not report the sixth article, the universal condemnation of the state-controlled newspaper. In fact, the *El Sol de Puebla* article belittled the Council's assembly and claimed their declarations were "ignored when first published," even though the meeting occurred that very morning at the midnight hour.[28]

The article appeared on page six, buried under the major national news story from that day, the army occupation of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, the UNAM on September 19, 1968. During that incident, the government broke the constitutional guarantee of university autonomy and raided University City with tanks, armored personnel carriers, and an estimated ten thousand soldiers. The Secretary of Interior, Luis Echeverría, authorized the army invasion with the implicit intent to undermine the Mexico City student movement. The government viewed the UNAM as a hub of subversive activity and launched its occupation to posture a disproportional use of force as a warning to student activists to terminate their mass actions directed against the

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[27] Interview with Julián González, in Jorge Labarreda González, "Entrevista Canoa," *El 68 en Puebla*, 176.
[28] "Harán una Declaración Oficial Sobre la Masacre de San Miguel," *El Sol de Puebla*, Sept. 19, 1968, 6.

state.[29] *El Sol de Puebla* reported that the army recovered various Molotov cocktails stored by students in the Science buildings which were upholstered in anti-government slogans and "Che" Guevara effigies.[30] The information described the subversive and potentially dangerous nature of student groups, and their apparent influences derived from international communism.

Two significant editorials published weeks after the Canoa lynching elucidate the efforts to frame the narrative of the lynching away from Canoa's local problems and its mounting sociopolitical tensions and into the national fold. The national newspapers controlled and significantly altered the narrative by linking the incident with the threats posed by the student movement in Mexico City. These articles completely minimalized the local conditions in Canoa because the writers own interpretations came from the metropole, where the political crisis between the Mexican state and the student movement loomed large. The editorial pieces corresponded dialogically between Ramón Ertze Garamendi, a Spanish priest from the Santa Iglesia Cathedral, and Rene Capistran Garza, former member from the National Defense League for Religious Liberty (Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa). Garza contributed regularly in opinion columns in national newspapers, and delivered virulently anti-communist and pro-government sentiment that condemned the student movement as a subversive plan against Mexico, and an outright religious attack against Christianity.[31] The two religious representatives framed the public perception of the Canoa lynching in a way that

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[29] See Elaine Carey's *Plaza of Sacrifice*, 123-125.
[30] Hernan Porragas R., "Libre de Agitadores se Entregará al Rector: Intervino el Ejército Para Garantizar la Autonomía," *El Sol de Puebla*, 19 Sept. 1968, 1.
[31] Rene Capistran Garza, "Réplica a Ertze Garamendi," *El Sol de Puebla*, Sept. 25, 1968.

significantly altered what happened and reinforced the government stance that condemned the student movement as Mexico's social antagonists.

On September 19th, 1968, *Excélsior* published Ertze Garamendi's op-ed "Student Dignity," described "the psychological repression that erupted across the country against some students, presenting them as communists, defilers of the most sacred and respectable, this bearing the fruit of bitterness as they are attacked in their own schools and the lynching of four people, with wounding four other people in the village of San Miguel Canoa, in Puebla." Garamendi condemned those primarily responsible for the violence; the press, and to a larger extent the Díaz Ordaz administration, for "throwing lies" and taking advantage of the students.[32] The author reminded the Mexican government to abide to its primary tasks of order and peace before pointing out the general ineffectiveness of the student movement, with its limited ability to disrupt the country and bring attention to its goals. According to Ertze Garamendi, the student's decision to prolong their strike was "not beneficial to anyone," casting blame for the widespread "psychological repression" on the students and the lynchings in Canoa. Ertze Garamendi's editorial recognized the news agency and the state's responsibility for the eruption of "psychological repression" directed against the students, but blamed the social movement for prolonging the political instability in Mexico. This moderate view eliminated the student movement's voice and their political legitimacy. Although the article criticized certain unnamed actors for spreading hatred towards the students and for causing the lynchings in Canoa, Ertze Garamendi did not specify. In a sense, the op-ed affirmed the government line, asking the students to stop their demonstrations causing the

[32] Ramon de Ertze Garamendi, "Suma y Resta: Dignidad Estudiantil," *Excélsior*, Sept. 19, 1968, in IPS, Caja 1509A, AGN.

Mexican state to use its psychological repression which caused violence and the lynchings to occur in Canoa.

Rene Capistran Garza responded directly to Ertze Garamendi a week later in an *El Sol de Puebla* column on September 25, 1968. The editorial scolded the priest for exceeding "all imaginable recklessness" and for promoting the subversive ideas held by the student movement. Garza imagined a deeply divided Mexico split between two religious and political camps, between non-communists and communists and non-Catholics and Catholics. He envisioned other loyal Catholics doing their part to "prevent Mexico from sinking into chaos," which is exactly what the residents of San Miguel de Canoa did when they lynched the "four young unhappy agitators." Garza inaccurately reported four dead "agitators," demonstrating the general misperceptions about lack of general knowledge about what happened in Canoa. Garza likely obtained his information from the misleading *Excélsior* article printed September 15th that reported four UAP employees died after attempting to raise a red and black flag. Garza's comments shed light on the development of competing social narratives that tried to make sense of the communal violence and significantly altered the realities of the situation.

Garza neither applauded nor condoned the acts of violence against the lynched UAP men, and instead viewed Canoa's residents responding and defending against an attack to their town and religious institution caused by the subversive element of communism. His words mirrored the official government version of events that found the student movement culpable for the events that transpired in Canoa. Garza labeled the lynching as an act of terror, and "a sobering warning" of things to come in Mexico.

Incidentally, this prophetic announcement occurred just a week prior to the government sponsored massacre at Tlatelolco, on October 2, 1968.[33]

The Canoa lynchings generally accepted narrative was developed primarily by social actors and institutions from within the metropole of Mexico City and Puebla. The narrative tended to downplay and exclude Canoa's internal political and social strife. The lynchings were decentered and divorced from Canoa and the rural countryside. The creation of the dominant narrative focused almost entirely on the lynchings as according to the UAP employees, undoubtedly the lynch mob's primary targets. The UAP employees provide some of the detailed coverage available. Subsequent state investigations were continually hampered by uncooperative residents unwilling to recount the events. However, the centralization on the UAP employees often ignores the local political and socioeconomic situation within Canoa, and the larger contextualization of Mexico's experience of the cold war.

Efforts by the UAP University Council and many others to bring public attention to the Canoa lynching helped frame the incident in a way that marginalized many other existing competing narratives. For example, a crucial gap exists between the experiences of Odilón Sánchez and Lucas García, both killed by the lynch mob. In general accounts, these victims are listed among the dead but their individual stories remain obscured by the prominence of the UAP employees. The heavy focus on the UAP men overshadows these and other accounts which may reveal pertinent details. For example, a historical analysis of Lucas García and his involvement with the CCI might reveal a richer

[33] Rene Capistran Garza, "Réplica a Ertze Garamendi," *El Sol de Puebla*, Sept. 25, 1968; Elaine Carey titled her segment on the lynchings "the Harbinger of things to Come."

contextualization of Canoa's internal political tensions between Padre Meza. Furthermore, there is a noticeable silence in the historiography concerning Canoa's experiences with the lynching and its aftermath.[34]

The internal social tensions in Canoa did not dissipate after the outbreak of communal violence on September 14, 1968. Those who participated in the lynching demonstrated their pent up frustrations on the supposed communist infiltrators. However, the underlying social, economic, and political tensions persisted even after the violence subsided as the bodies were cleared from the streets. In the immediate aftermath of the lynching, many residents openly questioned the authority of Padre Meza. According to one government security document, on September 21, 1968, Canoa's general population, along with ecclesiastical authorities and the *Frente Popular de Padres de Estudiantes de Enseñanza Superior* (Popular Front of Parents of Students for Higher Education) accused Meza of violating individual guarantees according to municipal authorities and the police. The group accused church authorities for "failing to prevent unprotected immorality" to their religion, in stark contradiction with the Mexican constitution. According to them, Meza also unfairly charged Canoa's inhabitants for various religious services that the group wanted to bring to the attention of the Archbishop. The people also accused government lackeys and the corrupt and "mercenary" García Velseca-owned newspapers "poisoned the city," and were responsible for the lynching deaths of four individuals.[35]

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[34] The release of *Canoa* in 1975-1976 sparked a renewed interest in Canoa lynching. However, prior to 1975, few historical documents reveal what exactly happened in Canoa following the events in September 1968.

[35] "En un desplegado anonimo de afirma que los problemas del publo de San Miguel Canoa se resuelven en el curato," Sept. 21, 1968, DGIPS, Caja 1509A, AGN.

This crucial piece of evidence confirms many of Canoa's residents were deeply connected to the outside world, especially through newspapers like *El Sol de Puebla*. They also recognized the biased nature of the pro-government newspapers, who they blamed for the culture of fear draped over Canoa. The residents were not ignorant of the national political environment or the global cold war. On the contrary, their combined efforts to inform government authorities about García Velseca and Padre Meza mirrored the sentiment shared by UAP survivors, the UAP University Council, and other outspoken critics from Puebla.

After the death of Lucas García, some neighbors collected 30,000 pesos to donate to Tomasa García, widowed after the attack that killed her husband and left her four children fatherless. However, the family never received the communal donation because Enrique Meza took the money before leaving Canoa in 1969.[36] Despite witnessing the horrific violence against her husband by neighbors and other residents, Tomasa García and her family stayed in town, explaining to journalists in 1976, "[Canoa] is our pueblo, where are we going to go, we have made a life here. My son Pascual scrapes magueys, gets twenty pesos a day, and with this we live with his five brothers and I."[37] As a widow of a poor farmer in Mexico's countryside, Tomasa García never received justice or financial assistance for her husband's murder.

A sustained and multifaceted effort from inside and outside Canoa eventually forced Enrique Meza to leave his position in 1969. Ecclesiastical authorities led by an archbishop recalled Padre Meza and sent him to San Inés Ahuatempan, a small town

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[36] Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas." *Contenido*, 77.
[37] Ochoa,"La Fiesta de la Sangre," 14.

located near the border of Puebla and Oaxaca.[38] San Inés Ahuatempan just happened to be the place of birth for Puebla's state governor Aarón Merino Fernández, a close friend of Meza.[39] In an interview with *Impacto,* Meza candidly recalled his version of events, demonstrating his total lack of remorse for what happened. Further, Meza explained how his established political connections kept him from being investigated or prosecuted. Meza insisted "everything that happened that night in 1968, they [the UAP employees] asked for it. They were from Puebla and they knew where they were going." Of course, Meza's version grossly oversimplified what actually happened. According to Meza, the UAP men were the ones who incited the lynching after they shot the storekeeper, Pascual Romero Pérez. According to Meza, after one of the UAP men shot Pascual Romero in the stomach, they ran to Lucas García's house.[40] Meza firmly denied the allegation he incited the mob. In one interview, he offered as evidence his sacrosanctity in claiming, "I am a priest and I cannot lie."[41]

Padre Meza benefited from having high-level political connections, with Puebla's Attorney General, who was also his personal friend. Meza stated to the *Impacto* journalists, "I have always been good with the government. Well, [Puebla's] governor was Aarón Merino Fernández, also a friend of mine. Do you think that if I was culpable, I would be free? I have never been involved in politics. Now the [new] priest of Canoa is a nephew of mine. The other day I went and spoke into the microphone and in fifteen

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[38] Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas." *Contenido*, 82.
[39] Carlos E. Sevilla S., "¡Pero no más 'Canoas'!" *Novedades de Puebla*, Apr, 10, 1976, 2.
[40] Carlos E. Sevilla S., "¡Pero no más 'Canoas'!" *Novedades de Puebla*, Apr, 10, 1976, 3.
[41] García Olvera, "Canoa, una película que deforma la realidad de lo que pasó," *Impacto*, 25.

minutes the entire town was in the church. The people said, 'Why would we not want Padre Meza?'[42]

Meza's telling recollections are notable for his conscious effort to avoid his own intricate involvement, Canoa's system of political corruption, the mounting rural frustrations, the culture of fear, the layers of political anxiety, and the existence of internal tensions between him and the CCI. Meza probably believed the young UAP men were communist agitators threatening the town's social order. His interview confirmed that Meza convinced himself that the violence unleashed against the UAP men was justified, and that they deserved it. Meza's oversimplified memory projected his own ignoble stance about the sanctity of life and the protection of religious freedom. His interview testified to his general lack of knowledge about what actually transpired.

Canoa resident Añade Cepeda confirmed the existence of another competing narrative that blamed the UAP men for what occurred. Her versions of events reveal a religious justification offered as a defense for the violence. She explained some others told her later "the guys from the university were at fault for everything." According to Cepeda, after the men snacked at don Pascual's store, "they confessed they were communists, and at that hour many townspeople were drinking, watching, and listening. Then when don Pascual charged their check, the boys shot at him." Cepeda's alternative version contended the other customers in the store then followed the men to Lucas García's house where they had planned to sleep for the night. Cepeda then provided a telling piece of evidence that this alternative version originated from a religious authority, stating, "These men said they were *universitarios,* and the first thing they teach when

[42] Ibid.

they have entered the university is that there is no God. And I ask you, who made the world? Who makes it move?"[43]

Who perpetuated the stereotype in Canoa that all university students were instructed and inculcated with atheistic beliefs? Who divided Canoa between the religious binary of good and evil? Canoa's local narrative tried to make sense of what happened by blaming the UAP outsiders, a conveniently oversimplified account that ignored larger historical contextualization. The local narrative that echoed Meza's version is not a lie and should be taken seriously if only to reveal the existence of competing narratives which offer insight into the production of public memory at the local level. These conflicting memories remembered certain details but forgot other factors. For instance, Meza's version ignored the death of Lucas García, the CCI, or any other conditions that fueled the lynching. This version gave the illusion everything in Canoa was fine until the UAP men disrupted the social order.

During the subsequent investigation into the Canoa lynching, investigators likely received enormous political pressure from social activists who represented the UAP employees, including the University Council. These efforts forced the state to bring to justice the alleged criminal masterminds who incited the lynching. Few, if any residents were willing to speak with investigators even though the residents likely knew who the main culprits were. A general lack of cooperation hindered police efforts to collect data. Perhaps this lack of on-the-ground information contributed to the overall failure by police to prosecute the guilty party, and to wrongfully convict two indigenous men who barely spoke the Spanish language.

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[43] Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas," *Contenido*, 80.

Ultimately, the police issued 18 arrest warrants of which five people were charged, and two people, Pablo Sánchez and Pánfilo Zepeda García, served prison sentences of eight and eleven years, respectively. Many of the suspects arrested by police were Indians who barely spoke Spanish, raising several doubts about the criminal proceedings.[44] Pablo Sánchez, arrested on May 5, 1969, was charged with inciting the mob that caused the lynching.[45] *El Sol de Puebla* reported that Sánchez "spoke with great difficulty in Spanish." It turned out Sánchez was convicted and incarcerated for crimes he did not commit. Mistaken for man who shared the exact same name, Pablo Sánchez's wrongful conviction demonstrated the farcical nature of the entire criminal investigation.[46] Sánchez maintained his innocence throughout his eight year prison sentence. He alleged Padre Meza had sent police investigators to detain certain people from his religious community considered uncooperative members. Sánchez confirmed Canoa experienced deep religious and political divisions between those who donated to the church and those who did not. According to Sánchez, those who did not cooperate were denounced as communists. Pánfilo Zepeda García, an indigenous man from Canoa, vehemently denied any involvement in the lynching and yet received the longest prison sentence out of any other suspects. According to Zepeda, he did not receive counsel because he could not afford the 8,000 pesos needed for his defense.[47] Both García and Sánchez spent their incarceration at San Juan de Dios state prison. None of the true criminal masterminds were incarcerated.

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[44] See for example, "Capturaron al ex Alcalde de Canoa y a un Obrero, por "Instigadores," *El Sol de Puebla*, March, 11, 1969; the journalist reports the ex-mayor was "speaking with difficulty in Spanish."
[45] "Ningún Caro por los que se le Acusa, le Comprobaron en Careo," *El Sol de Puebla*, May 5, 1969.
[46] Alejandro Suverza, "Canoa a flote, después del bombardeo psicológico," *El Financiero*, Mar. 20, 1998, 42.
[47] Carlos E. Sevillas S., *Novedades de Puebla*, April 8, 1976, 4.

The Judicial Police of Puebla released their initial findings to the public on September 19th, 1968. Their report declared Pánfilo Cepeda, Sebastián Manzano, Aurelio Cepeda, Miguel Monarca, Andrewa Arce and Sebastián Cepeda incited Canoa's residents to attack the UAP employees.[48] However, none of the arrested served any prison time. Initial press reports mentioned Enrique Meza, however not among those suspected as being involved. Instead, the reports reviewed another version of Meza's story significantly different from the DFS report written after Meza visited the Puebla military headquarters. Affirming his innocence throughout, Meza claimed on the night of the lynching he overheard farmers shouting from outside the church, but could not do anything to stop the swelling crowd. Meza reportedly peeked out the church window and among the cornfields heard someone shouting, "Watch out he went that way, don't let him get away."[49] In an obvious contradiction, Meza reported to be hard of hearing, but could decipher shouting from long distances.

Initial government reports indicated police investigators discovered Martín Pérez Arce, Canoa's Municipal President within the lynch mob.[50] His presence confirms the town's leading figure was not simply an idle bystanders, but present at the scene, and most probably involved in the attack. Arce was apprehended in Mexico City on March, 1969 after police investigators named him as one of the principal instigators of the lynching. *El Sol de Puebla* reported that the lynching survivors confirmed to the Delegation and Agency of Public Ministry that Arce was one of the first members from

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[48] "Identifican a los Instigadores del Linchamiento en San Miguel Canoa," *El Día: Vocero del Pueblo Mexicano,* Sept., 19, 1968, reprinted in Andaluz, *1968: Antología periodística*, 178.

[49] Identifican a los Instigadores del Linchamiento en San Miguel Canoa,´*El Sol de Puebla*, 19 September 1968.

[50] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 1, AGN.

the lynch mob to burst into Lucas García's house.[51] One can only imagine how Arce's presence in the mob psychologically charged and motivated the enraged crowd to inflict violence on the suspected communists. The participation of a town's political leader undoubtedly fueled the needed justification to commit murder against the UAP employees. Government documents also reported the link between Arce and Padre Meza. The government suggested Arce enjoyed the priest's personal confidence.[52] The former PRI candidate won his election to become Municipal President of Canoa in the 1960s with allegations of corruption.[53]

Arce's frequent instances of public intoxication in Canoa suggests some residents may have remembered him more as a drunkard than as the mayor. According to one resident, the night of the lynching, Arce was "drunk as usual.[54] Some resident's even remembered Arce present in Canoa on the night of the lynching, a claim Arce initially denied until his apprehension in 1969. In fact, Arce later publically admitted to "drinking all day and all night," on September 14th, but claimed his state of inebriation exonerated him from any wrongdoing or responsibility.

The 1968 lynching shares strikingly similar characteristics with lynchings that occurred in Canoa's past, 112 years prior. In 1856, Mexico's president Ignacio Comonfort battled to contain massive political unrest between liberals and conservatives. Mexico was plagued with isolated political uprisings, conservative discontent, and mounting social tension between political forces that culminated with liberal efforts to

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[51] Capturaon al ex Alcalde de Canoa y a un Obrero, por "Instigadores," *El Sol de Puebla*, Mar. 11, 1969, pg. 1.
[52] "San Miguel Canoa," Versión Pública, DFS, foja 3, AGN.
[53] García Olvera, "Canoa, una película que deforma la realidad de lo que pasó," *Impacto*, 25.
[54] García Olvera, "Canoa, una película que deforma la realidad de lo que pasó," *Impacto*, 25.

construct a new constitution stripping the Church from its power. Before *La Reforma*, Mexico's civil war, San Miguel Canoa witnessed the growing anxieties first hand. Three unknown persons in Canoa although appearing peaceful at first, exchanged arms with some of the locals.[55] The three men roamed through town while certain residents followed to keep a watchful eye. As the men walked peacefully passed the church, a group of armed men, led by the priest Miguel Santa María, his brother, followed by the mayor of the town, Manuel Pérez, and a large group of followers opened fire on the outsiders. Two of the men were apparently killed immediately, while a third tried to escape.

The church bells rang in a violent and alarming cacophony warning Canoa's residents to take action. Those who answered the general alarm encircled the escapee and brought him to the town's jail. The encounter came to a dramatic end when the priest Santa María told the largely indigenous community that "if death was not brought to the young man, San Miguel Canoa would be burned for having in its midst a wicked man."[56] The cryptic warning provided the mayor and the town religious justification for murder. The large indigenous group of men following the expressed orders of the town's mayor, Manuel Pérez, dragged the young man nearly a mile to a deep canyon, where they tied him with a rope, shot him in the neck, and smashed his head with a large stone that remained at the foot of a large tree.

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[55] Felipe Gálvez, "San Miguel Canoa, Mantanza en tres tiempos: 1856, 1924, 1968," *Proceso*, Vol 1143, (Sept.1998), 62; "tres personas desconocidas que, aunque en aparente son de paz, cruzaron armadas, momentos antes, por la poblacion. Y todo indica que de pronto han decidido regresar. Empero, ojos vigilantes siguen atentamente sus paso."

[56] Felipe Gálvez, "San Miguel Canoa, Mantanza en tres tiempos: 1856, 1924, 1968," *Proceso*, Vol 1143, (Sept.1998), 62.

A subsequent investigation in 1857 discovered the main perpetrators had made "a mistake" as the general pretext for the crime. Judge Juan N. Ibra called it an "enormous error," that led to the "horrific murders committed by the people of San Miguel Canoa, headed by the two people who had the most to set an example of humility for the faithful citizens: the priest and the mayor of the town."[57] Canoa's repeated examples of lynching's suggests a powerful correlation exists between sporadic and isolated acts of communal violence and moments of rising national political tension. In Canoa, localized power brokers acting as agents of state power often turned to violence when they felt their power was threatened. Violence was therefore a calculated measure to preserve Canoa's fledging power structure. The murders committed by seemingly innocent outsiders were in response to a liberal attack on the traditionally conservative power structure. Religious leaders felt particularly threatened by the idea of losing government support for their legitimacy. The 1856 lynching was in direct response to the groundswell of national political tension, and the anxieties to local political order.

The *Proceso* article by Felipe Gálvez elucidates upon the cyclical violence found in Canoa's history. However, the article only provides the reader with a small indication that these lynchings correlated with national events. The journalist offered only summaries of each lynching without drawing larger conclusions between the lynchings. What in fact, do these repeated instances of communal violence say about Canoa? It would be too dismissive to label this town as culturally isolated, or explicitly prone to violence. The unique cultural, religious, and political structure in Canoa played an intricate part to the cyclical violence in its history.

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[57] Felipe Gálvez, "San Miguel Canoa, Mantanza en tres tiempos: 1856, 1924, 1968," *Proceso*, Vol 1143, (Sept.1998), 62.

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In the immediate aftermath of the Canoa lynching, numerous competing narratives developed from within Canoa, and also the metropole, that tried to make sense of the outbreak of communal violence. Each version offers a lens in which certain truths are revealed about how Mexicans in Puebla experienced the Cold War. Exploring the lynching and its immediate aftermath within Canoa and also outside confirms San Miguel Canoa was not culturally isolated or separate as a traditional rural community but intricately connected to mainstream Mexican politics, migration, and culture. Canoa's residents were deeply connected to the global cold war, the national political environment under President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, and local and regional sociopolitical concerns. These layers of political culture filtered into Canoa and were interpreted by the town's residents according to their historical experiences. Enrique Meza and Puebla's state-sanctioned newspaper *El Sol de Puebla* undoubtedly contributed to the local fears of communism and young student protestors.

Viewed from outside the rural countryside, most people in Puebla could not believe the "wild and savage epically archaic crime," could occur in the 20th century, and just 16 kilometers from Puebla, a city that "prides itself on being the leader of industrial and cultural development."[58] The lynchings revealed the hollownesse of President Díaz Ordaz's economic policies, and the general lack of state power felt in Mexico's countryside. In fact, Canoa's severe economic problems and general lack of socioeconomic development expose the larger truths about how rural Mexican's

[58] "Desplegado que pública 'El Sol de Puebla' Firmado Por El Estudiantes de Medicina y Consejero Universitario,", IPS, Caja 1509A, September, 22, 1968, AGN.

experienced the "Mexican Miracle." Rampant social inequality remained just a few miles outside Puebla's industrial core. Severe inequalities in Mexico's poor and primarily indigenous peripheral towns are problems that date back to the colonial period.[59]

The generally accepted narrative's heavy emphasis and dependence on the accounts from the UAP employees reshaped and decentered the lynching from including the internal tensions ruminating within Canoa. The narrative took form outside of Canoa and was shaped primarily by perspectives emanating from the metropole. Thus, Canoa's internal anxieties were largely overshadowed by the larger national forces. Many journalists automatically connected the student movement and their negative portrayal in the press as a prime factor that caused the Canoa lynchings. However, important details about Canoa's internal economic and political situation remained noticeably exempt from these accounts. Exploring the other competing narratives reveals larger truths about rural Mexico's experience during the cold war, both from within Canoa and from Puebla. The dominant narrative that formed became incorporated into the larger legacy of Mexico's fear of social change during the Cold War. Later on, the Canoa incident became visualized in a popular film rendition of the lynching in 1975, a topic explored in the following chapter. In many ways, the lynching exemplifies the experiences of Mexico in 1968, and signifies how national social tensions filtered throughout the country and affected everyone, especially small communities where the presence of the state was all but absent.

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[59] See Taylor's *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages*.

Each competing version of the lynching offers a lens to view the larger experiences of Mexico during the Cold War. Viewed separately, each narrative offers insight into the mounting social tensions that enveloped Mexico. No individual narrative tells the entire story or explains precisely what happened. Other portions of the Canoa lynching need to be examined with greater depth.[60] For example, future research needs to examine court proceedings and documents related to the lynchings criminal investigation proceedings. The evidence in these documents (if they exist) would reveal a fascinating new lens to view the lynching's aftermath. One might wonder whether court documents reveal any evidence of other possible motivations for the lynching. The Governor of Puebla was under enormous pressure by the UAP to investigate the Canoa lynching and bring justice to the victims. However, the investigation was ultimately ineffective, hampered immediately by a lack of cooperation amongst Canoa's residents to piece together what happened. Despite multiple arrests, including the town's mayor, none of the intellectual planners served jail time.

When combined and analyzed, the competing narratives shed light on the immense social anxieties that existed in Mexico's countryside in the moments preceding Tlatelolco during the presidency of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. The Canoa lynching slowly faded from public memory and was eventually overshadowed by the government sponsored massacre on October 2, 1968. Only a few local newspapers in Puebla closely followed the subsequent police investigation. It took seven years before Felipe Cazals resurrected the memory of Canoa in a powerful fictional depiction aptly titled, *Canoa*

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[60] For example, further research could be devoted to a racial analysis of the criminal investigation process. It appears the police only convicted indigenous men who barely comprehended the Spanish language. This raises strong questions about the investigation process, or lack thereof.

released to Mexican audiences in 1975. *Canoa* remains an intricate part in the lynching's history, and also a powerful representation of Mexico in 1968, a segment to which we now turn.

CHAPTER 3: VISUALIZING AND REMEMBERING

In the wake of the Tlatelolco massacre on October 2, 1968, the memory of Canoa faded into obscurity for many Mexicans living outside of Puebla. The State had successfully smashed the student movement through the use of violence, intimidation, mass arrests, torture, and faulty trials. Destroying the movement came with a tremendous cost to the political legitimacy of the PRI. President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz publically announced his full responsibility for the events at Tlatelolco in a speech given to the state legislature. The political maneuver allowed Díaz Ordaz the opportunity to promote his most loyal political confidant, Luis Echeverría, to be the *tapado*, the undisclosed successor to the president.[1] As former Minister of the Interior, Echeverría is thought to have been directly responsible for the massacre at Tlatelolco.

During his *sexenio* as President, (1970-1976) Echeverría tried to clean his hands from '68 and take control over the progressive principles fostered by the student movement. He projected an image of himself as a populist president concerned with ideas of social justice.[2] Echeverría's principle tactic to neutralize the democratic threat posed by the generation of '68 involved co-opting many prominent leftist intellectuals into his political administration. Echeverría steered Mexico into a new political direction. Despite his best efforts to reinvent himself as a national hero and the leader of the 'Third World', Echeverría's policies were mostly failures. Ultimately, he never erased his association with Tlatelolco from public memory.[3] In fact, Echeverría's presidency continued the same methods of repression utilized by the Díaz Ordaz administration to

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[1] Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power*, 727.
[2] Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power*, 741.
[3] Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 113.

control political dissidents. Echeverría oversaw Mexico's own version of the Dirty War while simultaneously commandeering the spirit of the student movement and promoting left-wing causes.[4] This hypocritical domestic policy became known as Mexico's so-called "democratic opening," where the Mexican state relaxed its censorship of newspapers and other medias, opening a brief moment of progressivism, and creating a shift in political freedom most Mexicans had never experienced before.[5]

In this chapter, I focus on the power of film representation in the production of public memory by focusing on *Canoa*, released on March 4, 1976 by director Felipe Cazals and screenwriter Tomás Pérez Turrent. This film presented Mexican audiences with a dramatic fictional depiction of the hiker's nightmare. The film remains an intricate component of Canoa's legacy and a powerful depiction of 1968 Mexico. I contend *Canoa* has become the official public memory of the lynching. Due in part to Cazals' documentary-style production, the film influenced how Mexicans perceived the rural countryside during the Cold War, and sanitized the historical memory of the Canoa lynching in a manner that reflected the domestic political policies of President Luis Echeverría.

The popular culture expert Jerome de Groot notes that historical film and allegory are essential for film producers "to work through issues about the recent past, particularly in relation to violence and national identity."[6] Indeed, *Canoa* reconceptualized and simplified the lynching into a narrative that visually blurred history. However, the film

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[4] See Kiddle, Amelia M. and Muñoz, Maria L. O., eds. *Populism in 20th Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2010).
[5] Charles Ramírez Berg, *Cinema of Solitude: A Critical Study of Mexican Film, 1967-1983* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 44.
[6] Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture* (London: Routledge, 2009), 208.

symbolized late 1960s Mexico, and became a reference point for audience members to understand recent Mexican history. The film provided audiences with an emotionally appealing depiction of the Canoa lynching that influenced popular perceptions and culture. Film obviously remains an important medium for filtering history, and for people to gather interpretations about the past. The audience members watching *Canoa* in theatres undoubtedly knew the film was an allegory for 1968 Mexico, and likely viewed the movie seeking explanations for the recent past during the Díaz Ordaz administration that culminated with the bloody Tlatelolco massacre.

Canoa also created a visual template that later influenced how historians and journalists viewed the lynching. In other words, Cazals' fictional depiction became the dominant memory of the lynching that in many ways gained authenticity and continued to influence how Mexicans perceived Canoa and its inhabitants. In one sense, Felipe Cazals untangled the multiple social narratives that developed in the lynching's aftermath and made sense of what happened in the rural community. The film rescued and preserved the faded memory of the Canoa lynching and created a sustained historic interest in the event and the town that remains to the present.[7]

However, the film negatively portrayed Canoa's residents, and insinuated a message to audiences that the lynching was primarily driven by communal bloodlust, religious manipulation, and public ignorance. *Canoa* reintroduced certain tropes and perceptions that have periodically appeared in the official histories of Mexico.[8] These

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[7] See for example the anthropological study by Osvaldo Romero Melgarejo, *La violencia en el centro de México: El linchamiento en la comunidad agrarian de San Miguel Canoa, Puebla* (Puebla: Editorial Académica Española, 2012).

[8] For an analysis of these attitudes and their relation to ideas of order and progress, see Michael Johns, *The City of Mexico in the Age of Díaz* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997); William Beezley, *Judas at the*

tropes center on the traditional image of the pueblo: drunken townspeople staggering down unpaved streets, male residents fearful of social change, a powerful priest assisted by passive women obediently subservient to his instruction, a fanatically devoted flock who adheres to religious order, and ultimately, a hostile and ignorant public who at a moment's notice explodes into unprecedented violence against innocent people. The film also altered the history and made Canoa and its indigenous residents appear backward, barbaric, ignorant, and fanatically devoted to the Catholic Church. These stereotypes are common perceptions of *el pueblo* dating back hundreds of years. These tropes are also found in Mexican cinema, most notably in *María Candelaria* (Fernández, 1944). In that film, a beautiful indigenous woman named in the title (Dolores del Rio) from an undisclosed pueblo in rural Mexico became the village outcast. The film depicts many familiar tropes of *el pueblo*. Later, María agreed to model in a sexually provocative pose for a painter from the big city, in exchange for money she needed to release her husband from the local jail. One resident discovers her in the scandalous pose and returns to the village, where the indigenous community turns hostile against her, culminating with María being stoned to death in front of the village jail. The villagers turned to communal violence to save the reputation of their town.

Canoa reinforced many of these preexisting stereotypes of Mexico's countryside and focused almost entirely on the UAP employee's accounts, as written by the screenwriter Tomás Pérez Turrent. Many historians and journalists were influenced by Cazals' film and filtered their depiction of events using the visual template of *Canoa*. The

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Jockey Club and other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); James Garza, *The Imagined Underworld: Sex, Crime, and Vice in Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); William Taylor, *Drinking Homicide and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979).

film's negative representation of the countryside helped produce a black legend of Canoa that cast a shadow over the community to the very present. In the summer of 2012, during a research trip to Puebla, this researcher noticed evidence suggesting the film continues to influence how *Poblanos* view Canoa.[9] Though this evidence remains very anecdotal, it suggests the film continues to influence how Mexicans perceive the rural countryside. Besides the film, what else could have contributed to this fearful perception of Canoa? Where did this public memory derive from?

Other historical examples are more concrete and shed light on the manner in which journalists filtered their negative perspective of Canoa and its inhabitants through Cazals' version of events. One *Contenido* article published several weeks after *Canoa's* release in Mexico's theaters was exceptional in its negative representation of Canoa's inhabitants, and its dependence on traditional stereotypes of people from *el pueblo.* The article's front page is accompanied with a picture of Tomasa García Arce, the widow of Lucas García who was killed the night of the lynching. Standing barefoot on the dusty ground, wearing traditional clothing wrinkled and worn, a young, melancholy Tomasa holds a faded portrait of her late husband. Yet her harmless characteristics quickly fade away when one reads the introductory paragraph. Immediately, the journalist's reintroduced familiar tropes commonly associated with the people *del pueblo.* Ascensión

[9] While attempting to locate the correct bus to visit San Miguel Canoa from Puebla, many residents told me the town was still very dangerous, especially for outsiders. Aboard a bus line towards the BUAP campus, I questioned a fellow passenger for directions to Canoa. Other passengers overheard the conversation and immediately turned and looked at me the moment I mentioned Canoa in a way that suggests the town's very name still provokes thoughts of violence and disorder. While exploring Canoa, I entered a small store vending pirated DVD's. The storeowner persuaded me to buy a movie, and asked whether I knew there was a film made about the town. The slight excitement in his voice and the manner in which he questioned me and searched for a sellable copy suggests the storeowner felt the town had been made famous by the film. It had seemed *Canoa* entered public memory, remembered and entrenched into the minds of local residents due to the film's success and depiction of the lynching.

Flores is described as, "a tall man, white, his face pockmarked, standing motionless but with a menacing attitude behind Tomasa Arce, his wife. A third man, a friend of the couple, leaned against the wall, too drunk to move and posing a hazard."[10] The journalist depicts Arce and her community using familiar tropes visually depicted in Cazals' film, and throughout the history of Mexico. The journalists describe her threatening attitude immediately. According to the article, at a moment's notice, and without reason Arce shouted an obscenity at the journalists before she ran into her house and produced a double-barrel shotgun. Pointing the weapon at the men, she only lowered the weapon after accepting 100 pesos. The reader understands the indigenous woman would threaten physical harm to obtain a relatively small sum of money. Just a minute earlier, Tomasa had been "a cheerful Indian" dimple cheeked, with four or five children (the journalists lost count) "snaked between her legs, with their eyes glazed over by pulque." Flores, the "current husband" of Arce, "just kept drinking pulque from his drinking bowl." Despite it being before 11 in the morning, "everyone was already drunk."[11] The reader later learns Arce has three additional children who go hungry since she cannot provide for them. These tropes are interwoven throughout the *Contenido* article, reinforcing the common belief Canoa's residents were backward, hostile, and uneducated Indians. These tropes were very similar to those depicted in Cazals film to describe Canoa's inhabitants.

With the March, 1976 release of *Canoa* emerged a renewed public interest in the lynching. This is evident by the number of featured articles printed in the weeks following the film's release. Articles depicting the movie and the lynching appeared in

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[10] Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas," *Contenido,* 73.
[11] Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas," *Contenido,* 76.

newspapers, books, and other publications.[12] San Miguel Canoa suddenly became a tourist location for journalists moved by the film's early success in Mexican theaters. Canoa was rediscovered and its history retold, often through the lens created by Cazals and Turrent. *Canoa* should be credited with building a richer history of the lynching as historians and journalists documented the town's background in far greater detail than initial newspaper accounts, often limited to regional presses in Puebla. Researchers secured interviews with many prominent figures portrayed in the film, including Roberto Rojano, Julián González, Miguel Flores Cruz, Enrique Meza, and Tomasa García Arce. These accounts often reflected upon the film in relation to their own version of events, demonstrating just how significant *Canoa* played in shaping the memory of the lynching.

According to the pioneering work of Robert Robenstone, visual media offers a powerful lens for historians to view the different social and cultural attitudes of a specific era. Robenstone contends the investigation of fictional visual media is an important cultural entity historians can use to help think about their relationships with the past.[13] As Robenstone points out, most fictional and documentary-style films simplify history and overemphasize dramatic events to generate a desired emotion from the audience. Films often reflect the societal moods and opinions of their time, and *Canoa* was no exception.

In many ways, *Canoa* epitomized the Echeverría years. The film visually constructed an ideology that appeared to promote greater freedom of expression while simultaneously conforming to Echeverría's officially sanctioned state policy. Echeverría

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[12] Many of these publications are presented in the citations used throughout this thesis.
[13] Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 3.

projected an image of himself as a populist President deeply connected with the heart of Mexican culture. He distanced from his repressive past during the Díaz Ordaz years by promoting greater freedom to artists and intellectuals, such as Felipe Cazals.[14] As Mexican citizens came to terms with the violent repression of their own government, *Canoa* attempted to erase the bloody memory of Tlatelolco by presenting the state and the Mexican army in favorable terms. The film also promoted President Echeverría's ideas of progress and modernity while simultaneously condemning the role of the Catholic Church.

Though it is beyond the scope of this study to describe the history of Mexican cinema in the 20th Century, it is necessary to briefly summarize the state's involvement with the production of Mexican cinema. This background is necessary to understand how the memory of the Canoa lynching and 1968 Mexico became heavily filtered through Cazals and the state. Other researchers have already explored the rich history of Mexican cinema and in particular *Canoa* in much greater detail.[15] Though my project is not a frame by frame film analysis, I depend on these other works to set the background for the Echeverría period when *Canoa* was released into theaters.

Echeverría's new liberalized vision for Mexico redesigned many of the state's previous economic and cultural policies. These reforms extended into Mexico's national film industry. The state began its vestige interest with film production in the late 1950s.

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[14] Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 126.
[15] See for example, John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Charles Ramírez Berg, *Cinema of Solitude: A Critical Study of Mexican Film, 1967-1983* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Joanne Hershfield and David R. Maciel, eds. *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1999).

By the late 1960s, the state-owned Banco Nacional Cinematográfico (BNC) financed 90 percent of all film production, demonstrating the state's major influence and participation in Mexican cinema.[16] These accelerated changes with state involvement in Mexico's cinema were deeply connected with the massive democratic action in late 1960s Mexico.[17] Unlike his authoritarian predecessor, Echeverría appreciated the Mexican film industry, especially since his brother Rodolfo was a famous actor who starred in a number of popular films. Presidential powers and nepotism allowed Echeverría to appoint his brother Rodolfo to head the BNC, which by the 1970s became the official film producer in Mexico. During Echeverría's sexenio, the state owned 60 percent of all movie theaters and controlled the production for 95 percent of all Mexican films.[18]

Rodolfo Echeverría announced on January 21, 1971 the "Plan for the Restructure of the Mexican Film Industry," implementing new reforms to completely overhaul the Mexican cinema and remove the old establishment of conservative private producers whose films did not reflect the product envisioned in state goals. Echeverría sought to "change the image of the national cinema, so deteriorated and maligned at the beginning of the decade."[19] Through the establishment of a new credit system, the old-guard who controlled Mexico's film production became virtually excluded from the state's control over the market. The Echeverría film project was an extension of the President's liberal vision for Mexico. It allowed the state to revamp and liberalize the film industry, while also ensuring total control over the discourse and content.

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[16] Berg, *Cinema of Solitude*, 44.
[17] Hershfield and Maciel, *Mexico's Cinema*, 200.
[18] Berg, *Cinema of Solitude*, 44.
[19] Quoted from Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema*, 114.

One of the most important developments involved the state's creation of three production companies between 1974 and 1975, named the Corporacion Nacional Cinematográfica (CONACINE), the Corporacion Nacional Cinematográfica de Trabajadores y Estado I (CONACITE I); and the Corporacion Nacional Cinematográfica de Trabajadores y Estado II (CONACITE II). With almost entire control over Mexico's film industry, the state used these companies to facilitate the production and distribution of a new era of "package" films that explored Echeverría's new cultural vision of Mexico. State control also ensured proper state supervision over film content. For example, a typical film first needed the screenplay to be reviewed by state censors. If the screenplay passed inspection, "inspectors" were often sent to observe the physical production of the film. After completion, it was sent to the Director General de la Cinemotografica del Secretaria de Gobernacion, where the state decided whether the film was permissible for release. This system of state management in film production controlled cinematic content, and infused the state's sanctioned ideology within approved films.[20]

With funding from the BNC, and with the Echeverría brothers guiding a new liberalized yet state endorsed conception of Mexican cinema, CONACINE produced its first "package" film *Canoa* by director Felipe Cazals. *Canoa* retells the fictionalized account of the UAP employee's doomed hiking trip to La Malinche and a disturbing visual dramatization of the lynching's. Cazals utilized a fake documentary-style in the beginning of the film that certainly captured the audience's attention. This configuration

[20] Hershfield and Maciel, *Mexico's Cinema*, 198.

of the "apparent" using different styles and genres was analyzed with assistance from Alex Phillips Jr., the director of photography.

Cazals informed this author during an August 2012 interview that he configured *Canoa* into six different tempos.[21] The film began with the text "this did happen" and an overture: two reporters communicating by telephone and reporting the facts and figures about the lynching. The journalists repeated the distorted information initially published in *Excélsior* on September 15, 1968, that blamed the victims for what happened.[22] As Historian John Mraz notes, Cazals purposely used this misleading article as part of his criticism of the media. The film version removed one important sentence from the *Excélsior* article that explained the judicial police of Puebla were sent to Canoa to control the enraged mob. In Cazals' second tempo, the audience views a fictionalized black and white reportage of the lynching's aftermath. The camera moves erratically, capturing the somber faces of Canoa's male villagers looking down at the dead corpses lying in the street. The villagers appear in traditional clothing and wearing sombreros. Women are noticeably absent from this scene. Most significantly are the *Granaderos*, or grenadiers armed with rifles and wearing the distinctive metal helmets with a crest running down the center. Mexico's notorious riot police appear hostile and shove the unarmed residents away with their rifles. The audience watching *Canoa* in 1976 undoubtedly recognized this scene as an allegory for the repressive Díaz Ordaz years, when tens of thousands of

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[21] Felipe Cazals, interview with author, Mexico, August, 7, 2012; Cazals initially agreed to my electronic interview request. However, due to his overwhelming work load, he terminated the interview prematurely.
[22] See "Perecen Cuatro Empleados Poblanos, Linchados en San Miguel Canoa," *Excélsior*, September 15, 1968, reprinted in Cano Andaluz, *1968: Antología periodística.*

student protestors called for an abolishment of the Granaderos, disgracefully known for their long history of abusive treatment towards civilians.[23]

The third tempo utilized a "mockumentary" of San Miguel Canoa that gave the audience an overview of Canoa's local conditions narrated-over in documentary fashion. The audience hears and sees the sordid condition of the villagers and the surrounding areas. This documentary-style helped historicized Cazals' fictionalized account, and presented audiences with official information about the town's residents and their culture. I would argue this documentary form allowed the audience to digest the tropes Cazals depicted of the countryside: a campesino walking a donkey down an unpaved street, long stretches of road with no cars in sight, barren landscapes, and decaying walls passed by a barefoot child herding chickens down a dirt road in the middle of the day. The audience hears the population drinks pulque instead of water, confirming the truly backwards nature of the town.

Cazals' fourth tempo used a village Everyman who represents the village conscience and narrates directly to the camera critical information about Canoa and its residents.[24] Cazals called this man "The Witness," a local "peasant, cunning, evasive when it suits, whistleblower if you fancy, often ironic, serving as a bridge for the continuity of history and becomes a valuable counterpoint" to the film's overall structure and narrative.[25] Cazals depends on this character to provide omnipotent commentary that connects the film viewer with Canoa's local intricacies, and ties the film together from beginning to end.

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[23] Sherman, John W.,"The Mexican 'Miracle' and Its Collapse," In *The Oxford History of Mexico,* edited by Michael C Meyer and William H. Beezley, 599, (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[24] Berg, *Cinema of Solitude,* 188.
[25] Felipe Cazals, interview with author, Mexico, August 7, 2012.

Cazals transitions to the fifth tempo, the central story following the UAP employees from their initial planning stages in Puebla to their subsequent voyage and eventual interaction in Canoa. During this portion of the film preceding the impending nightmare, Cazals used wide camera angles to make the audience feel like distanced observers.[26] The suspense thickens with the ringing of the church bells and the dramatic scene of machete wielding peasants running towards Lucas García's home. The graphic killings and violent beatings of the survivors culminate with an important scene where the enraged crowd encircles the battered victims, ready to finish them off. At the last possible second, the blue helmeted Granaderos arrive to protect the innocent UAP employees before the ambulance whisks the injured off to the hospital.

During the final tempo, *Canoa* enters the epilogue: Daily life in Canoa returns back to normal a few days later, as if nothing happened. A body is laid to rest, presumably that of Lucas García, however only a few villagers attend his funeral. A few weeks later, Canoa's residents are depicted celebrating in the streets during a religious festival. A group of men dance in traditional clothing decorated in elaborate colors. A sizeable crowd watches intently as fireworks are launched from a distance. As the villagers celebrate, "The Witness" appears and notices the camera filming him. He turns away, refusing his obligation to deliver to the audience omnipotent details about what had happened. During this curious scene, the camera pans to follow "The Witness" trying to flee. Running up a flight of stairs, he suddenly notices another camera crew. Cornered, he grudgingly returns to the bottom of the stairs, approaches the camera just as the music dies down. The sound of a film reel spinning induces the sensation he is about to

[26] Felipe Cazals, interview with author, Mexico, August 7, 2012.

announce a profound truth about what happened. In supreme irony, "The Witness" states that if San Miguel Canoa was bad before, now it was worse![27] Finally, the village priest, Enrique Meza is seen leading a religious procession down an unpaved street. Villagers hoist the Archangel while singing a religious melody. As the film cuts to black, the viewer reads text explaining there was no real justice for the slain victims despite a criminal investigation.[28]

The film rendition of the Canoa lynching offered a window for audiences to visualize life in Mexico's countryside during the Cold War. When *Canoa* was released into Mexican theaters, audiences were most likely educated, middle class city-dwellers who identified with Mexico's growing consumer culture. Cazals' visualization of Mexico's countryside helped described the competing visions of Mexican society, between the modern industrial culture found in the big cities, and the underdeveloped and traditional society in the countryside. Mexicans probably filtered these visualized perceptions through their own identity, and understood the cultural perceptions and stereotypes used by Cazals to describe *el pueblo.* The law and the state are visibly stronger in larger cities, whereas the state appears less connected in the countryside. Thus, the local population appears suspicious, violent, uneducated, reactionary, and unfamiliar to the social intricacies and cultural practices provided in more civilized parts of Mexico.

In many ways, *Canoa* echoes the prominent theme of progressivism echoed in other mainstream movies from the 1970s, like *Deliverance* (Boorman, 1972). In that

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[27] See Berg, *Cinema of Solitude,* 188.
[28] *Canoa*, Felipe Cazals. DVD. Produced by CONACINE/STPC. 1975.

film, a group of survivalist men (Jon Voight, Burt Reynolds, Ned Beatty) from the big-city escape to the U.S. countryside to reconnect with nature. They encounter a dilapidated community abandoned by industrial capitalism, and seemingly isolated from the metropole. The men seem capable of conquering this unchartered territory because they are educated, and from a major city. Thus, they can comprehend the intricacies of this simple community without much problem. However, like *Canoa*, their adventure turns into a full-fledged nightmare. A local is killed, and then men are able to dispose of the body because in this rural area, the law is noticeably absent, and vigilante justice is justifiable. Ultimately, the surviving adventures eventually escape. Just before forever leaving the dangerous countryside, a sheriff deputy deeply suspicious of the men and probably aware of their crimes lets them go with a warning: "Don't come back around here. I'd like to see this town die peacefully."[29] The adventurers are therefore protected by the state structured society in the big city. Like *Canoa*, the film reinforces certain preexisting tropes about the rural countryside that disregard local factors and conditions

Miguel Flores Cruz, reflecting on *Canoa* believed the film was roughly 90% accurate to the UAP employee's version of events. CONACINE provided Cruz and the other UAP survivors 25,000 pesos each for their help in production, and 5,000 pesos for the widows of the fallen UAP employees. The survivors asked if they could receive a percentage from the film's profit, however package films produced through the state corporation could not offer this. Instead, CONACINE offered to charge $100 pesos per seat at the opening premier to benefit the men, however this also fell through.[30] The

[29] *Deliverance*. John Boorman. DVD. Produced by Warner Bros. 1972.
[30] Miguel Flores Cruz interviewed in Ochoa, "La Fiesta de la Sangre: Cuando Los Machetes se Dieron Gusto en Canoa," *¡Siempre!*, 23.

UAP survivors received small roles in the film, but did not appear in the credits or receive invitations to the film's premiere in Mexico City.[31] In Canoa, resident Serafín Flores Manzana headed a commission of neighbors that interviewed Rodolfo Echeverría, president of the BNC, with the explicit hope Echeverría would direct a portion of the film's profits be reallocated into Canoa and invested into the construction of schools. "What happened was because of ignorance," stated Flores, "We need to give the children history so that it does not happen again."[32] Significantly, *Canoa* had to be filmed in Santa Rita Tlahuapan, Puebla, and not on location due to fears from producers they might accidentally document their own lynching.[33]

Film critics quickly recognized *Canoa* to be an obvious allegory for the Tlatelolco massacre, and a symbol for the repressive violence inflicted by the Mexican government in 1968.[34] Immediately after the second tempo, Cazals depicts the UAP employee funeral protest march and the army's own preplanned military parade on September 16, 1968. As John Mraz observes, this scene is "a red herring that references the memory of the army's participation in the Tlatelolco massacre to anticipate what the audience expects will be the movie's story."[35] In addition to Mraz, I would also argue the scene recasts a positive memory of Mexico's state power during the late 1960s, as a paternal force that acted with the highest of intentions to preserve peace between protestors and the military.

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[31] Roberto Rojano, cited in Gabriel Peña Rico, "*Canoa:* Sobrevivientes incómodos,*" El Financiero*, 26 February 1999, section Cultura, S2; Quoted in Mraz, *Looking for Mexico,* 207.
[32] Estrada, "Ecos de un Linchamiento en el Pueblo de las Bocinas," *Contenido,* 82; It is unclear whether Canoa received any funds from lobbying Echeverría.
[33] Quoted in Mraz, *Looking for Mexico,* 207.
[34] See for instance Francisco Sánchez's epilogue in Tomás Pérez Turrent, *Canoa: Una Película de Felipe Cazals,* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2007), 238. John Mraz also argues this in his book. See *Looking for Mexico,* 208.
[35] Mraz, *Looking for Mexico,* 208.

During the scene, the drums from the military band grow in intensity, as the audience anticipates an inevitable altercation between the protest march and the military who are marching towards each other. However, just before clashing, unidentified men wearing suits, trench coats and sunglasses—who appear to be undercover security agents—emerge from the crowd and form a barrier for the protestors. These men appeared to have infiltrated the funeral march and emerge in the nick of time to force the protestors and the army to divert towards the left.

During this powerful cinematic moment, three branches of Mexico's society are visualized for the audience in a scene that I view as recasting the memory of Echeverría's role in 1968, Tlatelolco, and the Díaz Ordaz years more broadly. State power is represented by the security agents who stand equidistance between the general population and the military. On one side, the state comes to the protection of the protestors, securing their democratic rights to protest under Luís Echeverría's newly promoted "democratic opening." At first, the bulky security agents demonstrate their bravery to protect the marchers by positioning their bodies in a firm posture towards the military with their legs and arms spread firmly apart. After a matter of seconds, the state agents appear less threatening. Their backs are turned towards the camera while some agents clasp their hands passively behind their back or into their pockets. Their feet shift closer together, relaxing their strong outward appearance once it becomes apparent the civilian marchers are conforming to the wishes of the state to veer left and avoid conflict with the military. The state continues to carefully watch over the protestors, making sure they adhere to state order and control. However, the state agents also maintain an equal distance from the army, symbolizing Echeverría's attempt to promote an image of him and the state as

separate from military power. This also attempted to refashion the memory of Echeverría and Tlatelolco, where the state directed the military to attack the nonviolent student protestors. During the scene, the army dutifully follows its orders to diverge left and avoid conflict, inculcating a memory that the army was innocent from any wrongdoing at Tlatelolco.[36] The security agents maintain their vigilance and surveillance, glancing back and forth to ensure neither the army nor the protestors try to break the symbolic representation of state power (see figure 1). This important scene shows the state as the unquestioned savior of the people, protecting them from past abuses from the military. It recasts the memories of state repression from the Díaz Ordaz years when the weakened state power depended on the disproportional use of force administered by the military against the student protestors. When *Canoa* entered Mexican theaters this was undoubtedly remembered by everyone in the audience.

[36] Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*, 208.

0.1 The state security forces are shown protecting the funeral march from confronting the military parade. Frame enlargement from *Canoa,* Felipe Cazals. DVD. Produced by CONACINE/STPC, 1975.

The scene describes the benevolent nature of Mexico's state during 1968, and inculcates a positive memory to the audience that the state was the unquestioned savior preserving the peace during the turbulent years in the late 1960s. As Mraz correctly observes, "The expected battle of students and soldiers has been avoided thanks to the state's planning, which has foreseen that eventuality and designed the marcher's routes so that they would not run into one another." When *Canoa* was released into Mexican theatres, the audience surely understood the significance of this vital scene as an allegory to Tlatelolco, or at the very least, as an important symbol of the army repression against unarmed democratic protestors under the presidency of Díaz Ordaz. The audience also would have remembered president Echeverría's intimate role within the Díaz Ordaz years, dutifully participating as his predecessor's Minister of the Interior and Mexico's

top policeman.[37] Echeverría undoubtedly received security updates from the Dirección Federal de Seguridad, Mexico's version of the FBI, which monitored the student movement very closely and infiltrated many of the CNH meetings.[38]

One of the only English accounts to describe the Canoa lynching appears briefly within *Plaza of Sacrifices*, by Elaine Carey. Carey analyzes Mexico City's student movement and part of Mexico's counterculture in 1968 using a gendered analysis to explain how the movement gained influence from internal and external forces.[39] In her segment that focuses on the lynching, Carey connects Díaz Ordaz's propaganda campaign against the student movement and the equally negative sentiment printed in the national press as significant motivators that contributed to the communal violence unleashed against the UAP employees.

Carey's analysis of the lynching is a minor detail in her study which focuses primarily on the student movement. However, she uses Cazals' film for one of her citations, along with a misleading *Excélsior* article from September 15, 1968.[40] Her reliance on the film perpetuates Cazals' fictionalized version of events as an objective account of what happened. Carey depends on this version, which, while emphasizing Canoa's fears of communism, ignores the equally significant social anxieties that existed in the town like the CCI, the cattle rustlers, local agricultural problems, and the systemic political corruption. Carey is therefore only partially correct when she asserts Canoa's "townspeople assumed that the young men from Puebla were sympathetic to the student

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[37] Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power*, 739.
[38] See Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifice*, 120.
[39] Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).
[40] Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifice*, 120; See her citation on page 218.

uprising in Mexico City, to communism, and therefore enemies to the Mexican nation and the Catholic Church." Her analysis of the lynching also derives from a film study by Jorge Azala Blanco, and an interview with Felipe Cazals, once again, reaffirming Cazals' fictional depiction as historical truth.

Carey also erroneously states Miguel Flores Cruz died in a hospital from injuries sustained in the attack. She apparently mistranslated the September 18, 1968 *El Heraldo* article about the lynching that actually reported Cruz escaped with his life by "feigning death."[41] Of course, Flores Cruz not only survived the attack, but provided some of the most reliable detailed accounts of the lynching, including his latest interview in 2008.[42] In concluding, Carey posits in 1968 "the attacks did not seem to be related to the Mexican student movement, but the attacks can not be separated from the fact that the townspeople attacked the young men because they assumed they were activists from the Federal District."[43] In fact, the reality is quite contrary to her assertions. Overwhelming evidence suggests many people in and around Canoa, Puebla, and Mexico City immediately recognized the deep connection between the lynchings and the 1968 student movement.[44] It is probably unfair to unjustly criticize Carey's work since her segment on Canoa is only an overview of events and not the essential feature of her book. After all, Carey not only connected the Canoa lynchings in Mexico's countryside with the student movement, but also with the national press, and the cultural representations used to describe young people in 1968. Her segment on Canoa is also one, if not the only

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[41] See "Los Confundieron con Comunistas y los Mataron a Machetazos," *El Heraldo de Mexico,* Sept. 18, 1968, reprinted Aurora Cano Andaluz, *1968: Antología periodística*; Cruz, "fingiendose muerto."
[42] See Miguel Flores Cruz's interview in Enrique Agüera Ibáñez's edited volume *El 68 en Puebla: Memoria y encuentros* (Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Dirección de Fomento Editorial, 2008), 161-181.
[43] Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifice*, 122.
[44] See Chapter 1 and 2 from this study.

English account to describe the event with much detail. However, my research indicates *Canoa* became a visual template used by historians and journalists to filter their interpretation.

Cazals' film replaced many of the competing social narratives in the Canoa lynching's history, and obscured the larger memory of Mexico's experiences during the Cold War. The film also obscures many of the underlying tensions within San Miguel Canoa, such as cattle rustling, crop failures, frustrations to national economic policies, and local political corruption. Canoa's film cannot be viewed as a separate entity autonomous to the overall history of the lynching. It remains an intricate component, as evident from its citations that appear in historical works several decades later. It is also a significant part of the lynching's history that has become the official public memory, and a visual template used to explore Canoa's community and a lens into Mexico's experiences during the 1960s.

The film *Canoa* refashioned an image of Mexico's state as the benevolent, paternal savior for the weak and helpless, and a rational actor in defense of law abiding Mexicans. The film also inculcated an image of the state in conflict with the backward-nature of *el pueblo* and the manipulative tendencies of the Catholic Church. The pueblo, long described with nostalgia by post-revolutionary administrations, became a menacing threat during the Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría presidencies, as rural Mexicans organized against local injustices and national policies. While Echeverría tried to resurrect the populism and legacy of Lázaro Cárdenas, he also sent troops to suppress rural Mexicans who opposed the PRI, most notably Lucio Cabañas, an anti-government guerilla who conducted an insurgency campaign against the government in the late 1960s, and early

1970s, and was killed by Mexican troops in December, 1974. The Mexican army's counterinsurgency campaign in Guerrero utilized state terror, disappearances, torture, and assassinations against rural guerrilla movements during Mexico's own version of the "Dirty War."[45] Cabañas and other rural guerilla activists represented the pueblo, which had become very dangerous and posed a threat to greater Mexico. The depiction of Canoa in the film thus confirmed the government's evolving view toward rural Mexico namely that the inhabitants of small towns are backwards and potentially subversive. As the film depicts quite clearly, Canoa's inhabitants were irrational, uneducated, and in a state of perpetual decay in conflict with modernity and progressivism.

Thus, the film depicted the PRI in a positive light, obscuring the memory of the violent repression in the late 1960s by then president Díaz Ordaz and his Interior Minister, Luis Echeverría. The film also attempted to erase the bloody memory of Tlatelolco by presenting the state as the benevolent protector of social rights and order. The army is shown defending state orders and respecting the rights of protestors, a clear allegory to the Tlatelolco massacre. The film also depicted the Church, long the bane of the post-revolutionary government, as cruel, manipulative, and violent, perhaps resurrecting the memory of the Cristero Revolt. *Canoa* altered the lynching in a way that conformed to a state sanitized version, absent of criticism to national economic policies which proved disastrous to Mexico's rural countryside. The film produced a narrative that blamed the town's powerful priest and the manipulated and stupid inhabitants for the violence. The power of Cazals popular visualization of Canoa also pushed aside certain

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[45] Aviña, Alexander, "We have returned to Porfirian Times: Neopopulism, Counterinsurgency, and the Dirty War in Guerrero, Mexico, 1969-1976, In *Populism in 20th Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría*, edited by Amelia M. Kiddle and María L. O. Muñoz, 107 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

competing narratives, namely that the town reacted to the UAP employees not only out of fear imposed by certain perpetrators, but also by frustrations from political, economic, and climatic factors.

As the Mexican state modernized, traditional Mexico was abandoned to make way for rapid industrialization and a consumer culture. These national policies produced tensions and frustrations evidence in the Canoa lynching. Canoa's residents felt multiple layers of local, regional, and national anxieties connected to the policies of the PRI, and Mexico's national Cold War period. Canoa's residents were not culturally isolated or ignorant of these developments, but instead deeply connected to the metropole through culture, migration, and politics.

CONCLUSION

On December 25, 1969, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article reporting three Puebla state police officers patrolling San Miguel Canoa, persuaded an angry mob from lynching Ernesto and Antonio Bartolia, two brothers accused by villagers for the crime of cheating. According to police, the villagers set up a court, and condemned the brothers to be hanged from a tree in Canoa's zócalo. As the Bartolia brothers prepared to die, with nooses already tied around their necks, the police intervened and stopped the lynching. However, the police could only watch as the people's court "of village elders" imposed a $64 fine against the brothers, and an additional $16 charge for the "crime of cheating." With the physical absence of a strong Mexican state, Canoa's villagers once again rationalized the use of vigilante justice against individuals deemed criminally guilty of crimes against the community. The article claimed San Miguel Canoa had been made "famous for taking the law in its own hands," alluding to the lynching's that occurred there on September 14, 1968.[1]

The lynchings in Canoa represent a microcosm of rural Mexico's experiences during the Cold War. As my research indicates, very powerful social tensions enveloped rural Mexico during the 1960s, especially during the presidency of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. Canoa's residents were intricately connected to the pulse of Mexico's mainstream society, and understood, quite well, the global Cold War, the national political environment under President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, and the many layers of sociopolitical

[1] "Mexican Police Stop Mob from Lynching 2," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 25, 1969, G9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

concerns found nationally, regionally and locally. These layers of political culture filtered into Canoa and were interpreted by the town's residents according to their own historical opinions and experiences. Canoa's residents shared connections with the mainstream through newspapers, politics, migration, and culture. The national political and economic policies during the Díaz Ordaz's years were not exempt from effecting seemingly isolated villages in Mexico's countryside. In fact, analyzing the Canoa lynching indicates these policies were magnified in rural villages. It is perhaps ironic and also symbolic that the famous Canoa lynchings occurred in Puebla, in the very state Díaz Ordaz grew up in and gained his political reputation as an unchallengeable power. Puebla was the traditional bastion for the PRI, and the location for strong conservative support among rural Mexicans. The Canoa lynching exposed the harsh realities of Díaz Ordaz's national policies that abandoned rural farmers and attacked and demonized middle-class student activists. Puebla became an early battleground for student activism in the 1960s. The Mexican state responded to the rise of student protests by supporting right-wing groups like the Santillanistas, who terrorized democratic protestors.

In Canoa, the absence of state power allowed the village priest, the traditional head of small communities in Mexico, to represent the portrait of political authority. As a priest, Enrique Meza became more powerful than most other politically elected leaders. Appointed into his position of religious authority by ecclesiastic authorities, Meza did not need to contend with the political brake of elections or Mexico's lack of consecutive terms. Meza benefited and boasted about his strong political ties with local and regional political leaders who supported the PRI. The PRI could depend on Meza's loyalty, and special role as Canoa's spiritual and political leader. When Meza originally entered

Canoa, he profoundly affected the village's social dynamics. He positioned himself as an image of Mexican state power, and played the role of a quasi-state actor that filled the absence or weakness of state power in the rural countryside.

In 1968, most of Canoa's farmers were deeply affected by Mexico's rapid industrial development known as the Mexican "Miracle." Canoa's primarily agricultural-based economy declined during Mexico's flourishing economic period, as most farmers and their families remained in a precarious position susceptible to markets and the political decisions from the Díaz Ordaz administration. Canoa's residents were further victimized by local systems of political corruption designed by elites to disproportionately levy taxes from rural farmers. A small elite of cacique pulqueros also hired armed thugs who oversaw an elaborate cattle rustling racket, further devastating Canoa's farmers and adding to their mounting anger and frustrations. A series of crop failures, and an economic crisis in Puebla further compounded their hardships.

All of these mounting tensions mixed into the larger context of the Cold War Mexico, where the state experienced a serious challenge to its political legitimacy by the democratic forces of the student movement, and the rise of Mexico's counterculture. Fears of communist subversion spread across Mexico, including San Miguel Canoa, which experienced the same anxieties of political and cultural change as other Mexicans. Located in close proximity to Puebla, Canoa was connected to the big city through culture, migration, and politics. Residents were connected to *El Sol de Puebla* and other media outlets, which disseminated the national tensions to the student protestors on the UAP campus and the nationwide fears of communism. However, Canoa's residents were not ignorant. They recognized the biased nature of the national press which regurgitated

the political sentiment of Díaz Ordaz, who vociferously condemned the student movement as a vital threat to the nation.

It is evident some of Canoa's residents were also influenced and manipulated by the rhetoric extolled by Enrique Meza, who linked the local branch of the CCI with tacit support for communism. Evidence suggests Meza sowed fear of communism into his religious sermons and denounced Canoa's CCI supporters as threats to Canoa's social order. Meza felt vulnerable, and his political power was threatened by the local presence of the CCI. As an effective power broker and an image of state power, Meza replicated the national fears of communism and cultural change. Meza felt susceptible and insecure to his position of power, and acted in a way that projected his fears during moments of crisis. Though he was never formally charged or criminally investigated for his participation in the Canoa lynching, there is little doubt he played a major role in sowing the seeds of conflict and violence, and manipulated his pulpit into responding to the imaginary threats posed by the UAP employees.

The violence inflicted upon Lucas García, Odilón Sanchez, and the UAP employees resulted from a deadly mixture of pent up political and economic frustrations felt by Canoa's residents, along with heightened fears of communism, the student movement, radical social change, and the tensions of the Cold War. The UAP employees were likely confused with students from the UAP School of Economics, who had visited just days prior to their trip, with hopes of linking up with Canoa's local branch of the CCI. These same student activists were accused of raising a red and black flag on Canoa's flagpole, stealing animals, and looting from a local store. Incredibly, these accusations mirrored Mexico's national tensions but also local frustrations found throughout Canoa's

community. Significantly, these accusations identify the deep-seeded problems found in Canoa, and how its residents were deeply connected with the national political environment emanating from the metropole. Undoubtedly, Canoa's residents experienced the Cold War very similarly to other Mexicans.

Lynchings are often viewed as culturally isolated phenomenon, yet the Canoa lynching indicates rural frustrations and collective violence, often connected with periods of national crisis, feed local violence. In the case of Canoa, the violence inflicted and directed against the UAP employees was organized by residents in response to an immediate threat that they posed on the town's social order. In Hannah Arendt's well-known study *On Violence*, she argues violence is often implemented when structures of power and authority feel threatened by challenges to their control. Thus, violence is directed by states or other entities against threats to the current social order.[2]

Whether in fact Enrique Meza was the criminal mastermind behind the Canoa lynching, he could not have single handedly directed the lynching and controlled the outcome without the careful support of individual perpetrators who collectively responded to the calls to attack the supposed communist infiltrators. The UAP employees were likely confused for the UAP School of Economics students in town just days prior to their arrival. The UAP empoyees also entered the house of Lucas García, a known critic of Enrique Meza and a local CCI supporter. Suspicion and fears inevitably spread that the young-looking men from the University of Puebla were conspiring to disrupt the town's social order. In the summer of 1968, the University had its reputation embroiled within the larger narrative of the student movement, and was viewed as a hub

[2] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, 47.

of subversive activities. In 1968, the student movement strikes spread across most of the UAP campus, creating a very tense political moment for all of Puebla. Therefore, it was likely assumed by some of Canoa's residents that the supposed student outsiders who identified with the UAP were in town for malicious reasons. The violence directed against the UAP employees, Lucas García, and Odilón Sanchez was fueled by the national fears of communism, and the intense political, economic, and social frustrations experienced by most of Canoa's residents.

In the immediate aftermath of the lynching, various social narratives developed that tried to make sense of what happened. Each version offers a lens in which to view how Mexicans remembered the lynching, and constructed separate versions. Several of the most powerful versions came from the UAP survivors, the local and national newspapers, government investigators, resident eyewitnesses, the police, and the priest, Enrique Meza. Analyzing the Canoa lynching's aftermath also provides a powerful lens to view the larger issues of community, power, and memory in 1968, in Díaz Ordaz's Mexico. In the lynching's immediate aftermath, noticeable fissures emerged throughout Puebla and Mexico City. Depending on their perspective, Mexican's viewed the lynching in different ways. Some viewed the incident to be directly connected with the national anxieties caused by the student movement and the national newspapers. However, the dominant narrative of the lynching eventually disconnected from Canoa and centered on the events as described by the UAP employees and the powerful University of Puebla who lobbied hardly on their behalf. Many of the narratives that developed in the lynching's aftermath formed outside of Canoa. Noticeably absent from the historiography is the view from Canoa's residents.

Many Poblanos viewed the García-Valseca-owned *El Sol de Puebla* newspaper as the entity responsible for disseminating the negative views of student protestors and young people more generally. In 1968, *El Sol de Puebla* functioned as a daily propagandist for the Díaz Ordaz administration, and warned readers to the threats posed by the student movement and its linkage to international communism. The public outcry against the Canoa lynchings, led by the UAP employees and the UAP University Council, blamed the press for perpetuating a culture of fear that led to the murders. The dedicated social organizing led by the University Council pressured Puebla's police and government to help support the victims, and to investigate to the full extent of the law the crimes committed against the UAP employees. It was an incredibly tense moment in Puebla. The University Council continued its efforts to bring justice for the employees. Their fundraising efforts helped provide financial assistance to the UAP men and the bereaved relatives.

In Canoa's immediate aftermath, the communal violence exposed Enrique Meza power hold to be a paper tiger. After the lynching, many residents openly questioned Enrique Meza's political and religious authority, revealing the real hollowness of his control. Meza himself visited Puebla's military headquarters after allegations surfaced in local newspapers that he was the mastermind responsible for the lynchings. His visit to the military headquarters demonstrated Meza shared genuine fears about communist insurrection, but also that he was directly connected to the political pulse of Puebla. Meza eventually lost his position of power and was relieved of his duties by ecclesiastical authorities in 1969. The lynching's aftermath in Canoa revealed residents also believed Padre Meza, and the García-Velseca newspapers were culpable for the lynching.

Nevertheless, the subsequent police investigations into the lynchings were ultimately failures. No high level perpetrators received prison sentences, even though the town's mayor and priest were known to have participated in the incident at some level. Only two low-level indigenous participants were ever found guilty and imprisoned. Even the reported criminals investigated and ultimately incarcerated for inciting the mob maintained their innocence to the very end. Evidence suggests their arrest and trials were shams concocted by the state to protect those really responsible. Future research needs to explore the Canoa lynching's subsequent investigation and criminal trials in greater detail to elucidate this important chapter in the lynching's history.

After an initial wave of scattered and fairly inaccurate press reports, the memory of the Canoa lynching eventually faded behind Tlatelolco. However, seven years later, Felipe Cazals resurrected the memory through his fictional film adaptation released to Mexican audiences in 1975. In one sense, Cazals untangled the various narratives that existed and made sense of what happened, preserving the Canoa lynching albeit in a manner that reinforced preexisting stereotypes about the countryside. The film altered the history and made Canoa and its residents seem backward, barbaric, ignorant, and fanatical. These are common perceptions of *el pueblo* dating back hundreds of years. The film obfuscates Canoa's severe political and social tension and connection with the student movement, and the national political pulse. Although Cazals alludes to some of Canoa's internal problems, ultimately, *Canoa* blurs the memory of the lynching as being the result of religious fanaticism and manipulation, communal ignorance, backwardness, drunkenness, and rural underdevelopment.

Canoa obscured the larger memory of Mexico's experience during the Cold War and refashioned a positive image of the Mexican state. Released through CONACINE, the state-owned film corporation, the state managed and controlled film content and monitored movie productions and film scripts to ensure storylines were acceptable to state interests. In many ways, *Canoa* reflected the political and social policies of President Luis Echeverría, who projected an image as a populist during his sexenio from 1970-1976. Just as Echeverría spent his presidency attempting to clean his hands of Tlatelolco, *Canoa* also attempted to erase the memory by creating a positive memory of the Mexican state, as the paternal figure who acted benevolently to keep the peace during the turbulent 1960s. The important "Phantom '68" scene described in chapter 3, represents the ultimate metaphor for Echeverría's "democratic opening" domestic policy, and a powerful reminder to audiences attempting to comprehend the widespread repression during the Díaz Ordaz administration. The scene recast Echeverría's role in 1968, Tlatelolco, and during the Díaz Ordaz years by representing state power as a non-threatening entity who dutifully allowed the general population its right to democratic protest, albeit in a manner that never formidably challenged the Mexican state. Cazals' powerful, documentary-style visualization of the Canoa lynching became the dominant public memory of the lynching, and continues to influence how Mexicans perceive the rural countryside during the Cold War.

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