Tomorrow’s Dream, Yesterday’s Nightmare: Politics and the Meaning of Youth in Postrevolutionary Mexico

by

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Abstract

The 1968 Tlatelolco massacre has long stood as postrevolutionary Mexico’s “watershed” moment that broke the Partido Revolucionario Institucional’s ideological hold and solidified democratic opposition to its rule. This thesis explores a public debate about youth during the period of 1940-1972 that complicates this conclusion. It examines how conservatives used this debate to articulate their politics, often in opposition to the regime’s modernization project. Subsequently, it argues that their language of delinquency unintentionally engendered and politicized youths by the 1960s, while excluding their voices from any meaningful debate. Consequently, rhetorical violence escalated to physical violence in 1968. After Tlatelolco, the thesis argues that conservatives moved towards a depoliticizing narrative of pathology and addiction that recast youth as mentally ill. Finally, it reconsiders the legacy of 1968 by suggesting a link between this pathologizing language and the emergence of a mainstream conservative movement in contemporary Mexican politics.

Keywords: Youth; Tlatelolco; Postrevolutionary Mexico; Conservatism; Democratization; 1968
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Introduction

When the crimes of the country called the Soviet Union became too scandalous, a leftist had two choices: either to spit on his former life and stop marching or (more or less sheepishly) to reclassify the Soviet Union as an obstacle to the Grand March and march on. — Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

On October 2nd, 1968 the Mexican army assaulted a massive student demonstration in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* in the heart of Mexico City. The soldiers killed hundreds, perhaps thousands, and spirited countless more into clandestine prisons and torture centres.¹ Despite the official denials and silence from the authoritarian *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), the Tlatelolco Massacre has occupied a central place in the public narrative and memory of the postrevolutionary era. Today, a memorial stands on the site of the massacre and offers visitors an interactive aural/visual walk through the ’68 student movement and October 2nd. Design of the memorial began in 2004, during the administration of the left wing Mexico City mayor Andrés Manuel Lopéz Obrador, and it was inaugurated on October 22, 2007 in an event that included a speech by ’68 chronicler and prominent political figure Elena Poniatowska. Today, the *Memorial del 68* in the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM)’s Centro Cultural Universitario Tlatelolco stands as the dominant physical expression of memory at the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas*.² Visiting this memoryscape in 2011, I found myself both intrigued and troubled by the narrative offered by the installation.

The walk begins in a dark corridor that is lined with a series of lampshade speakers hanging over images of the self-styled student leaders of ’68. Here the viewer meets the household names of the movement and is invited to listen to their narratives. Luis Tomás Cervantes Cabeza de Vaca, Paco Ignacio Taibo II, Marcelino Perelló Valls, José Moreno de Alba, Gilberto Guevara Niebla, and Elena Poniatowska – these are some of the personalities, and the voices, closely associated with 1968 in Mexico. Both as participants and as commentators they represent part of a handful of “authentic” ’68ers who have carved out the authority to speak on behalf of the movement, and the past. But in an ironic twist, the voices of the memorial compete with one another, replacing a series of meaningful, individual memories with cacophony. Here, the memorial affirms Kristin Ross’s claim that the politics of 1968 have been dissolved, dissipated, and actively forgotten not through silence, but through an enormous amount of narrative labour.³

This presentation of retrospectively defined, self-styled leaders, the ones who now own the meaning of ’68, does more than just lose itself in a confusion of voices. It narrates an explanation of the 1968 movement in Mexico that, with the complicity of these ’68ers, does a different sort of violence to the politics that were attacked at Tlatelolco. This violence is anchored to the memorial’s contextualization of the movement and to its legacy-building purpose. Using images from the global 1960s and from Mexico’s period of rapid economic growth and urbanization between 1940 and 1968, the memoryscape visually tells a story of authoritarian modernization in the context of an international revolution of youth culture. One sees few images of equality-based, overtly political protests such as the May demonstrations in Paris, or confrontations in Tokyo or Berkeley, or even the anti-Imperial Prague Spring. Rather,

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² There are two other sites of memory at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas: an obelisk adorned with a poem by Rosario Castellanos, and graffiti images that echo the narrative of the Memorial del 68. For information on the memorial, see: Centro Cultural Universitario Tlatelolco, http://www.tlatelolco.unam.mx/museos1.html. (accessed January 18, 2012)
images of the Beatles, Hippies, Woodstock, and sexual liberation orient the reader toward the inevitable clash between a modern and youthful culture of individual liberty and the stuffy, old, bureaucratic-authoritarian PRI.

This contextual backdrop prepares the visitor for the winding corridors that narrate the Mexican student movement and the massacre of October 2nd. Descending a shadowy staircase, and passing through an open doorway, the memoryscape opens into a room that houses ephemera from 1968. Using pamphlets and brochures, newspaper clippings, and photographs from the UNAM campus, the collection emphasizes the peaceful, progressive, and democratizing nature of a youth movement led directly by a representative student body – the Consejo Nacional de Huelga (CNH). This portrayal of young, democratic innocence contrasts starkly with the images that represent the state. Here, pictures of victimized, bloodied demonstrators, dead bodies in the morgue, and heavily armed government troops depict the brutality of the PRI. This visual contrast echoes a common yet problematic claim about the meaning of 1968 in Mexico. For both public and academic historians, Tlatelolco has become the watershed moment that woke Mexicans to the repressive nature of their government, and galvanized progressive, democratizing opposition to its rule.

After this depiction of the massacre, the viewer arrives at the installation depicting the site on the morning of October 3rd – the aftermath. Recreating an affecting photograph taken at the scene, the memorial offers a bare concrete floor with scattered

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belongings. The only traces of the disappeared victims emphasize feminized vulnerability: a woman’s sweater, her sunglasses, a pair of high heels, a bowler hat, and a single, tiny child’s shoe. Finally, the memoryscape ends in a bright, fluorescently lit room that is covered with the backlit images of brutalized students behind bars.

As a narrative of 1968, the Memorial del 68 evokes several widespread myths that exist in both academic and public debates about the student movement and the massacre of October 2nd. For one, its simplistic, pseudo-sociological reading of the clash between an economically modernizing, yet socially stagnant authoritarian state, and a democratizing middle class social movement says more about the present than it does about the politics of 1968.\(^5\) As Kristin Ross argues, in the post-1989 world, existing socialism has become unthinkable.\(^6\) So in the memorial’s nostalgic desire to assert a resonant legacy, it denies the radical, Marxist-based equality inherent in the language of 1968. Instead, it equates democracy with progress and makes the movement part of that teleological narrative. As such, the memorial fails to consider the unrealized, radical potential of the demonstrations, and it puts their project into “a necessary continuum with the present.”\(^7\) Thus, in seeking to assert a continual relevance for the movement, the memorial actually silences the politics of those who took to the streets under the banner of equality in the 1960s. In this way, 1968 becomes apolitical.

Here, the memorial reiterates Octavio Paz’s claims that if the PRI had just modernized its political system and democratized itself and the country, 1968 would not have happened.\(^8\) Consequently, the protestors become either feminized victims or

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\(^6\) Ross, 19.

\(^7\) Ross, 149.

masculine martyrs for teleological progress. In either case, they represent the necessary, albeit regrettable cost of Mexico’s “watershed moment.”

But for all its problematic traits, this nostalgic, legacy-building narrative of democratization may serve yet another, almost cathartic purpose. For one, it validates the victims of repression, assuaging fears that they perhaps died in vain. And as Daniel James argues, commemorations of atrocities often tell stories that mask contemporary conflict. They do so by offering a safe narrative rooted in the lowest common denominator amongst the demonstrators. In this case, democratization is something that all can embrace, and it is something that, in theory, has been achieved.

Furthermore, the Memorial del 68 develops a plot in which a powerful state that no longer exists violently repressed the people. Like much of the academic literature on 1968, this puts only two antagonists into the spotlight and gives a tangible target for projecting blame and anger. Here, as James finds in the Monument to the Disappeared in Berisso, Argentina, the Tlatelolco memorial skirts the uncomfortable, perhaps impossible, question of tacit complicity and responsibility, the collective looking away that Diana Taylor calls “percepticide.” Only by locating blame in a past that disappeared with the PRIista regime can a commemoration escape this divisive part of the story. But a Manichean world of good and evil necessarily simplifies the past, and

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11 On July 2, 2000, Mexicans elected the Partido Acción Nacional candidate Vicente Fox Quesada president. The historic election marked the first presidential election defeat of the PRI in 71 years.
14 James, 28; Taylor, “Percepticide,” 122-124.
this story is no different. Like James, we are left asking, what complications does this narrative of 1968 mask?

In that light, it is worth taking a step back from the Memorial del 68, and challenging the refrain of the “watershed moment.” This means revisiting the period predating 1968 and asking how different groups within Mexico contested the political, and by extension, the PRI before Tlatelolco. It means asking how, in the context of rapid social, economic, and demographic change during Mexico’s postrevolutionary “Golden Age” (1940-1968), did Mexicans resist, negotiate, and come to terms with the profound transformations going on around them? And how might this story reshape the way we narrate 1968 in Mexico?

Over the span of just three decades (1940-1968), and in the wake of a turbulent era of revolutionary upheaval, a new middle class political elite emerged from within the PRI and allied itself, albeit uneasily, with a much older business elite. Together, this group of lawyers, bureaucrats, and entrepreneurs encouraged high levels of foreign investment, transforming the economy and leading to annual growth rates of over 6%. In commercial terms, this project, dubbed “modernization” in the regime’s rhetoric, brought global pop-culture and Americanization to a burgeoning urban middle class, while it overwhelmed the “vestiges of a slower-paced traditional life.” At the same time, the highly unequal nature of growth produced “especially devastating” effects in the countryside and caused a massive depopulation of rural Mexico as peasants fled the land for a better life in the exploding urban centres. As a result, urban populations were far larger than infrastructure or housing could support while the spatial expansion of the Mexico City was nothing short of disorienting. From 1940 to 1970, the capital’s

18 Padilla, Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata, 9.
19 Kandell, La Capital, 486-487.
population grew from 1.5 million inhabitants to an estimated 8.5 million, forcing many migrant families into cramped, deteriorating one-room tenements.\textsuperscript{20}

To date, historical studies of the “Golden Age” share a tendency with narratives of 1968. They focus largely on the relationship between a regime with hegemonic aspirations, and the people who negotiated, resisted, and subverted those aspirations in an “everyday” fashion.\textsuperscript{21} For all the work these historians have accomplished in seeing the state not as a thing, but as a cultural and ideological project, they continue to concentrate principally on the process of state formation.\textsuperscript{22} This trend informs many conclusions about 1968, and lays the groundwork for seeing Tlatelolco as a “watershed moment.” Thus, as historians celebrate the student movement’s “rupturing of the state’s monopoly over symbolic capital,”\textsuperscript{23} they reaffirm the memorial’s narrative of democratization and credit the students with waking Mexicans from the hegemonic hold of the authoritarian regime.\textsuperscript{24} But these conclusions give far too much weight to the PRI’s ideological power, and not enough to the ways that people shaped the political and negotiated vertiginous change outside of the realm of the state between 1940 and 1968.

A careful analysis of Mexico’s discursive climate during this period of intense growth shows the concurrent emergence of youth as a subject of heated debate among a broad cross-section of people. Mexico was not unique in this way. As scholars are beginning to uncover, public debates about the meaning and role of youth in the 20th century were transnational phenomena with distinct local expressions. Furthermore,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Zolov, \textit{Refried Elvis}, 177.
\end{itemize}
these conversations were especially pronounced in societies undertaking modernization projects and/or post-war reconstruction. In this thesis, I argue that the particularities of this debate in Mexico shed light on the way that a significant number of people engaged openly in the political during the postrevolutionary “Golden Age.”

Tracking the way that conservative journalists, doctors, lawyers, psychiatric specialists, bureaucrats, clerics, politicians, and parents publically discussed the subject of youth from the mid-1940s through the early 1970s, I show that the specific language that these commentators used to define and deliberate on the meaning of youth changed noticeably over time, and I argue that these changes reflect important larger developments in the politics of the period. Specifically, I claim that this conversation reveals one of the ways in which Mexican conservatives resisted the profound changes associated with modernization, and contested every inch of the political terrain before 1968.

Reading this debate, I trace an emerging socially and culturally constructed age category and I use it as an analytical tool for interpreting the political climate of the period. In essence, I argue that commentators inscribed the meaning of youth onto a vast and at times unrelated group of subjects through their language, assumptions, and ideas about people of a certain, ill-defined age. And I show that this construction tells us something important about postrevolutionary Mexican politics. While conservatives overtly discussed the subject of youth, I argue that their conversations served principally

24 Sergio Aguayo Quezada, La charola, 132.; Carey, Plaza of Sacrifices; Matthew C. Gutmann, The Romance of Democracy, 61-72; Paco Ignacio Taibo II, ’68; Silvia González Marín and Ana María Sánchez Sáenz eds., Diálogos sobre el 68; Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein and Eric Zolov, eds., Fragments of a Golden Age, 11-12.
as an allegorical mechanism through which they deliberated on and negotiated their pasts, presents, and futures in the public sphere. And as historian Richard Ivan Jobs suggests, these global debates spoke more to the profound changes unfolding around commentators than they did to youths themselves.\textsuperscript{26}

The growing body of literature on the subject of youth shows that the meaning of this category is never stable, its cultural currency depends heavily on the specific historical context in question. In Mexico’s mid-century period of economic growth and middle class expansion, the figure of the student became almost interchangeable with the category of youth in the urban imaginary. Moreover, commentators defined this group in terms of contrast. Adults were capable of making decisions, and they could be held responsible for their actions, be they positively or negatively perceived. In short, they were full political agents. Conversely, youths were passive, pre-political, malleable, and corruptible.\textsuperscript{27} This relatively stable aspect of the definition of youth in Mexico is the key to understanding the politicized nature of the public debate. As youth came to mean something necessarily passive, criticisms of its corruption, delinquency, or degeneracy must be read as criticisms of adult Mexico, or those full subjects who could be held accountable. Relying on this assumption, conservative Mexicans were able to use the category as an effective vehicle for talking about the political in ways that suggest a deep rejection of the PRI\textsuperscript{\textdagger} modernization project and the changes it wrought.

As for those commentators, their politics are rooted in their very words. Many who invested in the debate on youth, regardless of the issue at hand, put forth a political vision inextricably linked to a long-standing Mexican variant of conservatism. Despite initial enthusiasm for the potential fruits of modernization in the 1940s, they expressed great anxiety over the threat that modernity posed to their foundational traditions. They characterized these traditions in terms of an intense Catholicism; a deeply patriarchal,

\textsuperscript{26} Jobs, \textit{Riding the New Wave}, 3-7.
\textsuperscript{27} Jobs., 8-9.
and hierarchical social structure; social regulation through the concept of honour; and a rigid definition of gender roles that bordered on the misogynistic.²⁸

An important part of this thesis and an extension of the inherent conservatism of this debate comes through in the way the very language and logic of the debate actively excluded the voices of youths themselves from any meaningful conversation. In their assumptions and their arguments about youth, commentators excluded the possibility of political agency among youth. Thus, they shut many intensely political groups out of dialogue, opting instead to search for a hidden, corrupting cause of their politics. This was driven simply by the perceived age and behaviour, the youthfulness, of the people involved in those politicized groups. These conservative assumptions defined much of the debate about youth in Mexico’s postrevolutionary period, and they shape the arc of the story I tell about the era.

Throughout this thesis, I examine the way a language of youth served conservatives as a way of engaging in the political. In these instances of close analysis, I use the term “youth” to refer to a constructed age-category. This is the main subject of my argument, and I am concerned with the way it operated at the level of discourse. At times, however, I also discuss the actions, words, and politics of people that commentators lumped into the homogenizing age category of youth. While this category served allegorically in the realm of language, it had concrete effects on those who could be spoken of as “youth.” Moreover, some of the individuals and groups who could be described in this way often referred to themselves as youth. So despite potential confusion, I have chosen to maintain this language: when discussing young people as actors, I use the term “youths.”

This thesis proceeds in an overlapping, loosely chronological fashion that is meant to capture the tone and tenor of the public debate at a given moment. Chapter One covers the early post-war period and carries through into the 1960s. Here I trace the early evolution of the debate and show how conservatives deployed the concept of youth to engage in a hopeful politics of tomorrow. While they came to imagine youth as a means to engineering the future during this period, I argue that the development of an increasingly disciplinary and regulatory power relationship led to a tangible politicization of youths across the political spectrum.

Chapter Two covers the long 1960s: a period defined by the rise of counterculture, civil rights movements, rock music, and a sense of deep existential crisis among conservatives and radicals alike. Thus, this chapter deals with an anxious politics of the present. Here, I show how commentators struggled to make sense of the global counterculture by employing a depoliticizing language of victimization, moral corruption, and juvenile delinquency. I argue that this language reconciled the spectacle of politicized youths with conservative assumptions about youth passivity, and became a vehicle for openly critiquing the project of modernization in the 1960s. But I also claim that this mechanism actively excluded youths from the public debate, and created a climate of rhetorical violence that exploded physically in 1968.

In Chapter Three I interrogate an important backward looking conversation that occurred in the wake of the Tlatelolco massacre. During the short period of 1968 through 1972, the Mexican psychiatric community intervened in the public debate and introduced a pathologizing language of youth drug addiction. Here I argue that their narrative offered both an explanation for the tumult of the late 1960s and a moralistic critique of modernization that fit into the conservative rhetorical framework. I also link this medicalized language of youth to the formation of a biopolitical regime of surveillance in post-'68 Mexico that effectively depoliticized the countercultural politics.

Finally, I conclude by contemplating other ways we might narrate 1968 and democratization. In this short afterword, I pose several questions about the experience of the 1960s, the subsequent language of drug addiction and pathology, and the rise of right wing politics in contemporary Mexico.
Chapter 1: El Tesoro del Futuro

On July 27, 1943, the Continental Conference of Youth for Victory convened in Mexico City. As a keynote speaker, the prominent lawyer and writer Ramón Sánchez Medal called on youth to address the central problem of their time: “the reconstruction of the world of tomorrow.” He went on to instruct his audience on the importance of building a future of “tranquility in order” based on justice, progress, and destiny, while imploring both nations and individuals to realize their “mission in the world.”

Several days later, in a celebration marking the opening of the third national campaign of the youth group Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana (ACJM), ACJM official José González Torres spoke before a large audience of young people as well as prominent members of the Mexican clergy. Describing their present context, and urging young Mexicans to action, González Torres argued:

We are living in a moment full of uncertainty. We are witnessing the liquidation of one order of things and the construction of a new one. Everyone speaks of a ‘new order.’ ‘New’ does not mean good. In a way, the new order could be evil. The new order is an empty formula to which we are going to give content: it is something like a container from which one could pour mortal venom or exquisite and healthy juice.

He then went on to extol the critical value of youth service, especially in organizations such as the ACJM, for securing a future free of the poisons he mentioned in his speech.

29 “Noticias de la Acción Católica: la ACJM ante el mundo de mañana,” Novedades, August 8, 1943.
30 “Noticias de la Acción Católica”
31 “Sabrán cumplir con sus deberes patrióticos todos los jóvenes católicos de la República Mexicana,” Novedades, August 1, 1943.
These speeches reveal an emerging and important discursive framework in postrevolutionary Mexico. Addressing their respective audiences, Sánchez Medal and González Torres united two concepts that came to dominate much of the vibrant public debate during the following three decades: youth and the future. In both cases, the authors drew distinct and deliberate connections between the idea of youth and a project of shaping an inherently ambiguous, new, and boundless future.

In this chapter, I argue that a number of conservative groups turned to youth as a way of engaging in this forward looking politics and engineering their notion of an ideal future society in the wake of World War II. From the mid 1940s into the 1960s, their commentaries inscribed the fluid age-category of youth with essentially passive traits. In the language of this public debate, it signified something malleable and pre-political; something that through intense moulding and guidance offered an opportunity to shape Mexico’s future along the lines of a Catholic and conservative vision. But while the idea of youth first carried with it a sense of hope and optimism, the rising stakes of both the Cold War and economic modernization led commentators to identify this category as a potential threat to their imagined utopian future. As a result, I argue, a cross-section of conservative journalists, politicians, bureaucrats, and legal thinkers helped along the emergence of an ambivalent mass subject to be known, discussed, and disciplined. However, they also inadvertently engendered a group that by the 1960s, would begin to talk back.

As the Second World War entered its final stages, and an Allied victory seemed imminent, people all over the world looked toward a future defined by newness. Having experienced nearly 30 years of continual and destructive conflict, things would not continue to function as they had, and public debates across the planet turned to the establishment of a new geopolitical and social order. Mexico too, despite its distance from the war, experienced this particular moment as one of transition. After the violence, bitter social conflict, and divisive anti-clericalism of the Mexican Revolution(s) (1910-
1929), president Lázaro Cárdenas attempted a project of radical agrarian socialism during his sexenio (1934-1940). This turn of events exacerbated old ideological tensions and created new ones between conservative Catholics and leftists of nationalist and internationalist stripes – tensions that remained just beneath the surface throughout the Cold War in Mexico. Despite this trend towards radical upheavals, the 1940s marked a distinct turn away from revolutionary socialism. By 1938, Cárdenas began to drift towards the centre of the political spectrum. And within two years, his successor Manuel Ávila Camacho ushered in an era of full-fledged capitalist modernization paired with deeply patriarchal social values. Moreover, these changes took place under the political guidance of the corporatist, one-party state. At this juncture, the impending rearrangement of the political and economic order signified an unforeseeable future, full of potential. It also produced a sense of anxious hope among those debating the construction of the post-war world.

For Mexican conservatives, standing on the cusp of something new and unknown, the future presented a historic opportunity to remake society after years of revolutionary threats to Catholicism and conservative interests. To unpack their perceptions of this moment, their vociferous and optimistic commentaries on both youth and the future, I rely on David Scott’s analytical concept of ‘problem-spaces.’ He defines this concept as a discursive context, “an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs.” As a corollary, he invites us to historicize the future as part of a given problem-space, and see it as what he calls “futures past.” Historicizing the future in Mexico’s

public debate helps to frame and give meaning to the conservative focus on youth, and to understand its links to their political project of the 1940s.

In the immediate fallout from the war, the clearest stake of all among those involved in the public discussion was the construction of a new order. At the outset of this debate, conservative groups and members of the Mexican clergy articulated their vision of a future rooted in a desire for traditional social order, peace, and national progress under the auspices of the state. Echoing this perspective in his speech at the Continental Conference of youth for victory, Ramón Sánchez Medal advocated the necessity of an open market with free access to goods so that Mexicans, and the world, might find lasting peace and ensure national progress.\(^{37}\) Meanwhile, ACJM President General Ignacio Soto Sobreyra called upon Mexicans to recognize Catholicism as one of the key elements of \textit{la patria}. For him, Catholicism represented “the source and origin of national life, the defense of traditions and customs, the shining beacon of intelligence, the guide of will, strength of heart and indestructible shield of Mexicans in both life and death.”\(^{38}\) Soto Sobreyra closed his speech by urging youth to dedicate themselves to serving Mexico and crafting a future that would follow this message of the church.\(^{39}\) Clearly then, from the earliest discussion of a post-war world, these conservatives expressed a desire to reconcile their interests with those of a patriarchal, authoritarian government. For them, a future of progress grounded in the ideals of Catholic social doctrine was an acceptable alternative to that of the revolutionary socialism of the 1930s. They even hinted that youth was a key element for realizing this quasi-utopian vision.

By 1944, this emerging public discussion had moved emphatically toward the roles and responsibilities of youth in the construction of the future. A central trope that


\(^{38}\) “Sabrán cumplir con sus deberes patrióticos todos los jóvenes católicos de la República Mexicana,” \textit{Novedades}, August 1, 1943.

\(^{39}\) “Sabrán cumplir con sus deberes patrióticos todos los jóvenes católicos de la República Mexicana.”
media figures employed to this end was one of debt to those fallen in World War II and to Mexicans of previous generations. Writing about the 1944 national congress for the Confederación de Jóvenes Mexicanos (CJM), a scant five years after its inauguration, one journalist laid out the guidelines for “the great task of Mexican youth.”  

The author opened his piece by solemnly declaring that the work of the CJM would greatly affect both the present and the future of Mexico. Here he claimed, “if our youth can look to the future with confidence, it is because millions of youth have generously offered their lives for all of us.” Then, compounding the debt, the author went on to identify a special obligation to past generations of Mexicans for their work and sacrifice building the nation. Yet this trope did more than just highlight the sacrifices of others in the recent and distant past. It also subsumed an ill defined and otherwise unrelated body of individuals under the rubric of youth, creating a mass category and deploying it as a way of shaping the future – repaying the greatest of all obligations through “the giant task of building a grand patria, generous and clean.”

Yet for all its heavy language and historic grandeur, the article did not lose the underlying tone of optimism attached to youth in its author’s imagination. In fact it specified that ‘if the world is living its most cruel and dramatic hour, never in human history has a greater hope been evident.” The hope was that youth, conscious of its burdensome debts, would engage in service to la patria under the direction of one of the newly formed, and rapidly growing, conservative youth groups. Inherent was the assumption that youth would be transformed through, or at least guided by, this undertaking. In turn, those full political subjects, or adults, charged with leading and administering the groups such as the ACJM or the CJM, would actually gain direct and transformative access to the citizens of tomorrow. Thus, they could intervene to help engineer the future they desired.

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40 “La gran tarea de la juventud mexicana,” El Popular, July 1, 1944.
41 “La gran tarea de la juventud mexicana,” El Popular, July 1, 1944.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
However, as Cold War politics in the Americas intensified into the 1950s and the Mexican economic miracle commenced in earnest, conservative commentaries on the future began to lose some of their utopianism. Frankly, the limits imposed on the future were more discernable than in 1943, and the Mexican economy seemed to be hurrying the country toward the modern, urbanized world at break-neck speed. At the same time, PRIista bureaucrats gave an increasingly institutional home to a discourse that defined youth as a means to transforming the future. With the building of a new university campus and the founding of the Instituto Nacional de Jovenes Mexicanos (INJUVE), state bureaucrats and conservative journalists engaged in a joint-effort to guide youth physically, mentally, and spiritually towards a distinctly anti-communist, Catholic, and conservative vision of national progress. Consequently, what this project lost in utopianism, it gained in disciplinary power, seeking to regulate the lives of youth and occupy any time spent outside the schoolhouse.

First considered in 1943 and then completed in 1952, the construction of Mexico City’s Ciudad Universitaria (CU) – a massive, modernist campus designed to hold the UNAM in one contained space – offers an excellent example of the sort of disciplinary thinking applied to youth in this period. In fact, early discussion of the project’s merits and faults defined the issue at hand as a “problem of public order.” Commentators pointed to the enormous population of the city as well as the rapidly growing student body and lamented the massive distraction that the combination posed for the discipline of study. One editorial discussing the infinite distractions of the city complained that students “are at an age in which the things of the street call to them,” and thus must be isolated from the general population to undertake their education. Reiterating the claim that youth was a malleable, pre-political category, and thus easily corrupted by its

46 “La Ciudad Universitaria.”
surroundings, the author’s argument for the building of CU hinged on the assumption that students were uniformly predisposed to distraction and social disorder. Accordingly, they needed an isolated and controlled environment to facilitate their development. Another editorial furthered the point by saying, “the student, at the margin of quotidian solicitations of vagrancy, will be able to dedicate himself entirely, and during the entire day, to that which constitutes his essential duty: to study.”

While CU debate shows the increasing power within the relationship between youths and the conservative journalists and bureaucrats, a more explicit example involved state bureaucrats deepening their regulatory control as they developed a new institutional network for the guidance of youth. With the decree of January 30, 1950, president Miguel Alemán inaugurated the Instituto Nacional de la Juventud Mexicana (INJUVE) saying,

> la patria grows and will flower on the shoulders of its youth; youth that works in the fields, in the workshops and factories, youth that studies in technical institutes, colleges for teachers, agriculturists and military officers, and in the university.

The president’s words clearly expressed the hopefulness of the conservative discourse of youth, but they also captured one of the key aspects of the developing power relationship inherent in the language of the debate: youth was the lowest common denominator. Essentially, by talking about and producing knowledge about youth, conservatives were able to incorporate other social divisions, such as class, gender, race, ethnicity or sexuality and create “an agreeable matrix” through which they could dispute the national future. Moreover, their debate cast this slippery age category as something natural and existent outside the realm of language. Founding the INJUVE, Alemán exemplified this very aspect by calling on an incredibly diverse group of Mexicans, and uniting them solely on the basis of age. Moreover, the president’s

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inaugural decree institutionalized one of the central claims of the now ubiquitous debate about the meaning of youth stating, “the future of la patria depends on Mexican youth.”

Thus, with the founding of INJUVE, President Alemán signalled the momentum and direction of the public conversation by explicitly linking all Mexican youths under a cultural construct, and then targeting it as the key to shaping the nation’s future.

Alongside the creation of INJUVE, the explicit goals of the institute attest to the productive power at work within this debate. For example, in a 1952 message to the public that betrayed conservative ideas of who qualified for citizenship, the INJUVE claimed that it aspired to create “a new Mexican man.” Administrators sought to transform the malleable pre-citizen and form him into the ideal Mexican citizen of tomorrow through a rigorous program of civic, social, physical and moral education undertaken within juvenile centres established first in the Distrito Federal, and later, throughout the republic. As a productive and disciplinary measure, civic education obliged youths to constantly participate in marches, parades and celebrations of national achievement. Aside from what INJUVE administrators called the fostering of “devotion to la patria,” the activities had the expressed purpose of aiding in youth’s “formation as citizens, free and responsible, nourished in the principles of liberty, justice and human co-fraternity.” Seeking to engineer the masculine citizen of tomorrow, or what another commentator called “a useful social element and future citizen,” bureaucrats keyed on the existing conservative discourse of youth, institutionalizing it, and laying the groundwork for an expanding disciplinary regime.

52 Rodrigo Ortega, “El Instituto de la Juventud y sus Tareas.”
53 “Declaraciones del Director General con Motivo de la Iniciación del Instituto.”
54 “Declaraciones del Director General con Motivo de la Iniciación del Instituto.”
55 Rodrigo Ortega, “El Instituto de la Juventud y sus Tareas.”
While they established this disciplinary foundation in the 1950s, INJUVE proponents did not lose their optimistic tone as they contributed to the ongoing project of regulating and shaping youth. For one, many commentators stressed the vigour and energy with which youths could accelerate the progress of Mexico. They stressed passion, optimism, and noble intention as characteristics of youth that would serve progress and the engineering of a future Mexico. But a telling silence permeated the debate. Although they seemed to celebrate all the potential of this age-category, conservative journalists and bureaucrats took for granted that youth could not realize these qualities without the guidance of adults. The example of the INJUVE shows that they understood youth to be incapable of making their own decisions. Rather, only with the proper direction could they become the key to shaping the future. As such, this debate lent authority to the assumption that exploiting this transformative potential required adult Mexicans to know, talk about, guide, and act upon youth with even greater intensity.

While the INJUVE endeavoured to engineer future citizens, a combination of global and local events at the turn of the decade complicated the ways conservatives discussed the meaning and role of youth in Mexico. This shift follows an important change in political context. For one, ultraconservative Catholics re-entered and refocused the debate, articulating a more extreme vision of the future and defining a more immediate and dangerous threat to youth posed by revolutionary Marxism. As Eric Zolov argues, the visit of nostalgic leftist icon Lázaro Cárdenas to Havana in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 was a decisive moment. For one, it helped bring together a wide network of radicals in Mexico in the name of anti-imperialism and Latin American liberation. This event also took pre-existing ideological tensions between conservative Catholics and secular leftists, and dragged them into the centre stage. Consequently, conservatives expressed deep fears over the threat of communism and cardenismo as Marxist intellectuals, students, and radical workers filled plazas in

56 “Declaraciones del Director General con Motivo de la Iniciación del Instituto.”
57 Zolov, “Cuba sí, Yanquis, no!” 216-221.
Mexico City, Puebla, Guadalajara, and Morelia with banners of Fidel and el Che. As this event suggests, by the beginning of the 1960s Mexico’s Cold War had heightened the stakes of the public debate. Responding to perceived threats from the left, ultraconservatives’ full-blown anti-communism altered the conversation about youth by intensifying the language of the debate and urging increased insulation from a dangerous moral and cultural threat. But this had unintended consequences. Ironically, it led to the politicization of youths across the spectrum.

In 1961 an INJUVE sponsored sociological study of adolescence concluded that youth, while still noble in its intentions, was potentially corruptible given its natural predisposition to certain anxieties. The authors of this study cited a primordial interest in caring for and shaping the future citizens of Mexico. In their claims about the corruptibility of that future citizenry, they took the earlier silence surrounding the passivity and pre-political nature of youth, and made explicit the assumption that young Mexicans needed constant guidance due to an inherent age-related weakness. In their words,

there is a noble anxiety among youth to act in the national life, beyond the scope of their specific activities. They validly aspire to shape, and soon, their own part in the destiny of Mexico. But some of these anxieties, which are expressions of adolescence or the youthful age, may be erroneously directed against the revolutionary work, or propelled by examples of struggles or peoples distinct and foreign to us, that due to this same foreignness or difference, motivate an attraction in the young years.

So with an indirect reference to the struggle of the Cuban Revolution the authors articulated an increasingly common assumption about the nature of youth: its naïve corruptibility. Simultaneously, they emptied the meaning of any political message that

youths might have expressed by explaining them away as a natural expression of a passing biological phase.

For these conservatives, to be young was to be impatient, anxious, and easily drawn into a dangerous and corrupting desire for the foreign or different. Of critical importance here is a dubious claim cloaked in the authoritative guise of social science: that this tendency among youth reflected a natural, biological stage of life. The two-pronged effect of this language resulted in the depoliticization of youths in the public sphere, and an increasing desire to direct and channel them as a form of social prophylactic against Marxism. This whole project, of course, found its motivation in a desire to contest and shape the future in the context of the Cold War and domestic modernization.

This shifting definition of youth that the INJUVE sociologists captured so well in their report found its correlation in the disciplinary practice of the institute. By the early 1960s, bureaucrats and administrators could boast increasing numbers of Casas de la Juventud throughout the capital. Most commentators did not fail to see the value of these youth centres. For one editorialist

the INJUVE complements the educational system as it is preoccupied with organizing youth away from the schools and faculties, providing their leisure time with a constructive occupation, motivating them in patriotic thoughts, in sum, adapting their natural rebelliousness, that of the age, a cause uselessly sublime, to something noble and elevated, that of forging an eternally youthful Mexico.61

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60 “Una Institución al Servicio de la Juventud Mexicana –o la Sociología de la Edad Juvenil,” (emphasis added).
Praising the INJUVE, the author echoed the findings of the sociology report from 1961. At the same time, he stressed the value of a program that regulated leisure time and kept youths under the watchful gaze of bureaucrats.

So building the future meant more than just guiding youth toward a conservative vision of how society ought to look. It now required that “youth be observed and analyzed” while institutions such as the INJUVE regulated free time and ensured that youths would not be left to their own devices. In 1965, director of the INJUVE Píndaro Urióstegui Miranda stated that the institute provided youth with “a constant and correct civic, moral, intellectual and physical orientation,” and that Mexicans “cannot leave youth to grow and develop alone.” As they came to associate youth with both hope and threat, conservatives advocated new practices that sought to supervise, guide, and know an entire social category. Consequently, the public deliberation over the future led to further claims about the nature of youth and to more intense campaigns in the service of national progress.

Opening a new phase of INJUVE campaigns in a statement to the public in early 1965, and echoing statements made by the new president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, Urióstegui Miranda argued that the state was constrained by its limited resources and could not solve all of Mexico’s issues on its own. Rather, in his view, the country needed to exploit the full human potential of youth to tackle the most pressing of national problems. This was how the INJUVE would occupy dangerous youth leisure time.

Framed as collaboration in the revolutionary project of modernization, the INJUVE developed a series of campaigns to modernize the countryside through the deployment of youth brigades bringing sanitation, hygiene, economic, electric and medical services to those living outside urban Mexico. By mid-1967, these brigades had been sent out into isolated rural zones in the states of Guerrero, San Luis Potosí, Michoacán, Querétaro, and Morelos. The media billed the works as noble and charitable civilizing.

62 “Una Institución al Servicio de la Juventud Mexicana –o la Sociología de la Edad Juvenil-.”
efforts on the part of Mexican youth who attended to a wide array of the “problems of the of the most backward populations.”

Yet a closer look at the way commentators celebrated these undertakings reveals something crucial about the target of those national campaigns, and how they inadvertently contributed to the politicization of youth in the 1960s. In May of 1967, journalist Héctor Hernández Tirado published a special report on the INJUVE campaign in Atlixtac, Guerrero – a small and isolated rural village in the mountains of southwest Mexico. In his praise for the work of the young people, Hernández Tirado claimed:

the brigade of the INJM has arrived to break the ancestral stagnation of the inhabitants, installing a voluntary work camp, with 22 students, who, instead of using their spring vacation to take pleasure trips, to party or seek entertainment, have thrown themselves at a singular adventure.

The report went on to exalt the project of modernizing the town and bringing happiness to its miserable people. Yet the students only spent their two-week spring vacation in the village. Surely no serious attempt to modernize what the author described as a place untouched by time, isolated from the country, and immiserated by poverty of both land and people, could be achieved in such a short period of time.

No, the success of the campaign did not derive from the modernization of rural Mexico. Instead, as the report suggests, the intrinsic and intangible value of these numerous missions to the countryside lay in their ability to consume the free time youth spent outside the school, preventing such frivolity as parties or pleasure-travel. Under the assumption that youth, by definition, was easily corruptible and needed to be shielded from the temptations of unsupervised idleness, or worse, Marxist agents,

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64 “El INJM Prepara a los Jóvenes Para Ser Buenos Ciudadanos”.
conservative commentators as well as state bureaucrats looked fondly upon this practice. For them, it seemed to safeguard their vision of the future by putting the otherwise idle, and vulnerable key to that future to work in a supervised environment capable of moulding an acceptable tomorrow.

However, these rural campaigns did more than just occupy the time of youths. Their experiences in the countryside also helped shape the political protests that later shook the country. For many student volunteers, the INJUVE missions exposed the underside of the Mexican miracle – its radical inequality. These mostly middle class students, living an urban life full of modern amenities, confronted for the first time the reality in which rural Mexicans continued to live. As historian Tanalis Padilla argues, the economic miracle of the 1940s-1960s was achieved at the expense of the countryside. And an awareness of this very paradox of the Mexican project of modernization, along with the experience of being discussed, guided, packed together in CU and in the rural campamento all helped fuel the complaints and demands of student demonstrators that took to the streets in the late 1960s. Among the diverse and often contradictory messages of the protests, one of the few consistent slogans was a demand for the equality enshrined in the memory of the Revolution and betrayed by postrevolutionary society.

But the irony of youth politicization did not just affect those drawn to the politics of equality on the left. In the wake of the Cuban Revolution, the ultraconservative group Acción Católica engaged in its own campaigns that worked hard to immunize youth from the threat of communism. In the face of Marxism’s growing appeal, zealous Catholics were quick to establish a moral dichotomy between their religion and Marxist-inspired politics. Their message relied on an allusion to the final struggle between two sides that would decide the salvation of mankind. While the Marxist vision of the future was, in the right wing imaginary, a dystopian nightmare, conservatives argued strongly for their own Eden:

The re-Christianization of the world will be to the advantage of all, creating social peace, substituting struggle with the harmony between classes, love for hate, belief in God for atheism, facilitating the rule of social justice that is searched for so determinately in so many parts.\textsuperscript{68}

Often invoking language reminiscent of the crusades and the \textit{reconquista}, ultraconservatives imagined themselves in an existential struggle with communism upon which the future of humanity depended.

The key battleground for that future was, of course, youth. In 1962, the Archbishop of Puebla, Octaviano Márquez, articulated serious doubts about the conditions of education in Mexico. For him, Mexican youth was “educated at the margin of God,” and he expressed concern that university education was often “positively anti-Catholic”\textsuperscript{69} and thus morally suspect. The Archbishop’s call to safeguard the formation of youth resonated strongly among his Acción Católica followers. In early 1963, one of the organization’s leading figures stressed the need to target corruption by publically stating that Catholic youth must “fight with total capacity to detain the advances of foreign and demagogical ideas.”\textsuperscript{70} Moreover, the speaker implored youth to engage in intensified parochial activities designed to strengthen the moral bulwark of the Mexican family and counteract the noxious effects of Marxist theory. In fact, for these ultraconservatives, Catholic youth activities fostering strong faith and a clear vision of how a Christian future ought to look were the “one true antidote for communism.”\textsuperscript{71}

Along with their rhetorical dichotomy, the way Acción Católica advocates targeted youth in the struggle for the future led to a tangible politicization among young Catholics. And this extremist orientation fuelled one of the less discussed aspects of Mexico’s experience of the 1960s: the violent conflicts between ultraconservative and radical leftist student groups. While there were many young people drawn to reject the inequalities of modernization and to seek equality through revolution, the highly

\textsuperscript{69} “Fue Trazado un Programa Social a Acción Católica,” \textit{Novedades} March 11, 1962.
influential milieu of ultraconservatism helped shape an alternative path for increasingly politicized students. Defined by zealous anti-communism and the rejection of modern consumerism in favour of traditional social organization, extremist Catholics established semi-clandestine youth organizations on campuses and in cities throughout Mexico. Alongside their Marxist opposites, these youths contributed to an extremely tumultuous moment of crisis in Mexican history that reached its nadir in 1968.

Youth politicization had an immediate transformative effect on the public narrative in the coming decades. Alongside discussions of youth as the key to the future, conservative commentators began speaking about their present. Making sense of the countercultural politics of youths in the 1960s, they built upon their familiar assumptions about the malleability and corruptibility of youth. But their conclusions differed from those expressed in during the 1940s and 1950s. Instead of actively targeting youth as a means to engineering the future, the found an alternative language of delinquency that articulated a moral opposition to what they perceived as the unfulfilled promise of modernization. But this oppositional politics of the present also created an atmosphere in which violence and terror became all too possible.

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71 Victorio Ocampo, “La Acción Católica.”
Chapter 2: La Juventud Desorientada

On October 26, 1968, three weeks after the Mexican army’s massacre of hundreds of protesters, and the subsequent arrest of hundreds, perhaps thousands more, a group of approximately sixty parents arrived at the office of the Attorney General of the Distrito Federal, Gilberto Suárez Torres. Instead of expressing outrage over the detentions or the lethal repression of October 2nd, they came to convey their gratitude to the PRIísta official for releasing their children from custody. Before leaving, the gracious and apologetic parents promised, “in the future, the behaviour of our children will be more correct and attached to moral and patriotic principles.” As a final word, they committed to “spare no effort in making ourselves worthy of the privilege of parenthood, friends and counselling guides of our children.”

At first glance, the parents’ actions suggest a cynical attempt to secure their children’s release from the clutches of a repressive state. In the immediate aftermath of the Tlatelolco massacre, this conclusion seems quite plausible. Yet a careful and nuanced reading of the wider context of the 1960s points to a different, more troubling interpretation of events.

Beginning around 1959, the debate about youth in Mexico took on a new and anxious form. Conversations about the future slowly receded behind the looming crisis of what commentators called ‘juvenile delinquency.’ Buried within this loaded term, I argue, was an attempt on the part of conservatives to make sense of a wide array of newly politicized youths who put forth demands of their own in the 1960s.

73 “Dirección de Relaciones Públicas Boletín Oficial, No. 36” October 26, 1968. (DFS Problema Estudiantil Legajo: 33)
74 “Dirección de Relaciones Públicas Boletín Oficial, No. 36”
In this chapter, I argue that by the mid 1950s commentators developed a language of victimhood and corruption to explain the spectacle of counterculture and student politics and to define it as delinquency. Understanding youth as a victim instead of a willing actor, this narrative depoliticized youths’ actions by refusing them authorship of their own behaviour while it allowed conservatives to use an age category as a lens through which they scathingly criticized the politics of their contemporary society. Following this new turn in the public debate, conservatives moved the discussion towards those they deemed responsible for corrupting youth – neglectful parents, the media, and the modernizing elites of the postrevolutionary order. In this way, observers now imagined youth as victim – redeemable only by fixing the society in which they lived. Instead of a way to engineer the future, the flexible category now offered a mechanism for criticizing the present. This turn, I argue, helped shape a suffocating discursive environment that exploded in the physical violence of 1968.

Compared to the immediate post-war period, Mexicans now debated the meaning of youth from within a profoundly different ‘problem-space.’ The mood of excited hopefulness that pervaded the 1940s had become one of existential disquiet as urbanites came to terms with the ongoing transformation of life and urban landscape. As newspaper headlines increasingly warned of the threat of “Red China” and lamented the apocalyptic carnage of the Vietnam War, the 1960s replaced the open and limitless possibilities of the future with an entrenched bi-polarity that threatened to annihilate the planet. Domestically, the rapid modernization project of the PRI regime had created a staggering megalopolis in Mexico City. Here, the neon signs of consumerism, unimaginable just decades earlier, clashed with the destitute reality of an exploding urban underclass while political and business elites retreated to wealthy suburban neighbourhoods such as San Ángel and Coyoacán on the outskirts of the city. In these isolated communities they could escape from the pollution, noise, and overcrowding of the Capital to enjoy the immense wealth often derived from rampant, large-scale
corruption. With these rapid and disorienting transitions, the politics of the public debate shifted from one of the future, to one firmly rooted in an overwhelming present.

As Eric Zolov argues, in the late 1950s, transnational flows of youth counterculture and the international capital selling it found energetic expression among Mexican youths, especially in Mexico City. But along with rock music, Marlon Brando, and existentialism came an anxious effort on the part of conservatives to make sense of this cultural, and by extension, political statement. Almost immediately, calling countercultural youths ‘delinquents,’ or ‘rebeldes sin causa’ after the James Dean film Rebel Without a Cause, conservatives cried out over the victimization of youth at the hands of those irresponsible adults who had failed to prevent their corruption.

In a 1959 magazine article on the new “national drama” of youth delinquency, journalist Augusto Sierra explained the problem the following way: “the youngster imitates, always adopting the example that he receives from his elders, he is conditioned by the advice he receives from teachers and friends.” He further claimed that youth was no more than an expression of the politico-social reality of a given state, that the juvenile delinquent was “a victim and the real guilty must be searched for without pity in all spheres, falling who will, even the apparent untouchables.” For Sierra, to be youth was to be ineffectual, imitative, and vulnerable to corruption. And the failure of those who served as their examples signified a dangerous threat that required immediate action.

Sierra’s argument about the cause and solution of juvenile delinquency was linked to earlier definitions of youth. As commentators did before, he conceived of this age category as something necessarily naïve, corruptible and in need of constant guidance. According to these assumptions, youths could not be held responsible for their

75 Kandell, La Capital, 496-498; Rubenstein, Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation, 5.
76 Eric Zolov, Refried Elvis, 2-6.
78 “La Delincuencia Juvenil es un Drama Nacional”
79 “La Delincuencia Juvenil es un Drama Nacional”
antisocial or delinquent behaviour. Instead, this emerging conservative narrative encouraged commentators to look to Mexico’s present social conditions for answers. It was in fact, for Sierra, the elders that needed reform, even those in high places.

In the years that followed, expert voices began lending scientific authority to this growing narrative of delinquency and victimhood. Employing the soon-to-be ubiquitous critique of inadequate parenting, one journalist drew on a criminological analysis and offered a typical explanation of the problem of delinquency in 1961. He argued,

Groups of adolescents without any moral reservations, lacking in ideals, and totally indifferent to the restrictions that permit social harmony, they rob, loot, disrupt order and indulge in the greatest excesses. If we investigate the causes of this attitude, we find them in the weakness of family bonds, in the lack of parental authority, and in the lack of useful occupation.  

As a solution, this journalist recommended a return to the traditional family, bastion of the Mexican conservative social order, and increased vocational training to keep young minds occupied.

Together, these authors exemplify the way that conservative Mexicans helped shape a debate that, in producing knowledge about youth, served to critique Mexico’s present. In short, it served as an allegorical conversation about the political. Instead of looking at youths’ actions and behaviour as an expression of taste, volition, or politics, conservatives focused elsewhere. They turned to the lack of parental authority, the destructive immorality of modern society, and the disappearance of an imagined world of traditional values. As the decade progressed, this understanding of youth evolved into widespread panic over the failure of adults while it excluded youths’ political views from any meaningful debate.

Besides its obvious rhetorical negation of youth as political, the conservative reaction to counterculture also worked to disarm young Mexicans through an emphasis

on parental vigilance. In a clear example of this trend from early 1963, Ramírez de Aguilar published a parable designed to illuminate the true and frightening nature of the youth crisis for his audience. The tale begins with a kind of inconspicuous everyman angrily entering a police station and shouting at a group of indifferent officers over the outrageous detainment of his teenaged son. At this moment, the officers present the man with a document that gut-wrenchingly causes him “a visible transformation.”

Playing up the currency of honour among conservatives, the son’s confession provokes an overwhelming sense of shame and defeat as the man slowly sits to absorb the shock. He then asks his son if the words are true, and if so, why he had not spoken to his father before. The son, responding meekly that his confession is true, says he had not informed his father because “[he] could not… [he] was ashamed.” At this point, Ramírez de Aguilar ends the tale with father and son sitting together in a painfully awkward silence.

Explaining his story, the author warned his audience of the ease with which such a situation could happen to any Mexican parent. The boy’s crime in this instance, one of delinquency, was his presence in the dangerous atmosphere of one of Mexico City’s many existentialist cafés. More importantly, a friend had played the role of guide, taking him to the café on an “adventure, full of danger.” For the author, this situation – “the youth that, behind the back of his family, frequents prohibited places. And that falls into the clutches of degenerates” – was something typical of the era. The café was not one in which drugs or alcohol were present, but one with an “environment that makes one open to vice… the darkness in particular.” Thus, it was a place that could, and would, corrupt any youth unfortunate enough to set foot inside. Moreover, the son did not go there on his own accord. He was instead a victim of corrupting influence, while a lack of understanding and communication in the family was at the root of his moral crisis.

82 Ramírez de Aguilar, “Los Padres y el Actual Problema Juvenil.”
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
degeneration. The most troubling consequence though, was the tarnished reputation of the family name.

However, Ramírez de Aguilar did offer a solution to this threatening possibility. The problem, of course, was one of parenting:

few parents worry about their children. Some because they are rich and have multiple jobs, forget their children; they believe it is enough to send them to school and give them money to satisfy all their tastes. Others, being very poor, also forget their young.86

In essence, parents of every class had abdicated their roles as vigilant guardians. To underline the danger of such neglect he argued that adolescence was the moment of highest vulnerability, “when they feel alone and misunderstood. If their parents do not give them the attention, they seek the company of other youth.”87 So in this new, fast-paced and modernized Mexico, the catchall category of youth was vulnerable to corruption, and corruption took the form of unsupervised groups of young people. Their vulnerability, moreover, was linked directly to their age; it was a biological fact.

Ramírez de Aguilar’s simple tale signalled the direction in which the public debate on youth was moving by the mid 1960s. Increasingly, journalists warned of the morally noxious influences pervading modern society, and the failure of parents to adequately monitor, guide, and protect their children from those potential poisons. As the decade moved on, conservatives intensified their denunciations of failed parents while urging the close surveillance of children to prevent their corruption.

In this narrative of parental failure and youth degeneration, conservatives found a compelling way to raise the moral alarm over modernization’s assault on traditional gender roles and the patriarchal family. Writing in the influential daily El Universal, Héctor Solís Quiroga explicitly linked modern industrial society and inadequate parenting in his attempt to explain the burgeoning crisis of delinquency. He argued that in spite of

86 Ibid.
the complexity of the problem, the scientific consensus at the time agreed on the importance of the family. In keeping with an understanding of youth as essentially naïve, he argued, “if the individual is weak or lax in character, he will be easily absorbed by social corruption if he does not have a strong affective familial base.” For conservatives, the social changes wrought by modernity, especially those upsetting the heavily gendered divisions of patriarchy, were the most significant threat to that base. Reflecting this view, Solís Quiroga explained the growth in juvenile delinquency among mechanized, industrialized societies by claiming that the diminished socializing role of the family was “easily explainable if we consider that the home has been invaded by radio, television, modern music, female labour, ready-made food, rapid cleaning appliances, reduced family collaboration in the maintenance of the home, etc.” These complaints invite a deeper reading into the developing conservative political project when considered against the profound transformation of Mexico since the 1940s.

Arguments like Solís Quiroga’s make it clear that for conservatives, the moral debasement of the family was a critical explanation for a perceived crisis of juvenile delinquency. Yet his definition of modernization’s attack on the home was centred directly on innovations that reduced the domestic labours reserved, at least rhetorically, for women. Things as seemingly benign as ready-made food or more efficient cleaning appliances provoked a deep sense of anxiety, and this highlights the gendered dynamic of a conservative politics that stood as an alternative to the first world aspirations of a growing middle class. While they explicitly targeted “parents” in their diatribes over delinquent youth, commentators made an implicit and important distinction between mothers and fathers. And in their culturally conservative framework, mothers received

87 Ibid.
89 Héctor Solís Quiroga, “La Delincuencia de los Menores.”
90 Zolov, Refried Elvis, 5.
91 Ibid.
the lion’s share of the blame for the state of youth. Lamenting the moral degeneration of the family, conservatives were plainly stating that modernization took women out of the home, confusing the distinction between public and private, and thus encouraging them to abandon their children to the television or radio. Raising these concerns, they were arguing instead for a rigorous division of labour in which time-consuming household tasks would keep wives and mothers – for this was the only legitimate identity for honourable women – in the home and monitoring the children. In their logic, this patriarchal order was natural; upsetting such a division, as modernization had so discernibly done, would threaten the moral foundation of civilization.

Fatherhood, in contrast, should be read as a conservative metaphor for the political – the public sphere. Following the logic of the debate, youth delinquents were not guilty social enemies but were mere victims of a whole series of corrupting influences. Responsibility then, could not reside among youth themselves, but rather, those adult Mexicans charged with protecting them from corruption. So parents were a logical target for pinning culpability. Yet given the links conservatives made between patriarchy and order, their critique would place heavy emphasis on fathers for having failed to shelter their families from the dangers of modernity. Beyond the private realm, parenting offered something more than a source of blame for a perceived crisis of juvenile delinquency. Parents also represented the adult peers of conservative commentators: those full-fledged members of the nation capable of doing politics. So by critiquing parents, conservatives were also rejecting the present political elites and the social conditions of their country. It was these conditions that led to the destructive disorder in the private sphere. And in a political system modelled on the patriarchal family, criticism of this nature extended straight up the hierarchy of rule to the “revolutionary father,” the president. In this way conservative narratives of parental failure point explicitly towards heavy criticism of PRIista modernization and to an emerging alternative moral politics grounded in a deeply patriarchal vision of society.

92 Zolov, Refried Elvis, 4.
This conservative politics found fertile ground beyond a small circle of conservative journalists, and by the early 1960s, figures among the highest echelons of the legal community were publically denouncing Mexican parents. In 1963, reacting to the crisis of juvenile delinquency, the Mexican judiciary convoked a special commission within the national congress of attorneys to study the problem of youth. Speaking before that commission, sub-director of Social Prevention Dr. Edmundo Buentello expressed what he considered the dire reality of the situation:

There are deficient families, disordered, dissonant, tyrannical, anomalous, pathological, noxious, traumatizing, corrupting, thuggish, wealthy, amoral, etc… there are all kinds. And do you know what one rarely sees? The normal family that offers tranquil refuge for the children, the kind that consists of firm support.  

Here, his arguments about the Mexican family resonate deeply with other conservative critiques of modernization and the PRI. For Buentello, modernization had caused disorder and dissonance within the home, and there was none more to blame than the wealthy, amoral, and thuggish PRI. Thus, by the middle of the decade a significant number of commentators, from doctors to lawyers, journalists, and educators had invested in the debate on youth delinquency, using it to denounce the corruption and neglectful care of the regime, and to outline a conservative moral politics that might save Mexico from the transformations of the last 20 years.

One of the direct outcomes of this conservative critique of parenting, at least for youths, was a renewed commitment to the time-related disciplinary ideas first formulated in the 1950s. Among some of the more authoritative voices, doctor and prominent Medical school professor Dr. Guillermo Benavides Uribe publically called on parents to “understand the gravity of this inchoate evil and take on the dedicated role that they have to cure it, or they will resolve to suffer evil and accept the risk of losing a child for

themselves and for society, to see him through prison bars.”

Interestingly, Benavides Uribe’s definition of that “dedicated role” was the guidance of youth through the occupation of their free time – ideally, in one aspect of production or another. For the doctor, “every minute that the youthful mind is occupied with constructive work is one less minute that can be destined for evil.”

He argued that parents had an obligation to institute pre-emptive measures against the corrupting influence of the cinema, television, and idle friends. It was a task he called “a true labour of mental hygiene.” So protecting the vulnerable meant disciplining their time with menial tasks and constant surveillance of their social environment.

Beyond their generalized attack on bad parents and modernization, conservative commentators also found a unique opportunity to critique the new elite of the postrevolutionary regime in the diffusion of wealthy delinquents across the capital. Unlike a recent past in which “anti-social” behaviour was understood as something of the urban underclass, the sight of wealthy young Mexicans speeding around Mexico City in new cars or immersing themselves in the consumerism of the 1960s provoked especially intense outrage.

Even within elite circles, the spoiled teenaged children of notable politicians were a constant source of tension between neighbours in the suburbs of the city. In a cartoon from 1964 (see Figure 1 below), the artist captured this sentiment of incredulity over the apparent impunity of wealthy Mexican youth with political ties.

The cartoon depicts several youths of obvious material wealth standing before a police officer. They all wear fierce and intimidating gazes while an officer representing the voice of morally outraged Mexicans chastises them for their incorrigible behaviour. However, the menacing delinquents cut off the officer and threateningly retort that he ought to step lightly, given that they come from influential families. While satirizing the problem of youth delinquency, the artist called upon the widespread narrative of

95 Guillermo Benavides Uribe, “La Rebeldía Juvenil.”
96 Ibid.
98 Kandell, La Capital, 498.
inadequate parenting to indict the new elite as the most corrupt and obvious culprit in the moral crisis of juvenile delinquency. Thus, the cartoon signified more than just comedy, it was an explanation for the crisis of juvenile delinquency and a heavy handed statement about the political order of Mexican society.

Figure 1: Novedades, August 19, 1964 (used with permission)

By 1965, however, the conversation about youth was beginning to change, and its new trajectory set the public debate on course for the social crisis of 1968. Gradually, conservatives replaced their anxiety over juvenile delinquency with a newer concern for something they called youth rebellion. This shift marked an important change in the way observers made sense of counterculture and the growth of radical student politics. While the debate still considered youth a victim of something bigger, something corrupting, and
parents suffered even heavier criticism, commentators started to make sense of youths’ behaviour as a sort of visceral rejection of a morally corrupt and broken world. This rejection, moreover, represented a threat to civilization. Some conservatives even considered it a sign of the apocalypse. At the same time, psychology slowly entered the debate. These experts began refining analyses of youth rebellion, moving their points of entry away from the mass category, and ever so slowly, towards the individual. All of this points to the deeply repressive nature of the delinquency debate and the escalation of rhetorical violence to its limits. By the crisis of 1968, the conversation had reached its boiling point, and the problem of youth left the confines of language and entered the realm of terror.

In 1966, journalist Mario Rojas Avendaño published an eight part special on youth rebellion in the prominent daily Excélsior. In it, he presented a multi-faceted analysis of the crisis among Mexican youth while offering explanations and possible solutions to the problem. Interviewing experts and referencing their studies, Rojas Avendaño was one of the first commentators to explicitly state that youth rebellion was a result of a mixture of so-called ‘endogenous’ and ‘exogenous’ causes. Amongst the exogenous factors, he listed the familiar corrupting forces of the media and the social environment of the family and school. However this report noted the psychological make-up of youth as an important cause, or, ‘endogenous factor.’ Rojas Avendaño presented his readers with an image of a crisis within the home, “in each case... a childhood drama; each one, the possibility of rehabilitation and, at the same time, the fear of finding one’s self before an unredeemable youth.” His argument, in essence, was that youth, as a group, suffered an abnormal, age-related psychological state that required special shielding from dangerous corrupting influence. He then defined this psychological state with the help of an expert: Dr. Alfonso Quiroz Cuarón.

The definition offered in the article is demonstrative of changing attitudes and assumptions about youth as conservatives struggled to make sense of growing countercultural expressions. Quiroz Cuarón argued that the particular psychological state of youth, a state of extreme anxiety shared by anyone falling into that category, was a product of a world “disturbed by a lack of confidence, atomic terror, and the anxiety of a tomorrow whose dawn we cannot foresee, except through the Dantesque vision of the mushroom cloud.” For him, the combination of modern technology – to him, a significant source of anxiety – and parental neglect led youth to search for understanding among peers in the street. Moreover, Quiroz Cuarón stated that it was “axiomatic” that where unsupervised youth met, there was always one older boy ready to corrupt them. And together, youth were susceptible to imitating what they saw in the immorality and irregularity of adult social life, a prostituted political system, and the illicit enrichment going on around them. Again, buried within the logic of their arguments, conservative journalists and scientific experts used the concept of youth to critique the PRI and its politics of modernization. While this author’s disdain for the postrevolutionary order was readily apparent, its expression relied on language that precluded any independent politics on the part of youths themselves.

The inherent conservatism of this narrative surfaced again in the solutions proposed by experts. For many, the answer was a simple return to the traditional values of the Catholic religion and the strengthening of morality through the patriarchal family. Psychiatrist Dr. José Quevedo offered a typical thesis among traditionalists, stating that “the old family preserved the home between walls of dignity.”

neighbours, and the fear of “what they will say”\textsuperscript{106} kept family discipline in order. Contrastingly, he claimed, “the spatial, economic, social and technical widening of modern life in big cities destroys the consensus among families.”\textsuperscript{107} Rojas Avendaño then added,

> When family morals are consolidated on substantive bases, among which counts religion, there is a consensus within and outside the home that sets ways and norms of life and conduct and all in the community observe them… in such environments disorderly or antisocial conduct cannot flourish.\textsuperscript{108}

For these observers, the crisis of youth rebellion contained an important lesson for Mexican society. It was a sign that modern life, industrialized and urbanized, was dangerous and threatening to the morality, honour, and timeless traditions of Mexico. It was thus something to be overcome, or perhaps reversed.

As the debate continued into the late 1960s, psychiatrists began to regularly assert their authority in the public sphere. While initial psychiatric readings of the problem of youth delinquency did continue to target apparent corrupting influences, the logic of this growing medical science helped lay the foundations for later understandings of youth. It did so by subtly shifting the point of entry into the conversation away from the mass-category and slowly towards the more specified, individual psychological make-up of its members. A Dr. Shoasmert provided a telling example of this new expert approach in December of 1966. Writing to convince the public of the value of psychiatric science in ameliorating the problem of juvenile delinquency, she argued that childhood psychology was the secret to preventing delinquent youth and mental illness among future adult Mexicans. In her vision of the problem, the youngster


\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.

left without treatment would be a frustrated youth who would not reach his true path, a very intelligent delinquent, bitter and in constant struggle with an environment that he does not understand nor comprehend and, in his time, would be rejected by that environment in virtue of his illness.\textsuperscript{109}

The core problem, as she saw it, was that “almost the totality of child mental illness [was] caused by malfunctioning and broken homes.”\textsuperscript{110} So, while still clinging to a notion of youth as victim, and more specifically, victim of bad parenting, she began establishing the groundwork for a more individualized focus on the age category.

As psychiatric medicine developed its theories, state bureaucrats also responded to the robust criticism of parents and all things modern. The Mexican Institute for Social Security and Services for State Workers (ISSSTE) decided to intervene in 1966 with a program for parental education. Inaugurated on September 6, the parenting school was designed to improve moral conditions in the home and confront the problem of youth.\textsuperscript{111} According to journalist Pedro Ocampo Ramírez, the establishment of the school represented an important first step toward the “disinfection of society”\textsuperscript{112} of the evils associated with modernity. At the top of his list were those forms of entertainment that ran counter to the moralistic tone of contemporary conservative rhetoric, i.e. pornography, cinema, radio and television. At the heart of this program was a desire to remake the Mexican home in such a way that parents would closely scrutinize the every move of their children. Clearly the notion that transforming adult society could ameliorate the problem of youth rebellion held purchase among a significant number of Mexicans. Importantly, this suggests that a broad section of the population shared in the idea of youth as victim, and thus emptied countercultural politics of any independent meaning. This only contributed to a deepening repression of youth and student politics.

\textsuperscript{110} Shoasmert, Dra., “Los Delincuentes Juveniles son Enfermos Mentales.”
\textsuperscript{112} Pedro Ocampo Ramírez, “Fórmula Contra el Rebeldismo.”
While commentators bent and distorted the political and cultural expressions of youths throughout the decade, their activities became so boisterous and disruptive that by 1968, the discursive climate seemed to be at a tipping point. As politicized youngsters from across the spectrum took to the streets protesting or supporting a whole range of events, from the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, conservative observers struggled to understand the events unfolding before their eyes. Furthermore, the ideological tension and deadly physical violence between various Marxist student groups and those belonging to clandestine ultraconservative organizations such as the Movimiento Universitario de Renovadora Orientación (MURO) challenged the notion that these were just misguided youths in need of parental supervision.

On August 25, 1968 – about halfway through the paralyzing crisis of ‘68 – MURO organized a public protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia outside the Soviet embassy in Mexico City. They succeeded in rallying over 2000 students to their cause, and they invited speakers from a cross-section of the city – a woman, a worker, a professional, and a Cuban ex-patriot. After listening to the orators, the group burned red flags while chanting, “Russian assassins!,” “death to communism!,” “Russians out of Mexico!,” and demanded that president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz do something to stop the tide of Marxist infiltration into Mexico. Finally, after MURO leader Manuel Alonso Aguerrebere denounced the true nature of the left as murderous, menacing, and evil, one youth climbed up onto the gates of the embassy, opened his shirt to bare his chest and screamed, “shoot here, assassins!”

Aside from the number of students that MURO was able to mobilize, this event is worth considering for the undeniable intensity of the demonstrators. Although both public and academic narratives of 1968 have largely ignored and therefore silenced the fact that conservative youths participated in this moment of crisis, the anti-Soviet protest

113 “Manifestación Ante la Embajada de la URSS,” Excélsior, August 26, 1968.
114 “Manifestación Ante la Embajada de la URSS.”
115 “Manifestación Ante la Embajada de la URSS.”
compels us to reconsider the possibility that these extremist student groups were as politicized, and as active, as groups associated with the left. It also places those ultraconservative groups squarely in the middle of the street as central protagonists, abolishing the problematic notion that the right stood as an aloof alternative to the chaos of 1968 – a position that has served conservatives in the political arena since the aftermath of October 2nd. It also forces us to rethink narratives that see only two antagonists in the violence that characterizes ’68 in Mexico; to allow space for the uncomfortable possibility that instead of just an authoritarian, anti-democratic regime with blood on its hands, youths killed youths at Tlatelolco.116

Looking backwards, this protest recalls the work of Acción Católica and other ultraconservative movements that spoke at length about both youth and the end-of-days moral struggle between Catholicism and Marxist atheism during the 1950s and 1960s. Here, the MURO protest offers rare evidence of the kinds of extremist organizations in which young conservatives cut their political teeth during the 1960s, and it links them back to a public debate that pre-dated, and perhaps helped cultivate the crisis of 1968. And if we look closely at right-wing politics in Mexico today, we can perhaps link this moment to the present in ways that go beyond a safe narrative of democratization.

In the moment, however, the first response of commentators was to reach for the familiar crutch of corruption. But this time they shifted their blame from the modern media and parents onto an imagined conspiracy of foreign provocateurs. By telling themselves that the events unfolding before them were the result of something other than politicized youths they “repress[ed] the unthinkable.”117 As Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues, “when reality does not coincide with deeply held beliefs, human beings tend to phrase interpretations that force reality within the scope of these beliefs.”118

One commentator, writing in early 1968, suggested that the rebellion of youth against society was, in actual fact, a noble rebellion against injustice that had been distorted by dangerous foreign interests. For this author, youths that engaged in “fights of indoctrinated character and under imperial rule” were “truly misguided.” For him, theirs was a ridiculous endeavour that lacked the needed direction to ensure a fight for a better world. Building on prior psychological assumptions about youth, Journalist Oscar Uribe Villegas took this interpretation further and argued that the crisis before Mexico was not one brought on by young people, but rather, the adults that manipulated their nature. For him, “the fact that the student body consist[ed] predominately of youth explain[ed] its inquietude.” He claimed that youth was necessarily energetic but lacked healthy outlets for such vigour. According to Uribe Villegas, “adults capitalized on this. They put this energy to their service and ma[d]e youth believe they [were] the beneficiaries of revolt.” So these professional revolutionaries tricked and corrupted by offering places in student movements that would “satisfy certain psychological necessities of youth; giving a target for their aggression, self-sacrifice, and heroism.”

For these commentators it seems the idea that youths would engage in a politics of their own design, seeking to argue for their own vision of how the present ought to be, was far outside the realm of the imaginable. Therefore, it was much simpler and logical for the observer to reduce youth to a victim of corruption, something redeemable, that adult society might rescue only in reforming itself.

The most prominent voice in the conservative community, Pope Paul VI, validated this vision of youth in 1968. His message was framed by a reporter who wrote,

Students all over the world share a common characteristic: discontent with society. However, it is not currently within their power to create a

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120 Alfonso Sierra Partida, “Rebeldía Constructiva.”
122 Oscar Uribe Villegas, “Buena Conciencia Estudiantil.”
123 Ibid.
better world. They have insurmountable barriers that cannot be passed except with time, education and maturity.\textsuperscript{124}

In this preamble, he clearly indicated that youths were not full political subjects of the present, they did not have the right to agency, and they needed to wait until an undefined point in the future to articulate any demands in society. The Pope followed, explaining away the actions of demonstrating students worldwide, he argued, “the style of protest seduces these people. A crazy desire for change… at times they are not even afraid of giving themselves over to explosions of lunacy.”\textsuperscript{125} With this language, he further depoliticized counterculture by describing youth as an affect-driven, irrational mass. After bemoaning the degenerate and corrupting nature of the society, the Pope concluded his message with a warning to youths that they stop allowing themselves to be victimized by those who sought to corrupt them.

A 1968 cartoon from the weekly magazine Jueves de Excélsior captured the essence of the Pope’s message with an image. (see Figure 2 below) The drawing, depicting a student protestor in the city of Buenos Aires, denies any thought or agency to the politics of young people by suggesting that the youth in the image is a universal constant, wound up by agitators, and set loose on cities across the world. The student appears to be little more than a mass-produced hell-raiser while the cartoonist silences any possible message with the satirical line that he is “radar controlled.” Here the cartoon visually reinscribes youth with the passive, depoliticizing traits that conservative journalists applied so often in their writing. For them, the only solution for youth rebellion was to discipline members of this category through close parental orientation. In the words of one commentator: “the urgent thing is to understand them, direct them and channel them.”\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{124} Jaime Morales L., “Por Torcidos Senderos Camina la Juventud,” \textit{Jueves de Excélsior} Año 47, No. 2411.
\textsuperscript{125} Jaime Morales L., “Por Torcidos Senderos Camina la Juventud.”
\textsuperscript{126} J.O., “Cúal es el Fondo de las Revueltas Estudiantiles?,” \textit{Jueves de Excélsior} Año 47, No. 2411.
In the autumn of 1968, conservative commentators reacted with surprise and confusion when conflict between UNAM students and government forces, as well as among the students themselves, turned deadly. On October 2nd, after several weeks of particularly intense conflict, the Mexican army assaulted a student gathering at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco housing complex in Mexico City. While the gruesome violence of that night has been largely narrated as a dark moment of the state’s repression of society, it also marked the low point of a decade-long public debate about the meaning of youth rebellion. Throughout the 1960s, conservative commentators shaped a debate that failed to allow space for Mexican youths’ own political views. Instead, they appropriated the cultural and political expressions of youths as a way of engaging in a politics that excluded those deemed ‘naïve’ or ‘immature.’ The physical violence of 1968 is less surprising then, when considered in light of the intense and sustained rhetorical violence of the preceding decade.

An article, written by an ultraconservative author at the height of the student demonstrations, captures the sort of thinking applied to a situation that no longer made
sense within the discursive limits of the debate. Looking upon the young demonstrators in her country and abroad, Guadalupe Appendini wrote,

> The destruction of the world is approaching; and not exactly with atomic weapons, those seen with horror, nor with the floods and earthquakes constantly recorded on every continent; not with wars and disturbances that break out in various countries. These disgraces, we might call them small warnings from God, alert us so we might stop our vertiginous run toward the degeneration, lightness, and immorality that will carry the world to the inevitable chaos that has already begun to form.¹²⁸

Lamenting everything modern, from cinema to radio, television, and even the novel, she mourned the loss of the Christian family and its impending replacement with Communism. And finally, predicting the future to come, she warned

> the parents of tomorrow will be the extravagant hippies of today; the immoral ‘go-go girls’ and the ‘scientists’ that burn their eyes studying modern theories and ‘sex complexes’ that guide the world, forming all classes of misguided children, whose irresponsible parents failed to channel them through the path of duty, love, respect and truth.¹²⁹

In essence, she imagined no less than the full collapse of humanity.

> This vision of a coming moral apocalypse marked the boundary between a broken discourse, and a new way of speaking and producing knowledge about youth. After the terror of the late 1960s and the conceptual bankruptcy of the youth as victim narrative, the focus of the public debate moved decidedly toward the individual. This fundamental shift in the way commentators discussed youth altered the way they both understood and marginalized their younger counterparts after 1968. A discussion in


which experts increasingly pathologized youths on the basis of behaviour and drug use replaced the story of collective corruption. While it served to better explain the crisis of 1968, it also effectively depoliticized youths by subjecting them to closer scrutiny and discipline than ever before.

129 Guadalupe Appendini, “Destrucción Moral del Mundo.”
Chapter 3: Todos los Delincuentes son Enfermos

In the aftermath of 1968, the way conservatives spoke about youth and youth rebellion drastically changed. A new narrative of drug abuse and individual psychological pathology eclipsed prior debates about inadequate parenting and juvenile delinquency and came to dominate the language of the youth debate in Mexico. Building on a growing international body of theory about adolescent drug abuse and rehabilitation, the Mexican psychiatric community helped to define, along with conservative journalists, politicians, and lawmakers, a new problem of youth. In this conversation, an age-category became an illness that required not repression, but treatment. I argue that this shift towards pathologization represents a fundamental change in the way conservatives engaged in politics and negotiated change after the experience of the 1960s in Mexico.

In this panic over an imagined crisis of drug-addicted youth, commentators found a comfortable way of looking back on the chaos of 1968 and explaining it from within the basic parameters of a passive definition of youth. And while this argument still allowed for a critique of their contemporaries, its focus on an individual point of entry more effectively contained the broad, equality based-politics of youths at the individual level. I read this depoliticizing effect as an expression of what Michel Foucault calls “biopolitics.” Within this biopolitical logic, medical experts implored adults to closely surveil youths as a way of combating their dangerous pathology and ensuring the

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biological survival of both the patient/youth and the species/nation as a whole. In this chapter, I show how this change in the language of the youth debate helped to cultivate a new way of conserving a status-quo order. This order, moreover, rested on the consent of those concerned with the biological welfare of Mexico’s children.

As in the previous chapters, these changes did not occur in a vacuum. This shift towards pathologization occurred in a ‘problem-space’ scarred by the experience of the late 1960s. By the end of the decade, dizzying economic growth and insatiable middle-class demand for globalized consumer culture seemed to be faltering. This raised widespread questions about Mexico’s “first world” pretensions, while the events of 1968 seemed to signal the death knell of modernization. At the same time, Mexico City had gone from a spectacle of modernity to an “unmanageable, overpopulated, unproductive, and insalubrious” monster. Clearly something had changed. In response, political commentators now turned their attention backwards in an effort to explain the violent and tumultuous crisis that shook Mexico and cast doubts on its modernizing trajectory. An explanation would, by making sense of the chaos, restore order to the public debate and ease the sense of loss tied to 1968. In the midst of this environment, commentators offered solutions motivated by the most immediate stakes: the survival of the nation and the species, both threatened by the ominous tandem of youth drug addiction and mental illness.

Psychological explanations for youth delinquency were already in formation before the social crisis of 1968, and these arguments only gained strength with their

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131 Foucault defines biopolitics as: a focus on “the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population.” Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 139.


133 Kandell, *La Capital*, 529.
transnational circulation via the media and professional conferences. In May of 1967, the Mexican newspaper *El Universal* published an article describing tests run by psychiatrists on juvenile delinquents in New York. Taking the category of youth as a biological fact independent of cultural or historical difference, the article opened by ensuring that although the study in question was undertaken in New York, “its conclusions may be applied in certain aspects to adolescents from all civilized countries.”\(^{134}\) The author recounted for his Mexican audience the way that New York doctors identified mental illness among delinquent youth by examining hand perspiration. Their conclusions are worth quoting:

There are more than 15 million adolescents walking about the United States with a bit of sweat between their fingers. The better part of them have been subjected to tests and it has been discovered that, between 14 and 17 years old, half of girls (47%) and one quarter of boys (23%) are ill, that is, distressed, anxious, with profound emotional maladjustment and dangerous psychic traumas.\(^{135}\)

Recalling the language of the 1960s, the author went on to blame this phenomenon on a combination of poor parenting and noxious, immoral influences such as cinema, television, and other destructive aspects of late modernity. The importance of the article here, though, is not its identification of causes. Rather, it shows the direction of change occurring within the discussion about youth at the turn of the decade. Under the borderless influence of psychiatric medicine, conservatives were finding a more efficient, particularized way into a conversation about youth as a corrupted mass category. They achieved this by refocusing their language in terms of psychological pathology at the individual level.

In Mexico, the early explanatory weight of psychiatry was enough that, by 1968, a group of psychiatrists openly engaged their counterparts in the legal community over the treatment and prevention of juvenile delinquency. Beginning on May 28, 1968, the daily *El Nacional* ran several articles in which prominent doctors argued for the

importance of finding a medical solution to a problem that was, for them, obviously not suited to legal measures. One, Dr. Josefina Vélez, defined juvenile delinquents as “sick, people with maladjustment, poorly adapted and with grave psychiatric and neurological problems.” While she never defined what exactly youth were poorly adapted to, Vélez made it clear that left untreated, these mentally ill delinquents represented a threat to society’s future. For her, they would become adult criminals. Thus, she argued, the Mexican state had an obligation to craft new legislation compelling delinquents to enter into rehabilitation.

In a follow-up piece two days later, Vélez recounted the story of an eighteen-year-old who, in the course of her work as head of the rehab program of Mexico State, she encountered on several occasions. Reiterating her point about legislation and medicine, Vélez explained that the youth had been suffering since an early age from mental conditions provoked by familial conflict and that he required intense psychiatric treatment. Thus, he “could not remain in absolute liberty.” The problem, however, was that doctors did not have the power to legally confine youth to treatment centres. Rather, as she explained, they could only attempt to persuade parents who were not necessarily willing to commit their children. As a result, she argued, the state had failed in its obligation to provide “social protection” for Mexican citizens by failing to adequately legislate the psychiatric treatment of juvenile delinquency. Vélez went on to conclude that the goal of such treatment was not to repress but to cure, a cure that would preempt the impending existential threat of youth delinquents turned criminal adults, and protect the life of the nation. This argument marks a distinct break from those conservative commentaries of the 1940s and 1950s. Here, Vélez’s piece shows that by

135 Delio F. Ponjoan, “El Drama de una Generación,”
138 Joaquín Villasana, “Cuando Intervienen Jueces o Abogados, Todo se Complica
the late 1960s, the debate had taken on a biopolitical dimension: her goal was the biological survival of the nation, not the quasi-utopian engineering of the future.

Later that week, Dr. Alfonso Quiroz Cuarón – a pioneer in the field of youth addiction in Mexico – defined the legal issue in Mexico in more direct terms than Vélez. He argued, “medicine progresses much faster than the judicial sciences,” and thus delinquents were currently ushered down the path to crime instead of treated with adequate care. His solution was a joint-approach in which legislation would compel the mentally ill to confined treatment while taking punitive action against those parents and/or doctors who conspired to keep psychologically infirm youth out of rehabilitative institutions.

A legal solution along these lines would have empowered doctors greatly, and Quiroz Cuarón’s vision gains clarity given the internal logics governing definitions of sanity and rehabilitation in Mexico at that time. Dr. Guillermo Coronado of the Department of Public Health argued that at least half of the great number of Mexican delinquents could be cured through rehabilitation. Rehab, he continued, was designed to “make them useful to themselves and to transform them into productive men for society,” while subverting problems of a “psychosocial and socioeconomic order.” Sanity then, in the logic governing the debate on youth delinquency, meant at least in part, one’s ability to produce. It appears to have been linked on some level to the economic value, or balance, of one in the eyes of an imagined collective. And if we track this debate back to the 1950s, we find the Public Health Department defining normalcy as follows:

The individual, for human society, attains value in function of what he produces, that is to say, for a man to be valued, he must produce at least

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the value of what he consumes. The cripple does not, he is fundamentally our problem, our subject.\textsuperscript{142}

So psychological definitions of normalcy were deeply rooted in the logic of modern capitalism, calculating one’s productivity as an approach to measuring sanity.

For a psychiatric community seeking to explain the phenomena of hippie culture, politicized youths, and their rejections of modern consumer capitalism, mental illness served as a satisfactory explanation for behaviour that otherwise baffled them. Consequently, experts in the field sought to firmly establish their place in treating what they perceived to be a threat to the future of humanity. Although they did not manage to radically alter the legislative landscape, the Mexican psychiatric community did succeed in elbowing into the public debate, proposing highly influential explanations that shaped the discussion about youth following 1968. As this conversation moved into 1969 and 1970, commentators discovered the second part of their pathologizing narrative: youth drug addiction. In conjunction with mental health, this problem offered a way of making sense of the 1960s while disarming politicized youths in a more efficient, effective way.

In October of 1969, exactly one year after the Tlatelolco massacre, bureaucrat José Ganem Pérez travelled to the 38th Conference of the General Assembly of Interpol to present his study on the growing drug culture among hippies and youth more broadly. His pamphlet \textit{Hippies and Hallucinogenic Mushrooms in the Sierra de Oaxaca} warned the international community of the impending crisis of youth drug addiction in his country, while offering suggestions on how such a disaster could be averted globally.\textsuperscript{143} Reflecting widely held racial assumptions tied to Indigeneity, Ganem Pérez noted that the causes of drug use had not changed for the last 450 years in Mexico – “aversion to work, desire for intense emotions, indifference to life.”\textsuperscript{144} But he argued that stimulants

\textsuperscript{142} Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia, “Programa de Trabajo de Dirección General de Rehabilitación,” June 26, 1956 (SSA-SubA-caja 64-exp 4).

\textsuperscript{143} José Ganem Pérez, \textit{Los Hippies y los Hongos Alucinogenos en la Sierra de Oaxaca}, (Procuraduria General de Justicia del Distrito y Territorios Federales, México 1969, pgs 1-24 SSA-SubA-caja 28-exp 4.)

\textsuperscript{144} José Ganem Pérez, \textit{Los Hippies y los Hongos Alucinogenos en la Sierra de Oaxaca}, 5-6.
now posed an immediate threat because the users were younger, more numerous, and devoid of traditional moral restraint. Blaming the immorality of youth on an excess of liberties as well as the absence of both parental and psychiatric attention, he claimed that the root cause of drug use among youth was a “complex unhinging” of the juvenile mind; and this demanded action on the part of authorities around the world.

Referring to the use of hallucinogenic mushrooms among Mesoamerican peoples “since time immemorial,” and mentioning the newfound interest of countercultural enthusiasts in a romanticized indigenous culture, Ganem Pérez explained that “ignorance, an absence of moral strength and a lack of respect towards the norms that make civilization possible” led one into such a state of “incurable degradation.” Clearly, the thought of Mexican youth – captured in recent memory by the image of the protesting middle class student – venturing down the path of mind altering substances provoked a racial panic within conservative commentators such as Ganem Pérez. His message was a stark warning to international lawmakers gathered at the conference: youth was sick; it wanted to abandon civilization, and to return to a primitive state. And for many in Mexico, a primitive state was perceivable in the “backward” indio. This desire for indigeneity, claimed Ganem Pérez, would spell “sure death.”

To counter this impending collapse of civilization, the pamphlet argued first and most predictably for strict prohibition laws targeting mushrooms. Second, however, Ganem Pérez proposed several measures to attend to the other source of anxiety in the conservative mind: those mentally ill youth experimenting with drugs. For in a sense, drug use was but a symptom of a larger pathology. Facing this perceived threat to the species, he counselled the use of anti-drug publicity campaigns, censure of hippie promotion and culture, and the creation of specialized centres designed for diagnosing and treating the specific psychiatric condition of the youth addict. Moreover, these

145 José Ganem Pérez, Los Hippies y los Hongos Alucinogenos en la Sierra de Oaxaca, 6.
146 Ibid., 14.
149 José Ganem Pérez, Los Hippies y los Hongos Alucinogenos en la Sierra de Oaxaca, 16-17.
centres would diffuse information to parents so that they might recognize the “biological, psychological and social character” of the potentially ill adolescent and thus rescue him from the “desire to escape towards the darkness.”

This text, first presented in 1969, signals an important turn in the language conservatives used to talk about youth. Ganem Pérez defined a dual problem of drugs and youth pathology that could not be surmounted without attending to both social illnesses. Building on psychiatric explanations for youth rebellion that were formulated at the end of the 1960s, his argument moved the focus of the conversation away from youth as a mass-category and toward individual youths now defined as patients. This biopolitical shift stressed treatment as a means to curing the individual and ensuring the life of the patient and of the body politic. It also relates back to the moralizing arguments that conservatives used to bemoan the fruits of modernization in the 1960s. Here, Ganem Pérez’s pamphlet on delinquency suggests a synecdoche for the collective failure of the nation. In the eyes of conservatives, postrevolutionary society’s hedonistic embrace of modernity was no different than youth’s “escape towards the darkness.” Thus, the immorality of youth stood in for the immorality of all Mexicans, and it explained the sense of decline in the country after 1968.

In more concrete terms, Ganem Pérez’s text began a series of actions undertaken by state officials and private citizens to further treat the problem of youth addiction. These actions included countless newspaper articles warning Mexican readers of the danger of youth drug use, numerous official publications, and the creation of both public and private treatment centres designed to rehabilitate affected youth.

By 1970, the Mexican press brought these dire warnings into the homes and private conversations of the reading public. One article, covering a UNAM Faculty of Law conference, cited a Dr. Francisco Acevedo Vargas who warned of the annual four percent increase in drug use in Mexico. Maintaining the anxious, biopolitical tone of this conservative narrative, he argued before his audience that “the moral and material

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José Ganem Pérez, Los Hippies y los Hongos Alucinogenos en la Sierra de Oaxaca, 17.
interests of our society, even the conservation of our species”\textsuperscript{151} were at stake. Moreover, the XII Congress of the Pan-American Alliance of Female Doctors urged action against the threat posed by youth addiction while seeking to convince the public of a need for special treatment centres. The Mexican delegate, Dr. Alicia Gamboa Guzmán, claimed that “an elevated percentage of those that consume drugs have diverse levels of mental weakness, or more likely, great trauma; thus one can deduce that the problem is psychiatric.”\textsuperscript{152} She went on to claim that the key to saving youth, and by extension civilization, was the creation of isolated rural rehabilitation villas. Increasingly then, Mexican psychiatrists and doctors helped cultivate an atmosphere of crisis around youth, while parents, teachers and other adults read about the threat to survival facing their country, and humanity.

One of the most influential and enduring voices in shaping and refining this discourse of pathologized youth was Dr. Guido Belsasso, a specialist in both psychiatry and addiction, as well as one of the architects of the Mexican state’s drug rehabilitation program. Speaking before the Mexican Society of Neurology and Psychiatry in 1970, Belsasso reiterated calls to save youth “from falling into the abyss of toxicomanía and drug addiction.”\textsuperscript{153} Then, he articulated in the clearest terms to date the link between addiction and “the normal evolution of the adolescent.”\textsuperscript{154} Explaining the particular vulnerability of youth to corruption through drugs, Belsasso argued that,

It [was] necessary to assess the individual problem of the adolescent and establish if his confrontation with the adult world, in which he is assaulted by desires to try alcohol, cigarettes and drugs, is the result of a normal process or if it presents pathological characteristics.\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{151} “Aumenta el 4\% Anual el uso de Drogas en Nuestro País,” \textit{El Universal}, October 11, 1970.
\textsuperscript{154} Juventino Chávez, “Es Oportuno Iniciar in Programa que Salve al Jóven de las Drogas.”
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
Expressing the assumption that the biological stage of youth represented a period of psychological weakness, Belsasso’s argument shows the increasing belief among psychiatrists that youth needed to be treated, unlike before, at the individual level for a mental pathology.

It was not long before conservatives incorporated these ideas into an argument about the eruptions of street politics and violence in the late 1960s. Introducing youth drug use as one of the defining problems of the day, journalist Isabel Hernando claimed that in taking drugs, Mexican youths were “undermining their own existence.” Instead of stopping the argument here, at a pure critique of youth drug use, she went on to target drug trafficking as the truly evil and manipulative aspect of the problem. Coming back to the notion of youth as a victim, Hernando claimed that traffickers engaged in “an assault on youth, through degeneration and corruption in order to count on docile elements in the hands of a series of groups that try to guide youth in the struggle against established authority, against consolidated structures.” Making the argument that secret, subversive forces hooked youth on drugs in order to use them as submissive pawns, Hernando offered a comfortable explanation for events that, to this point, could not be easily reconciled in the minds of observers. Rooted firmly in the long-held assumption that youths, regardless of their actions, could not independently articulate a politics of their own, this line of thought rationalized the events of the 1960s in a way that attributed agency to mysterious, shadowy forces, and victimhood to pathologized youth. Furthermore, Hernando’s argument emptied any creative message that the 1968 protests might have contained, erasing them with the illusion of nefarious dealers concerned purely with destruction. But formulations such as these did more than explain a troubling past. They offered a way of preventing its repetition.

On June 16, 1971, Dr. Guillermo Calderón Narvaez of the Mental Health section of the Public Health Department issued a report on the problem of youth drug addiction that employed many of the assumptions expressed by commentators like Hernando and

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157 Isabel Hernando, “El Mundo, Hoy.”
experts like Belsasso. Moreover, the report established a framework for an entire project of surveillance, discipline, and rehabilitation that the Public Health Department undertook together with private organizations to ‘treat’ youth. Within the Mexican psychiatric profession, the influence of this report’s author cannot be overstated. In fact, Calderón Narvaez trained an entire generation of young psychiatrists and counsellors who would go on to run Mexico’s drug therapy programs in subsequent decades.

More importantly, the content of his report clearly shows the deepening of a conservative, biopolitical logic in post-1968 Mexico.

Beginning his report by identifying youth drug addiction as a surging social crisis that required immediate attention, Calderón Narvaez wasted little time explaining how the problem could be solved. Referring to the drug user as the “patient,” he argued that the doctor, as both expert specialist and possessor of knowledge of the “most intimate medico-social problems of the nuclear family,” was obliged to serve on the front line of the struggle against drugs. But it was not enough for the doctor to confront the problem in his clinic. Calderón Narvaez argued that given the causally linked expressions of youth rebellion, delinquency and drug-abuse, the problem was both medical and social, and therefore a problem of public health. And as a public health crisis, he urged the doctor (and the parent) to, beginning in his own home, “convert himself into an active element in the struggle to resolve this critical problem.” What this vague call to arms meant became clearer as he developed his report.

Before further defining the role of the doctor, the report was careful to fully articulate the logic that allowed Calderón Narvaez to define youth drug abuse, and by extension, youth rebellion, as a public health crisis. Employing the sort of social critique

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161 Ibid., 1.
162 Ibid., 2.
that characterized conservative narratives of the 1960s, he blamed the rapid pace of change in the modern world, the loosening of family structures, and complexity of the mechanized world for disrupting the natural psychological development of adolescents. But the report extended this trope, arguing that in taking drugs, Mexican youth engaged in an activity that provoked “physical, social [and] economic consequences unfavourable to the user [and] other persons.” Here, Calderón Narvaez conflated escapism, drug use, and the desire for social change among youths as symptoms of a mental disorder affecting youth and threatening the public. Thus, following the report’s claims, the Mexican medical community was obliged to intervene.

Calderón Narvaez's report also refined the meaning of youth, explaining how and why adolescent Mexicans were, in his mind, biologically predisposed to addiction. The first step the report took in this direction was to define the "personal predisposition[s]" of addicted youth. This meant falling into one of three categories: unstable and immature individuals struggling with personal relationships; frustrated individuals with internal conflicts; and impulsive individuals desiring immediate gratification. All of these predispositions, he continued, often masked deeper psychopathological problems.

Not satisfied to stop here, Calderón Narvaez then outlined a general definition of adolescence in the next section of his report. The overlap between addictive predispositions and circulating ideas about youth is striking. First, he claimed that unlike the biological stage of puberty, adolescence was a "psychological and social" process characterized by "emotional instability, the feeling of being misunderstood, an introverted tendency, idealism and an eagerness for sexual knowledge." Moreover, the report contended that the adolescent was compelled, given his psychological state, to seek the approval of peers and tend toward groups and rebellion. Concluding his definition, Calderón Narvaez argued, “the uncontrolled exacerbation of some of these aspects [led] to psychological pathologies such as juvenile delinquency, the use and abuse of

163 Ibid., 3.
164 Ibid., 7.
165 Ibid., 7.
intoxicants, [and] homosexuality." In this way, Calderón Narvaez understood adolescence to be synonymous with vulnerability to drug addiction and psychopathology. Furthermore, he distinguished between the biological stage of puberty and the psychological stage of adolescence. This distinction suggests that, like youth, adolescence could be applied broadly to people of nearly any age. It would all depend on their behaviour. And any outward expression of discontent with the status quo or traditional social order could, ultimately, be explained as symptomatic of this pathology.

As an inherently vulnerable group, the report argued that youth required careful attention, and Calderón Narvaez outlined an influential method for providing such care. Given that his report identified Mexican doctors as the single most important force in combating youth addiction, he urged the medical community to form mental health brigades that would go into the community and educate parents, teachers, priests, and all others charged with supervising youth. These teams would also work to ensure the "early detection of cases," thus guaranteeing "opportune treatment," and this meant resolving the underlying psychiatric problems affecting youth. Successful rehab, therefore, would eliminate the threat to public health, and perhaps public order, posed by drug using youth.

Critically, this report defined youth as a pathology that, left untreated, posed an existential threat to the species; offered an explanation for the social crisis of 1968 that fit within the overarching assumption of youth passivity; and finally, established a framework for treatment and rehab that would encourage intense surveillance and disciplining of youths an individual level. In sum, it spun a web of intersecting claims that, calling for action to ensure the biological survival of youth, ensured a highly depoliticizing environment. Significantly, these claims carried the authoritative weight of science.

166 Ibid., 7.
167 Ibid., 8.
168 Ibid., 8.
The doctors within the Mexican Department of Public Health did not only issue these reports amongst themselves. They also published several anti-drug educational brochures targeting parents, youth, and teachers. Those directed to the adult audience are particularly revealing of the climate of surveillance and discipline that now pervaded discussions of youth.

Writing to parents in 1971, Dr. Velasco warned of the universal problem of youth drug addiction and lamented its effect on the productivity of the nation’s citizens. His counsel for guardians was that poor parenting – the irrational use of authority in the home and an absence of communication – would weaken preventative measures against drug use. Instead, he argued, “many youth that consume drugs believe that, in doing so, they obtain a certain equilibrium that facilitates solidarity with their peers, that it permits them to challenge authority and social conventions and it satisfies their desires for adventure.” This drug-induced aggression toward norms, Velasco claimed, was the root of antisocial delinquency. The key then for parents was to serve first and foremost as examples for their children by demonstrating the proper ways to express disapproval or inconformity while maintaining open communication with youth. This, he claimed, would be the only way to protect against the dangerous unproductivity and antisocial tendencies of the youth drug user. Velasco’s brochure for parents suggests an effort to heighten both awareness of, and anxiety over, youth drug use within the private sphere of the home. Furthermore, it defined the psychological traits of youth and encouraged parents, through disciplinary action, to pre-empt the pathological degeneration into delinquency that psychiatrists understood to be affecting Mexican youth.

169 Dr. Velasco, Información Utíl Sobre el Problmea del Abuso de las Drogas que Causan Dependencia: Información para los Padres de Familia, (June 16, 1971, SSA-SubA-caja 122-exp 3, 1-3).
170 Dr. Velasco, Información Utíl Sobre el Problmea del Abuso de las Drogas que Causan Dependencia: Información para los Padres de Familia, 4.
171 Ibid., 4-5.
If Velasco’s brochure brought the fear of youth addiction into the home, the publication for teachers, written by Dr. Luis Antonio Gamiochipi Carbajal, strove to create a rigorous regime of surveillance within the Mexican school system.\footnote{Dr. Luís Antonio Gamiochipi Carbajal, Folleto para los Señores Profesores, (April 14, 1971, SSA-SubA-caja 122-exp 3)} Opening with information on the nature of specific drugs, from their chemical make-up to their potential risk for dependency, Gamiochipi Carbajal offered teachers an explicit list of “common symptoms”\footnote{Ibid., 4-8.} of drug use that they were obliged to constantly look for in students. While the report classified symptoms by type of drug, a cross-drug sample of just a few such symptoms is telling of the expert’s point: “expressions of anger and moodiness; association with other students known to abuse drugs; lack of interest in scholarly activities; drowsiness.”\footnote{Ibid., 8.} Across the board, teachers were warned that

the vast majority of adolescent addicts engage in drug abuse in the company of others, almost never alone, [and] for this reason we must carefully keep watch over small gatherings within the school, above all when they adopt precautions to avoid surveillance and do not admit new members into the group.\footnote{Ibid., 8-9.}

On this point, the report made it clear that the use of drugs, and even socialization among individual youth, predisposed adolescents to manipulation at the hands of criminal interests, therefore leading to the dangerous corruption of sectors of the student mass.\footnote{Ibid., 8-9.}

Including this convenient and implicit explanation for the student movement of 1968, Gamiochipi Carbajal implored teachers to spend a great deal of time and energy watching students for any suspicious behaviour and then reporting it to the appropriate medical authority to ensure early treatment. He was clear to reinforce the value of early detection and the importance of teachers in saving youth from the serious threat of addiction. Beyond saving youth, however, the report sought to create an environment in
which any sort of unsupervised gathering of students, regardless of their activity, would raise the alarm of a potential public health threat. Here, the effort to regulate and protect the biological existence of youth intersected with a project that, in practice, would actively depoliticize youth – and the boundary was noticeably blurred.

Building on these reports, the ways experts sought to rehabilitate the youth/patient further conflated the distinctions between surveillance, discipline, and treatment. One of the rehabilitation programs founded in Mexico in the 1970s, el Centro de Trabajo Juvenil or, the Centre for Juvenile Work, offers a telling example of the way the Mexican psychiatric community and private citizens came together to shape this ascending order. In 1969, journalist Kena Moreno sought to develop a program to confront what she saw as the defining problem of her generation: youth drug abuse.¹⁷⁷ In conjunction with the private organization Damas Publicistas y Asociadas A.C. and the Mexican Department of Public Health, Moreno opened the Centre for Juvenile Work on March 12, 1970, and by 1976, the organization could boast at least 30 units throughout Mexico.¹⁷⁸ The organizers designed the centre to offer, “preventative, therapeutic and rehabilitation activities against drug addiction in a happy and welcoming place,”¹⁷⁹ while providing an integrated mental health team composed of psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers.

In a report celebrating the success of the centre, Dr. Calderón Narvaez outlined the philosophy behind the rehabilitation work undertaken in the institution as one of productivity. The patients, watched by the volunteer women working in the centre, attended artisanal classes where they created small crafts to be sold to the general public. While the financial reward for such activity was nominal, Calderón Narvaez explained that it “activity [sought] the psychological effect of feeling like a productive

¹⁷⁹ Dr. Guillermo Calderón Narvaez, Informe al C. Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia sobre el Centro de Trabajo Juvenil, (SSA-SubA-caja 145-exp 5)
person in active collaboration with the program." This logic of rehabilitation drew on the existing psychiatric precedent to try and erase the tendency among some politicized youth, and especially hippies, toward rejecting modern systems of capitalist production and consumption. Moreover, the centre, instead of serving purely as a place of incarceration, would work directly on the bodies of youths to ‘cure’ and redeem those who had tempted alternative frameworks of life.

Beyond purely curative measures, the centre also employed a range of experts tasked with the study of addicted youth and subsequent knowledge production on their condition. This aspect of the centre’s work only strengthened the position of a psychiatric community that claimed increasingly authority on youth and its problems. Dr. Ernesto Lammoglia, one of the young disciples of Calderón Narvaez, presented data collected in his work to the newspaper *El Universal* in 1971. Based on his experience, he defined drug addiction as a “problem that [was] causing the mental genocide of thousands of youth.” Further compounding the message of the earlier pamphleteering of the Public Health Department, Lammoglia urged that it was not possible to save addicted youth that had escaped early detection. Thus, he argued, parents and teachers had an immense obligation to closely monitor the youth in their daily life, sending any suspicious or potentially ill adolescents to institutions such as the Centre for Juvenile Work. By this point, the media inundated readers with claims that Mexican youth was ill, and as a result of this particular pathology, was engaging in a “collective suicide” that threatened both their own existence and that of humanity.

While the Centre for Juvenile Work did not ultimately intern and rehabilitate all drug using or politicized Mexican youths, it does suggest the pervasiveness of a growing biopolitical order that served to disarm the youth politics of the 1960s. Its endurance – it exists today as the Centre for Youth Integration – its rapid growth, and the numbers of patients in its first year alone attest to its social impact. In 1971 it had an average of 39

180 Ibid.
182 Ibid.
daily visits and a population of 246 long-term patients, while employees and volunteers engaged in the constant work of educating parents. At the same time, some of the doctors involved in the running of the Centre, Ernesto Lammoglia for one, went on to have successful careers as public intellectuals whose reputations were forged in the fight against youth addiction in the early 1970s. Thus, this institute (one among many) attests to the power of the pathologizing narrative of youth in post-'68 Mexico.\textsuperscript{183}

It is undoubtedly difficult to gauge the concrete effects of language in a historical setting: did Mexican parents and teachers really fear the annihilation of their children as a result of drug use? To what extent did the calls for surveillance and discipline actually depoliticize youth? The answers to these questions are not easily gleaned from the archives. But the material I have reviewed suggests that in Mexico, in the wake of the social crisis that exploded in 1968, the public debate on youth took on a new tone. The psychiatric community, now an authoritative voice in the debate claiming the mantel of science, helped shape a conversation about youth that accomplished several things that the language of corrupted youth in 1960s could not. To start, equating youth or adolescence with psychological pathologies helped explain the violence and chaos of the previous decade, while continuing to preclude any understanding of Mexican youths’ behaviour as political.

This new language also had profound impacts on its present context. Crafting an environment of anxiety and fear over the survival of the species and a desire to avoid a repetition of the recent past, the ways commentators discussed youth drug use introduced a new tactic for maintaining order based on a biopolitical imperative. It seems plausible that this medicalized public debate about youth, defined as pathology, did in fact compel a significant number of Mexican parents, teachers, doctors, and any other adults charged with caring for youth, to engage in what was essentially a highly depoliticizing project of surveillance and discipline. Frighteningly, I think they did so with the best interest of youths in mind. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s work, I call this a

\textsuperscript{183} Informe del Programa Desarrollado en el “Centro de Trabajo Juvenil” Durante el Periodo Comprendido del 23 de Marzo de 1970 al 1 de Febrero 1971. (SSA-SubA-caja 145-exp 5.)
biopolitical order and I wonder if it does not help us understand the disappearance of a student-based politics of equality in post-'68 Mexico.
Afterword

It would be erroneous to see this language of pathologized youth as uniformly successful in its depoliticizing effect – even with its apparent ability to shape understandings of social reality. Clearly, in the wake of 1968 some of the most radicalized student demonstrators, the *linea dura*, fled Mexico City for the rural zones of the country, seeking to establish a base for a long-term guerrilla struggle.¹⁸⁴ This radicalization led to a small yet intensely violent clandestine war that historians are only beginning to understand. Mexican feminisms also pushed the boundaries of the politically and socially acceptable in post-1968 Mexico, challenging a rigid patriarchy in myriad ways.¹⁸⁵ But it is equally evident that, despite the tortuous pace of change and the persistence of deep inequalities, no large, equality-based social movement has come close to challenging the status quo in Mexico in the way that the 1968 protests managed to do. This very fact, in part, helps explain why contemporary activists, commentators within the Mexican left, and historians have built the story of 1968 into such mythic proportions. After the *Tlatelolco* Massacre that kind of politics never regained the same purchase, and it is somehow understood that it will not return. Nostalgia then, characterizes its narrative, and only democratization salvages its meaning.

This does not mean, however, that we should abandon 1968 as a key moment of change in the story of Mexico’s postrevolutionary period. While conservatives developed an entire allegorical lexicon of youth for debating the political before 1968, their

commentaries abruptly changed from a language of delinquency to one of pathology in the wake of the protests. At the same time, a new president, Luis Echeverria, actively sought to reincorporate youth into the fold with his neo-populist rhetoric of “democratic opening” that promised equality and democracy emanating from within the PRI. Largely, this strategy was about co-opting leftist students and former activists more than affecting any meaningful change. But as I suggest in this thesis, it was the biopolitical turn in the language of youth that may best explain the disappearance of progressive, equality-driven, student-based politics, not any cynical attempt at PRIista co-option. Looking beyond the immediate fallout, this story might also offer clues to another fundamental characteristic of Mexico’s post-'68 period: the articulation and rise of a conservative, nationalist opposition that culminated in democratization and an end to dictatorship in the year 2000.

As scholars have argued, the 1970s were a key moment in the building of a right wing coalition that positioned itself as the democratic alternative to the PRI. Finding its institutional structure in the long-standing loyal opposition party, the Partido Acción Nacionalista (PAN), this diverse alliance included humanistic Catholics, ultraconservatives formed in the clandestine right wing student groups of the 1960s, and wealthy northern businessmen alienated by the rhetoric of the Echeverría regime. Significantly, this group found its political common ground in a moral alternative to the decay and degeneration of decades of PRIista corruption. In such a values-based framework, the tropes of delinquency, parental failure, and pathologized youth would carry a great deal of currency. Indeed, their emphasis on the patriarchal family, moral

186 Zolov, Refried Elvis, 13; Kandell, La Capital, 531.
188 Dawson, “Pan Para Todos,” 66; Uribe, “La ultraderecha en México"
renovation, and honesty seem to link directly back to the widespread panic over mentally and “socially degenerate” youth that typified the public debate of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Perhaps we might read the subsequent success of the right in Mexican national politics as the result of this pervasive sense of moral crisis in the country. What could validate the message of PAnístas more than the bloody conflict between degenerate, drug-addicted delinquents and a corrupt, violent regime?

This is a reading of the 1960s that turns the self-styled legacy of ’68ers on its head. It sees democratization from the right, largely as a result of a failure on the left. But if this reading does upset a dominant narrative of the student movement, it should also make us aware of the troubling ways that the nostalgic narrative has occluded the role of the right in that moment. By claiming ’68 as an event belonging solely to the left, it has enabled the rise of a new politics in Mexico: one that positions itself as the alternative to the moral debacle of ’68. Moreover, it is a politics that accepts hierarchy and inequality as the necessary order of things. Surely this was not part of the program for those who protested under the banner of equality in the late 1960s?

It does, however, align with the project of those ultraconservative Catholic students who also took to the streets in 1968, fighting what they deemed a diabolical Marxism. The commentators too, who cried out over the corrupting influences of postrevolutionary life, shared in this vision. Their message of nationalist Catholicism – identifying family and Church as moral bulwarks against a threatening modernity – has formed the core of a PAnista right that now enjoys broad electoral support in Mexico. These conservatives, the ones who present themselves as the alternative to ’68, have in many ways succeeded in selling their message to the broader Mexican electorate, and they can legitimately claim much responsibility for democratization in the country. In light of the story I tell in this thesis, might this turn of events be, in some way, a consequence of the very language that Mexicans used to define, debate, and regulate youth in the years 1940-1972?

\[189\] Zolov, Refried Elvis, 13.
\[190\] Dawson, “Pan Para Todos,” 77.
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