

Unintended Lessons of Revolution

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UNINTENDED

Student Teachers and Political Radicalism in

LESSONS OF

Twentieth-Century Mexico TANALÍS PADILLA

REVOLUTION

Duke University

Duke University Press Durham and London 2021

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by Aimee C. Harrison

Typeset in Garamond Premier Pro and Helvetica Neue by

Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Padilla, Tanalís, [date] author.

Title: Unintended lessons of revolution: student teachers and political

radicalism in twentieth-century Mexico / Tanalís Padilla. Description: Durham: Duke University Press, 2021. | Includes

bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021011881 (print)

LCCN 2021011882 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478013860 (hardcover)

ISBN 9781478014799 (paperback)

ISBN 9781478022084 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478091684 (ebook other)

Subjects: LCSH: Education, Rural—Social aspects—Mexico—History—

20th century. | Teachers colleges—Mexico—History—20th century. |

Boarding schools—Mexico—History—20th century. | Peasants—

Education—Social aspects—Mexico—History—20th century.

Teachers—Political activity—Mexico—History—20th century.

BISAC: HISTORY / Latin America / Mexico

Classification: LCC LC5148. M45 P236 2021 (print) | LCC LC5148. M45

(ebook) | DDC 370.9173/4—dc23

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021011881

LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021011882

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Cover art: (Foreground) Mural at the rural normal of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. Photograph by the author. (Background) Rural normal of Galeana, Nuevo León, 1934. Archivo General de la Nación, Photographic Archive, Normales Rurales, c2, Sobre 9.



In memory of my mother, Eva, herself a radical teacher

To Ayotzinapa's Missing 43: May your families one day find justice



Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix / LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS XV

Introduction: Ayotzinapa and the Legacy of Revolution, 1

- 1 Normales, Education, and National Projects, 23
- 2 A New Kind of School, a New Kind of Teacher, 43
- 3 "And That's When the Main Blow Came," 68
- 4 Education at a Crossroads, 99
- 5 "The Infinite Injustice Committed against Our Class Brothers," 133
- 6 Learning in the Barricades, 165
- 7 "A Crisis of Authority," 189
- 8 "That's How We'd Meet . . . Clandestinely with the Lights Off," 212 Epilogue: Education, Neoliberalism, and Violence, 241

Appendix: Sample Rural Normal Class Schedules, 255

NOTES 269 / BIBLIOGRAPHY 323 / INDEX 343



Acknowledgments

Intellectually, politically, and personally, the topic of this book picked me as much as I picked it. The question of rural teachers first began to tug at me in the early 2000s when I was working on my first book about a postrevolutionary agrarian movement. The more I delved into Mexico's twentieth-century history of campesino resistance, the more I encountered the countryside's teachers, as organic intellectuals, as advisers, and as leaders. My search for answers about their persistent presence led me to the rural normales, utterly unique institutions whose politicized student body often made headlines for mounting roadblocks, staging demonstrations, or otherwise disrupting business as usual. From predominantly poor backgrounds, the youths who attended these boarding schools couched their demand for an education in the language of socialism, an ethos that, I came to learn, was a constituting element of their school culture. The fact that their student association defined itself as Marxist-Leninist was fascinating to me, having grown up in a Marxist household but coming of age after the fall of the Berlin Wall when, even among the leftist groups with which I participated, many insisted on a new analytic paradigm. And then there was my own childhood in rural Mexico, where I attended my town's public elementary school, precisely the type where rural *normalistas* would have been sent to teach. Precarious in so many ways, it was better off than most rural schoolhouses because it went up

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to sixth grade. Still, its predominantly campesino and indigenous student body was unstable. Youngsters were pulled out during harvest season to help their families, and many had to join the labor market before reaching sixth grade. I remember clearly my sixth-grade cohort being half the size of the first-grade class.

In various ways these dynamics shaped my connection to the world of rural normalismo, and I am ever indebted to those who assisted me in reconstructing it. In Mexico, numerous compañeros and compañeras, colleagues and friends, helped me navigate the vast network of schools, teachers, students, and archives necessary to write this book. Luis Hernández Navarro was an ever generous source of contacts, stimulating discussion, and a treasure trove of knowledge about Mexico's education policy—past and present. His own work with, and participation in, the democratic teachers' movement, is a powerful example of the best tradition of the committed intellectual. I feel fortunate to call him a friend. My research in various parts of Mexico would not have been possible without the kindness of people like Alma Gómez Caballero, who opened her home to me and introduced me to other normalistas who, like herself, participated in local and national struggles. In Oaxaca, Rogelio Vargas Garfias led me through the rich and multifaceted world of the state's militant teachers. His warmth and tireless struggle are inspiring amid the seemingly insurmountable odds faced by teachers and students in Mexico's poorest regions. I will likewise always be grateful to those dissident teachers who accompanied me through hardto-reach parts of the countryside. Those journeys, those conversations, and the people I met will long remain with me. In Zacatecas, I am grateful to Martín Escobedo for his help accessing the local archives of San Marcos. Marcelo Hernández Santos, Sergio Ortíz Briano, and Hallier Arnulfo Morales Dueñas have also been enormously supportive. Always eager to help clarify some of normalismo's intricacies, they have been valuable colleagues in the process of writing this book. I am likewise grateful to Siddharta Camargo, who generously provided fruitful contacts for key parts of this research. In Morelos, Guillermo Franco Solís helped guide me through the fascinating world of Amilcingo's rural normal. During my visits to various rural normales current students gave me tours of their campuses and shared their experiences of study and struggle. I am grateful that they allowed me in, even during delicate moments such as when they had shuttered a campus as protest. In the wake of different acts of state repression, student leaders spoke to me with pride and determination, even as their precautionary measures and a tendency to look over their shoulder revealed the extent to

Acknowledgments

which violence was a part of their condition. Those interactions gave me a complex sense of their schools' present and sharpened the lens with which to see their past. Throughout the research and writing process, I have benefited enormously from conversations with Hugo Aboites, Ariadna Acevedo Rodrigo, Jorge Cázares, Alicia Civera, Francisco López Bárcenas, César Navarro, Jesús Vargas, and Lev Velázquez. I am grateful for their time and intellectual generosity. I thank Tracy Goode and Irving Reynoso for their research support as well as the numerous archivists and librarians who went out of their way make my searches fruitful. Friends like Enrique Dávalos, Guillermo Peimbert, Víctor Hugo Sánchez Reséndiz, and Javier Villanueva have brought me support, fun, and hours of stimulating conversation. My travels to Mexico have long been enriched by their presence. My aunt and uncle, Hilda Moreno and Arturo Padilla, remain generous with their home and ever present with logistical support. Their welcoming arms have been a great source of comfort.

Through the many years working on this project, I have received support from several institutions. The Woodrow Wilson Career Enhancement Fellowship Program helped fund my initial research in Mexico, the Institute for Historical Studies at the University of Texas at Austin provided the time and space to begin the writing process, and a fellowship at Wellesley's Newhouse Center for the Humanities supported my writing as I finished the first draft of this manuscript. Dartmouth College, where I was a faculty member until 2015, provided financial support for several research trips, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), my new institutional home, has been generous in its funding and leave time, both crucial to finishing this book.

The thinking, drafting, writing, and rewriting process for this book took place in conversation with many colleagues and friends. Claudia Rueda has been an ever-present sounding board for ideas, a generous draft reader, and an incisive source of feedback, often helping me out of the corners I wrote myself into. Our in-person and long-distance writing sessions helped fend off some of the loneliness inherent in the writing process. Over many years now, Louise Walker has been an incredibly generous draft reader. Her keen eye, a ruthlessly helpful commentary, and an acute sense of the larger picture have been crucial to honing my ideas. With immense care, Cindy Forster read almost the entire draft of this manuscript. She is deeply attuned to the voices from below and the logic to which they point, and her feedback and her own work as a historian have influenced my thinking in fundamental ways. Christina Jiménez also read most of this manuscript. Her comments, encouragement, and ever-positive outlook were an important part of the



process. Alex Aviña has time and again engaged thoughtfully and constructively with so many of my questions—big and small. His solidarity and compañerismo have meant a lot to me. At a crucial moment in the life of this book, Kirsten Weld provided invaluable observations that sharpened its focus. It has been a privilege to count on her feedback and be part of the Latin Americanist community of historians she has helped create through the writing workshops at Harvard. I have also benefited enormously from the wider community of Mexicanist historians and am especially grateful to Ray Craib, Shane Dillingham, Gil Joseph, Steve Lewis, Ken Maffitt, Jocelyn Olcott, Wil Pansters, Pablo Piccato, Thom Rath, Ben Smith, and Mary Kay Vaughan. With kindness and wisdom, Gisela Fosado, Duke's editorial director, has guided this project through publication. I am immensely grateful to her, Ale Mejía, Ellen Goldlust, and Duke University Press's wonderful editorial production team. To Brooke Larson (who subsequently revealed herself) and Duke's other anonymous reviewer, thank you for engaging deeply with this manuscript, asking tough questions, and making invaluable suggestions.

My colleagues in the History Department at MIT have been nothing short of wonderful. Welcoming me with warmth and kindness, they have been crucially supportive and enthusiastic about my work. Craig Wilder, a longtime friend and colleague, continues to be a wise and generous mentor. He has been immensely helpful in thinking about parallels between the United States and Mexico on the dynamics of education as it relates to historically subjugated populations. Jeff Ravel's warmth, generous spirit, and enthusiastic engagement have greatly enriched my time at MIT. His own knowledge of Latin American history has made for some especially compelling discussions about my work and the dynamics of the region more generally. Deeply thoughtful and thoroughly kind in his feedback, Chris Capozzola has time and again provided invaluable commentary on this project. Emma Teng's continuous commitment to Latin American studies at MIT has been crucial to fortifying the institute's vibrant intellectual community and increasing the possibilities of connecting research, teaching, and community engagement. Directly and indirectly, this project has been supported by numerous staff members. I am especially grateful to Ece Turnator, MIT's humanities and digital scholarship librarian, for consistently going above and beyond the call of duty to help track down obscure works. At Dartmouth College, Jill Baron also proved amazing in her skill and dogged pursuit of sources. Karen Gardener, whom I had the privilege of working alongside during my tenure as director of graduate studies at MIT, was thorough, patient, and ever



on top of tasks big and small. Her conscientious nature made it possible to strike a productive balance between research and administrative work.

My lasting friendship with numerous colleagues has been an immense source of strength, not to mention fun. I am especially grateful to Aimee Bahng, Laura Brown, Joe Cullon, Kendra Field, Jennifer Fluri, Reena Goldthree, Jean Kim, Annelise Orleck, Rashauna Johnson, Russell Rickford, Naaborko Sackeyfio-Lenoch, Justin Steil, and Franny Sullivan, who have been there in good times and bad, providing support and sharing in joy. Since we first met as we began teaching at Dartmouth, Celia Naylor has been a kindred spirit. Her camaraderie, generous spirit, humor, and audacity have accompanied me in countless ways. I look forward to many more years of work, visits, and travel, hopefully more of the latter two.

In the fullest dimension of the term, Bobby has been a true compañero. Not only has he read multiple drafts of this work, talked through my ideas in their rawest form, helped refine them to acquire coherence, and offered immensely constructive feedback, but he has consistently undertaken the lion's share of domestic and family duties. His unassuming, loving, and supportive acts made possible the focus this book so often required. Camilo, our son, who has lived with this work the entirety of his short life, handled the absences it brought with a patience otherwise uncharacteristic of his eager personality. To be sure, he found ways of joining the process, constantly matching my early waking hours by insisting he could sit quietly by my side and draw. I will always cherish these predawn work sessions even if they were never quite as quiet as he promised. *Hijo*, I'm finally done "making my book." I hope one day you will read it.

My mother, Eva, did not live to see this work's completion. But her spirit shaped it in many ways. Tireless in her devotion as a mother and committed in her work as a public schoolteacher, she was also daring and unabashed in her relationship to the world. Witnessing her tireless labor as a Los Angeles public schoolteacher, I learned early on how deficient education budgets rested on the backs of teachers, not to mention their students. She was not one to hold back on political explanations even when I was too young to understand them, and her accounts of how racism and capitalism shaped the world instilled in me an early indignity toward injustice. I consider it a great fortune to have been born to a resilient, radical schoolteacher like her.



Abbreviations

CNED	National Central of Democratic Students (Central Nacional de Estudiantes Demócraticos)
CREN	Regional Normal Teaching Center (Centro Regional de Enseñanza Normal)
FECSM	Mexican Federation of Socialist Campesino Students (Federación de Estudiantes Campesinos Socialistas de México)
GPG	Popular Guerrilla Group (Grupo Popular Guerrillero)
IPN	National Polytechnic Institute (Instituto Politécnico Nacional)
MAR	Revolutionary Action Movement (Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria)
MRM	Revolutionary Teachers Movement (Movimiento Revolucionario del Magisterio)
PAN	National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional)
PP	Popular Party (Partido Popular)
PPS	Popular Socialist Party (Partido Popular Socialista)
PST	Socialist Workers' Party (Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores)
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional)



SEP Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública)

SNTE National Union of Education Workers (Sindicato Nacional

de Trabajadores de la Educación)

UGOCM General Union of Mexican Workers and Campesinos

(Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México)



Abbreviations

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Ayotzinapa and the Legacy of Revolution

IN THE AFTERNOON OF September 26, 2014, dozens of students from the teacher-training college of Ayotzinapa in Mexico's coastal state of Guerrero set out to commandeer several buses to use as transportation to Mexico City. As they had in years past, they would attend the annual commemoration of the 1968 massacre in which the army killed hundreds of students demonstrating in Tlatelolco's plaza. Frowned on by the authorities and begrudgingly tolerated by bus companies as the cost of doing business, such bus takeovers by students of the country's seventeen rural normales were common practice. These boarding schools, created in the 1920s for the sons and daughters of campesinos, have long enjoyed a reputation for political militancy. This latest action appeared as another exploit in this tradition. However, later that night, as the Ayotzinapa students tried to depart the city of Iguala with the five buses they had garnered, they found themselves encircled by a massive armed operation. Local police blocked their exit while uniformed agents and plainclothes gunmen shot at them. The army dispatch at the nearby military base that had, in concert with federal and state police, been tracking the students since they left their school earlier that afternoon, did nothing. By morning, three Ayotzinapa students lay dead, one with his face torn off.

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Forty-three other students had disappeared, last seen being dragged off in the presence of federal and state authorities.¹

Gruesome as it was, this event was hardly remarkable in a country whose war on drugs—officially declared in 2006—had, by then, left over 100,000 people dead and 25,000 more disappeared.² Indeed, federal officials quickly dismissed the attack as a local cartel conflict: if students from Ayotzinapa had been victims, they must have had some connection to illicit activity. After all, the normalistas' penchant for disruption was widely known. Remarkably, however, this official narrative did not quell public ire, nor did the victims' families accept it. Over the following months, thousands took to the streets demanding justice and the return of the forty-three disappeared Ayotzinapa students. Why this event and not the thousands of other deaths and disappearances sparked the unprecedented protests has much to do with the identity of the forty-three disappeared, the immediate actions of their peers, and the history of the schools where they studied.³

Founded in 1926, the rural *normal* of Ayotzinapa was one of thirty-five teacher-training schools the Mexican government built in the two decades following the 1910–20 revolution. This civil war ended the thirty-five-year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911) and brought to power a nationalist government whose ensuing project deployed teachers as agents of state consolidation. The institutions that would train these educators acquired many of their defining characteristics during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40), whose numerous progressive reforms included socialist education. Although socialist education was short-lived as official policy and never clearly defined by its state architects, at rural normales its meaning was simple and enduring: justice. Education for the poor, a student voice in institutional practices, and class consciousness constituted defining elements of *normalista* culture, reproduced in subsequent decades thanks to student collective action.

These dynamics were at play that fateful September night. Commandeering buses from private companies was not just a means to acquire transportation but also a lesson in protest, one the student association passed on to each incoming class. The Tlatelolco commemoration that the Ayotzinapa students planned to attend, moreover, offered a history lesson, an important one for rural normalistas whose besieged schools had for decades produced numerous campesino and labor activists, some killed or jailed by the state (figure I.1). Tlatelolco's anniversary provided a venue to dramatize the myriad ways the government had betrayed the 1917 Constitution and the revolutionary principles on which the modern Mexican state was founded.





FIGURE I.1 Mural at the rural normal of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, that depicts the 1970s guerrilla leader Lucio Cabañas and the images of the Missing 43. The legend reads, "We are an army of dreamers." Photograph by author.

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The betrayal was decades in the making. President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–18), whose administration marked the return of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI), which had ruled the country from 1929 to 2000, epitomized many of its sins. It was corrupt, authoritarian, and technocratic, and its long relationship to drug trafficking had spun out of control, a dynamic reflected in the dizzying numbers of people killed and disappeared in the preceding decade. In this context, the violence against Ayotzinapa's students was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Their condition as students, the sheer scale of the attack against them, and the state's involvement in it elicited the specter of Tlatelolco, the site of a massacre that still haunts the PRI. Building on their long tradition of protest, rural normalistas mobilized immediately, sparking a level of outcry the state could not contain.

There are few weapons the poor can wield against the powerful, but in those the rural normalistas are well versed. In addition to compelling bus drivers to take them to demonstrations, they have frequently blocked roads, taken over tollbooths to let drivers pass for free, commandeered and distributed merchandise from cargo trucks, and sequestered transport vehicles in their schoolyards. And they have long organized school strikes and walkouts. Students undertook most of these actions merely to force the authorities to allocate the necessary budgets for the schools' subsistence—funds they are entitled to but often receive only after a fight. While normalista persistence and loud protest have ensured their schools' survival, they also produced a black legend. For decades, the government and the press have labeled these institutions centers of agitation and guerrilla seedbeds; the authorities have threatened to turn them into pig farms or schools for tourist technicians and have characterized those who study and teach there as agitators, subversives, and, more recently, pseudostudents or hooligans. Indeed, in the public debates that raged as the families of Ayotzinapa's Missing 43 searched for their sons, official narratives sought to blame the victims. What, other than trouble, could students expect with their disruptive behavior and blatant disregard for private property?

To the narrative that criminalized the victims, protesters counterposed the crimes of the state. "Fue el estado" ("It was the state") became the massive rallying cry. Here the Tlatelolco massacre, the anniversary of which the Ayotzinapa normalistas sought to honor, intensified the rage. Still an open wound, Tlatelolco resonated across social sectors, partly because its victims were students. Just as significant was the rural normalistas' tradition of protest. Within moments of the September 26 attack, with a fellow classmate's

Introduction

blood-soaked body still on the ground, students called a press conference and safeguarded the crime scene. Before most could even describe the events as they transpired that night, normalistas had activated their school networks across the country, publicized this latest aggression against them, and reminded the nation of their schools' history. That history is the subject of this book.

A RADICAL TRADITION

Since their founding, rural normales have been hosts to national sagas. Emerging from the state's revolutionary project, they trained teachers who were intended to shape a modern patriotic citizenry by organizing civic festivals, promoting hygiene and health campaigns, and replacing superstition with science. But the popular longings driving the Mexican Revolution also permeated these institutions and by the 1930s became constituting elements of their institutional logic. Land reform, education for the poor, and community leadership stood as guiding principles of the teachers they trained. Over the coming decades, the tensions between state consolidation and revolutionary justice produced a telling contradiction. The very schools meant to shape a loyal citizenry became hotbeds of political radicalism, and their graduates appeared consistently linked to militant protests, including guerrilla struggles. How and why did the rural normales stray from the state's original design?

The answer lies in four interrelated processes. First, while rural normales were founded for the purposes of state consolidation, they were grounded in the notion of agrarian justice. Built on expropriated haciendas, these schools were enshrined with an air of poetic justice. In the palatial estates that previously exploited their parents, adolescents of campesino origin—one of the requirements to study at these institutions—would now gain an education.⁶ State officials linked education to rural development, adopting pedagogical principles that connected the classroom to the community, cooperativism to individual discipline, and learning to laboring. These qualities, insisted Mexico's early twentieth-century educational architects, would reinforce a "rural spirit," one that harnessed campesinos' commitment to the land but directed it to modern, efficient ends.⁷ This framework sparked a uniquely student-campesino consciousness that came to challenge a modern national project increasingly devoid of justice.

Second, the state's prescribed mission comingled with a transformation in students' own identity. At rural normales, the children of campesinos



became professionals, male and female students shed gender norms and absorbed different ones, and ethnic identities expanded or narrowed as normalistas navigated the contradictions of *mestizaje*, the dominant ideology that Mexico constituted a harmonious mixture of Spanish and indigenous heritage. Field trips exposed students to different parts of the country, and dorm life alongside two hundred to five hundred other youth gave them a degree of autonomy they did not have at home. Such exposure and social fluidity denaturalized hierarchy and created both the possibility and expectation of change.

Third, rural normales hosted broad contradictions that made struggle a fact of daily life. The imposing architecture of the ex-haciendas that housed these schools contrasted with the spartan nature of daily life. Boarding-houses rarely had enough beds for all of the students; the newly arrived slept on cardboard. Food was meager, running water and electricity infrequent. To secure their basic needs, students continuously petitioned the government, leading them to mobilize for resources as much as they studied for classes. By underfunding and abandoning rural normales, the state assured that the individual upward mobility the schools promised could be secured only through collective struggle.

Finally, these contradictions extended beyond normalistas' time as students. Upon their graduation, the Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP) dispatched the young teachers to communities whose children they would teach, whose living conditions they would improve, and whose inhabitants they would organize and uplift. It was a daunting task, one made virtually impossible after 1940 as the state took less interest in the countryside, except as it might serve the cities. In lieu of the funding, infrastructure, and resources—including a dignified teaching salary—that might buttress rural education, the SEP appealed to teachers' missionary duty. They were of campesino origin after all; sacrifice must not be foreign to them.

Rural teachers navigated this contradiction in myriad ways. As did the rest of the population, most migrated to urban centers, where they pursued professional advancement and could teach in more manageable conditions. Plenty became regional caciques (political bosses), *charros* (official unionists), or corrupt politicians. Some pursued justice relentlessly, willing to lose life and limb in the process. In the minority, these militant teachers and students exerted an outsized role, and their legacy is most associated with the rural normales. This association is partly based on rural normalistas' constant protest to garner resources for their schools' survival. But it is also

Introduction

a measure of how these schools served as an uncomfortable reminder of the countryside's abandonment.

Unintended Lessons of Revolution details the culture of student militancy that was forged and reproduced in Mexico's rural normales. Rural normalistas occupied an intermediary position between city and countryside, and their lived experience, tactics of struggle, and notions of justice drew on the campesino, student, and labor worlds. The ideology they fashioned highlights key continuities between the old left (whose relationship to the Communist Party looked to the Soviet Union as a model, saw workers as the principal revolutionary protagonists, and privileged structure over agency) and the new left (which was more inspired by anti-imperialist struggles, especially Cuba; saw students and campesinos as essential agents of change; and believed the conditions for revolution should be made rather than awaited). At rural normales the relationship between the two became manifest not because of the content or style of classroom lessons—which were in many ways quite traditional—but because of the nature of students' collective living experience in institutions conceived of within the framework of revolutionary justice. As an ethos more than a pedagogy, Mexico's brief 1930s experiment with socialist education proved transcendent. So, too, the Mexican Federation of Socialist Campesino Students (Federación de Estudiantes Campesinos Socialistas de México, FECSM) formed in 1935 to advocate for the rights of students at rural normales. In the tradition of the old left, the federation was hierarchical, sought discipline from its members, imposed mandatory meetings and activities, and had a vanguardist strategy. Within rural normales it became a primary vehicle to challenge the state, transmit historical knowledge, and offer analytical tools that denaturalized poverty. It challenged the powerful to reckon with the vision of the oppressed.

That challenge propelled a radical political culture at rural normales, schools that, like other progressive institutions from Latin America's old left, became venues "where the abstractions of liberty and equality could be embodied as felt experiences, where individual rights and collective social justice would be viscerally understood and mutually dependent," what Greg Grandin characterized as insurgent politics. That from the start rural normales were materially precarious, besieged by the right and dependent for their survival on students petitioning the state, punctured liberal individualist notions that education was an independent, self-sufficient endeavor. Insurgent politics also tied schooling to action, giving students a sense that conditions in the world could be changed. This process spurred political consciousness, not because students learned a critical pedagogy that they then applied as teachers,



but because they came to understand their very schools as historically constituted through social relationships of power.¹⁰

The question of consciousness, an awareness of one's material reality that spurs action, is a central theme in this story. Scholars of labor, agrarian, student, and guerrilla movements have long noted the multifaceted, contingent, and contradictory nature of critical consciousness and its manifestations.11 Consciousness is not, as E. P. Thompson famously put it, tied to the ups and downs of an economic curve but is an accumulation of lived experiences.¹² It is also not a static or binary characteristic that subjects either do or do not possess. Consciousness is a process with multiple origins and expressions, always dependent on the particularities of time and place. 13 Finally, consciousness is a constantly evolving process, one honed or transformed in the act of struggle, one that itself generates new possibilities.¹⁴ This is why the tactics, rhetoric, and demands of particular movements change over time and why radical revolutionary language coexists with seemingly innocuous strategies of "reaching the people." ¹⁵ In their rhetoric, historical actors often borrow from the only available political discourse, even if it originates with elites.¹⁶ Other times the language of struggle comes from utopian ideals spurred by insurrections of the dispossessed, whether failed or successful.¹⁷ Whatever its manifestations, context is key to understanding the puzzle of collective action.18

For the indigenous and campesino students of this study, that context was the network of rural normales, schools that came to harbor shared politicized cultural norms. This institutional world determined much of their praxis, a condition that goes a long way in explaining why, after graduation, individual teachers' paths diverged so widely and why, for many, upward mobility came to supersede collective action. But even within the schools, the politicized environment did not mean all students were militant actors. Indeed, as is historically the case, relentless activists are the minority and achieve change only when their message resonates with a larger group and when that larger group is willing to act. At rural normales the self-consciously political student leadership organized through the FECSM achieved collective action not because it promised liberation but because it secured the basic material needs for their institutions' survival and reproduction. To be sure, the FECSM did articulate radical principles—in its calls for socialism, for example—and organized militant actions such as land takeovers alongside campesinos that posited a fundamental restructuring of society and cultivated alliances to achieve it. But for most normalistas those lessons served as a framework to justify and secure their own rights: adequate living conditions

Introduction

in their boarding schools, competent teachers and sufficient learning supplies, pedagogical and recreational infrastructure, and a dignified job upon graduation. To achieve this, the FECSM constantly called for strikes. Since its representative body drew from rural normales across the country, these strikes extended nationally and forced the upper echelons of the SEP to the negotiating table.

The politicized culture that became such an enduring feature of rural normales is a measure of how far the schools' constituting logic—which foregrounded the countryside—contrasted with the state's actions that privileged cities. Unable and unwilling to resolve this contradiction, the government propagated a narrative that stigmatized these schools and their students like no others, even as many rural normal graduates went on to serve as cogs in the ruling party's governing apparatus. In the 1940s the authorities revived reactionary 1930s tropes demonizing teachers' role as community leaders; the press added red-scare tales of Bolshevik takeovers in the 1950s and of Cuban subversion in the 1960s; and the SEP topped it off by insisting that unqualified teachers bore responsibility for the nation's educational shortcomings, especially the dismal situation in the countryside.

The logic established a clear continuity between the portrayal of ungrateful campesino youth who, at rural normales, continued to challenge the state rather than appreciate the opportunity and resources to study and teachers who would not succumb to SEP appeals for self-sacrifice and insisted on higher pay, better working conditions, and more benefits. Teachers' very struggle for union democracy, which, under the leadership and with the participation of rural normal graduates, saw especially strong episodes in the mid-1950s and again in the late 1970s, provided an additional layer with which to demonize them in the public eye.¹⁹ On the one hand, the National Union of Education Workers (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, SNTE)—the powerful official teachers' union, whose historic allegiance to the state produced (often dubious) labor concessions meant to control its base and harness support for the PRI—offered proof of teachers' collective corruption. On the other, when teachers challenged SNTE cronyism by mounting struggles for independent unions, they were stigmatized for putting their labor interests above children's educational needs.

But stigmatizing rural normales and blaming teachers for Mexico's low education levels obscure the extent to which the school system itself reflected structural inequality, which after 1940 became increasingly acute and was driven by three policy strategies that marked most of the twentieth century. First, in contrast to President Cárdenas, who in the 1930s treated



rural education as part and parcel of community development, which included land distribution, support for the ejido (communal landholdings), and the establishment of cooperatives, subsequent administrations addressed schooling in isolation. After 1940 the SEP continued to build schoolhouses throughout the country, often at an accelerated pace. The SEP also trained an increasing number of teachers to populate the new classrooms. But a village teacher could do little against the broader forces of hunger, lack of infrastructure, and families who could not send their children to school because their immediate economic survival depended on the entire household's labor. The staggeringly low rates of elementary school completion are a testament to these larger dynamics.²⁰ Teacher absenteeism was another. Sent to remote communities, educators found themselves in a situation that was tantamount to exile. Rural living conditions did not correspond to the upward mobility their education had promised. Their paychecks alone might take a year to arrive. Their salary level, moreover, was set on a lower scale than that of urban teachers. With this situation, SEP appeals to missionary duty and self-sacrifice rang hollow. Teachers consistently sought transfers to urban areas where they would have better pay and working conditions and could seek additional schooling to qualify for positions in secondary schools or as principals, SEP bureaucrats, or regional inspectors.

A second dynamic, the state's policy toward the countryside, aggravated this process since it stymied the efforts of those teachers willing to brave difficult conditions. Absent after 1940 was any type of deliberate or sustained strategy to develop social infrastructure in the countryside. Indeed, at every turn the state undermined campesinos' basic ability to subsist off the land. Not only did agrarian redistribution slow after Cárdenas, but presidents Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940–46) and Miguel Alemán (1946–52) eased laws designed to prevent land concentration by expanding expropriation limits for export-crop cultivation. Through subsidized inputs for production and infrastructure projects, the state helped agribusiness establish its dominance in the countryside, much of it geared to serve the US market.²¹ The 1941 Rockefeller-sponsored Green Revolution also focused its aid efforts on large-scale farms. Campesinos could in no way compete with a mechanized industry whose high-yielding seeds depended on sustained irrigation and high levels of fertilizers and chemical pesticides, the costs of which both the public and private sector sponsored.²² The 1942-64 US-Mexico Bracero Program, which sent hundreds of laborers north, and the 1965 Border Industrialization Program, which led to the proliferation of northern assembly plants, offered jobs to rural migrants that usually paid more than the income

Introduction

they might derive from their own land cultivation. But such opportunities did nothing for rural development's social infrastructure. On the contrary, to the extent that such opportunities helped laborers provide a better future for their children, that future lay with an education in the cities. By the 1960s Mexico went from being a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban nation, a trend that continued throughout the century. Material support for rural teachers and their schoolhouses as venues to promote community development had by then long been abandoned—but not the rhetoric. The SEP continued to invoke teachers' sense of missionary duty by which they were to endure rural poverty and isolation for the greater good of the nation. Such appeals may have had some resonance had they been part of a deliberate national effort in which shared sacrifice produced a more equitable collective well-being. But the state made these appeals at a time of unbridled prosperity, whose fruits accentuated inequality and were based on a transfer of wealth from the countryside to the city.²³

Finally, Mexico's education spending itself operated under a palliative rather than transformative logic. The state expanded educational opportunities without implementing the structural reform consistently demanded by campesino, labor, student, and indigenous movements. Public education compensated for the lack of other benefits—health care, social security, adequate housing, stable employment, a living wage—ones the country's majorities would never enjoy.²⁴ Over the latter part of the twentieth century, education spending ebbed and flowed depending on the presidential administration, but even when it increased, that rise did not improve its quality nor offer more equitable access.²⁵ Nor did it always correspond to significant intergenerational social mobility.²⁶ Intertwined with this dynamic was the nature of the PRI, whose power and organizational logic came from a corporatist structure that relied on union networks affiliated to the state. The official teachers' union, the SNTE, constituted Mexico's (and Latin America's) largest union. Aside from teachers, it included schools' technical, manual, and clerical personnel; nonmanagement and some lower-level SEP administrative workers; and academic and nonacademic employees of institutes, research centers, and museums.²⁷ Its infamously corrupt leadership—whose general secretaries comfortably navigated the halls of power, often using the SNTE as a springboard into political office—supported the PRI in exchange for concessions to their membership.²⁸ Those concessions were again palliative, translating into increased opportunities for individual upward mobility rather than collective material improvements, much less union democracy. When adjusted for inflation, for example, teachers' pay did not achieve its



1921 levels until the early 1960s; during the crucial years of educational expansion, this allowed the state to hire three teachers for the price of one.²⁹ In lieu of raises and other benefits demanded by dissident teachers in the 1950s, the SEP offered opportunities for professional development that corresponded to individual merit-based pay. The SNTE's involvement in academic matters—so censured by technocrats as interfering with educational efficiency—acted in tandem with this dynamic. The SNTE assured, guided, and directed opportunities for upward mobility to control its base.³⁰ These opportunities, moreover, came in the cities, partly because that was where the accrediting institutions were located but, more important, because that was where the higher-paying jobs lay.³¹

It is within these three structural dynamics—school construction devoid of rural development, support for agribusiness at the cost of the campesino economy, and the corporatist logic of education spending—that we must understand rural normales and their consistently politicized student body. Mexico's urbanizing political economy marked rural normales as relics of a past project even as they provided crucial opportunities for students to navigate the contradictions of national development. For this opportunity students had to fight: they had to fight to secure material resources, to ensure rural normales remained schools for the poor, and to prevent the reduction of spots for incoming students. Far from static, their frameworks of struggle changed with each passing decade and acquired new dimensions, ones rooted in the Mexican Revolution and the structural changes carried out under Cárdenas, spurred by subsequent battles to preserve the popular elements of the 1917 Constitution, given new impetus by the anti-imperialist and socialist ideals of the 1960s, and engaged with the guerrilla struggles of the 1970s.

OLD DIVIDES, NEW QUESTIONS

Mexico's education system of the 1920s and 1930s enjoys a robust tradition of study. For subsequent decades, however, historians have turned their attention to student protest rather than to educational policy or schools as institutions. The relationship between the two remains largely unexamined, a lacuna this work seeks to fill. How rural normales become repositories of political militancy, how this ethos was reproduced, and how it survived amid sea-change transformations constitute this book's guiding questions. To answer them, I center the experience of the indigenous and campesino students who participated in school mobilizations, engaged in



popular struggle, and perpetuated political traditions. Their experience, in turn, I contextualize within the broader forces that conditioned their vision and actions. My story begins with the revolutionary state consolidation in the 1920s–1930s, continues through the 1940–68 Mexican miracle, and takes us through the guerrilla groups of the 1970s—three periods historians tend to treat separately. Focusing on the countryside or Mexico City and alternatively treating campesinos, students, workers, or the middle class, recent histories have uncovered the multifaceted protest and state repression that accompanied the betrayal of the revolution's social reforms. Seeking to expand these geographic, temporal, and social divides, I take a *longue durée* approach that is national in scope and that examines subjects whose changing identity—from campesino, to student, to teacher—defies neat categorizations. In this way, *Unintended Lessons of Revolution* addresses key questions raised, but still unanswered, by this recent literature.

First, while the recent scholarship on popular unrest has revealed the 1940-68 pax priista (peace of the PRI) to be a myth, uncertain still are the effects of those struggles. Put another way, what is the relationship between the protest that we now know marked the Mexican miracle and the institutions meant to fulfill the revolution's social reforms?³⁵ To answer this question, this study considers Mexico's revolutionary twentieth century as a distinct historical period.³⁶ In a rather bold fashion, historians Greg Grandin and Gilbert Joseph have posited a long Cold War time frame that extends, in Joseph's words, "back to the Mexican Revolution, the twentieth-century's first great social revolution," and by some measures "has not yet ended." This new Cold War historiography understands Latin American politicization not as resulting from US-Soviet rivalry but as emerging from local historical dynamics in conversation with global events. The 1910 revolution inaugurated Latin America's transition from nineteenth-century authoritarian liberalism to revolutionary nationalism as popular struggles throughout the region challenged landed oligarchs, their exclusionary institutions, and the racial hierarchies that structured social domination.³⁸ No institution better represents nationalism's inclusionary vision than Mexico's rural normales, the boarding schools that trained agents of state consolidation while bringing education to the children of the historically subjugated campesino and indigenous population. This ostensibly inclusionary vision housed serious contradictions, namely, the assimilationist framework of mestizaje on which it was based. How indigenous students navigated a system that demanded they shed their languages, traditions, and worldview and the alternative educational proposals that indigenous communities would themselves



make by century's end reveals the dynamic nature of the educational process and the differing visions originating from above and from below.

Second, a history of rural normales provides a unique opportunity to hone in on the question of political consciousness and examine its expansive nature amid a group whose identity drew from the agrarian, student, and labor worlds. Utterly unique in their evolution, student practices, and institutional mores, rural normales display the fate of leftist foundational principles in a changing national landscape. First conceived as a means to produce campesino teachers and soon expanded within the logic of socialist education, rural normales endured reactionary backlash, survived despite state neglect, housed teachers and students-turned-guerrillas, and persisted in their Marxist-Leninist rhetoric even as many on the left abandoned such language in the 1990s. Their origins in a particularly radical period of revolutionary state consolidation, their almost mythical status in the official revolutionary narrative, and the role of the FECSM within and across these schools made social justice both an effective and a compelling framework by which to elicit the state's material support. Ideology and praxis, the collective and the individual, material interests and radical ideals constituted ever-evolving dialectics. While rural normales hosted an array of student types—from militant, to reformist, to indifferent, to conservative—all had to contend with a politicized institutional universe overseen and enforced by the student association. For those who chose activism, the road to politicization began with a rather modest venture: demands for better food, dormitories, and pedagogical resources. For many that is where it ended. But for many others the notion that campesinos were entitled to an education coalesced with longer memories of family exploitation, concurrent agrarian struggles, student mobilizations, teachers' movements, and anti-imperialist notions that produced a militant consciousness that the state battled to contain.

Finally, *Unintended Lessons of Revolution* broadens the framework of transnational comparisons for both radical actors and institutions within authoritarian systems. If previous notions of the pax priista prompted views of Mexican exceptionalism, recent debates alternately characterize the seventy-one-year PRI rule as a *dictadura* (dictatorship) or a *dictablanda* (soft dictatorship). The former stresses the state's coercion, its physical and symbolic violence, and an evolving repressive apparatus.³⁹ The latter, in contrast, emphasizes a loose political control, a "cultivated but thin hegemony," and an uneven ability to co-opt and points to the PRI's irregular process of state domination, in which repression was limited, controlled, and hidden.⁴⁰ My own view is that this debate sets up a false dichotomy for a regime that was

Introduction

both staunchly repressive and remarkably flexible.⁴¹ While rendering Mexico's authoritarianism soft risks minimizing state repression as proponents of the dictadura view maintain, overemphasizing its likeness to other Latin American dictatorships risks diminishing the fundamental significance of the 1910 revolution as a social upheaval. The extent to which the PRI was more restrained in its repression owes much to the popular revolution that earlier in the century broke the church-oligarchy-army triumvirate that in the southern cone structured state terror. 42 More useful for making transnational comparisons is understanding the Cold War as counterrevolution, a process that was hard and soft, in which anticommunism served both to attenuate old-left notions of democracy that linked political and economic rights and to marshal elite power with broader conservative traditions such as status anxiety, racism, and fear of loosening social mores. 43 In this context, rural normalistas harnessed the principles inherent in the twentieth century's first great social revolution to defend their schools, a process that led them to question capitalism's socioeconomic structures. The political consciousness they acquired in the course of their struggle became increasingly articulated through larger ideological and subjective frameworks tied to national and international battles in Latin America's century of revolution.

In this sense, contrary to interpretations of the PRI as a successful political center that oversaw a society largely devoid of Cold War politicization, *Unintended Lessons of Revolutions* shows how that political center was itself historically constituted through violence and co-optation. ⁴⁴ Time and again, elites harnessed Cold War narratives about the containment of communists, foreign agitators, and those intent on tarnishing the nation's image to battle popular sectors fighting for their constitutional rights. It was a counterrevolutionary process that sought to break the link between political and economic rights propelled by the radical elements of Mexico's 1910 insurrection. While the PRI's tried-and-true strategy of co-optation was by definition a less violent method of suppressing dissent, its success depended on the ever-looming threat of violence—the violence of the stick or the violence of poverty.

In this context of resistance, repression, and co-optation, what does it mean, then, to tell the history of rural normales from the perspective of radical actors? Why not focus on their conservative, quiescent, officialist, or corrupt graduates, those who helped shape the dominant political and economic system rather than those who challenged it? Or, indeed, why not devote equal time to both? The latter position is attractive especially to those who conceive of historical writing as a quest to find balance between all perspectives, an

endeavor in which the historian is a free agent "floating above, taking notes with equanimity."45 This question of objectivity has itself been the subject of historical examination revealing the extent to which its proponents have been dominant groups at the center and its challengers those at the margins of the status quo.46 Without subscribing to the trappings of historical relativism, it is imperative to interrogate the power of dominant narratives and the extent to which they act to silence the past, to use Michel-Rolph Trouillot's haunting analysis of power and the production of history.⁴⁷ One way of silencing the past is to erase the radical possibilities presented by the struggles of the dispossessed. Another is to attenuate those possibilities by placing them on equal footing with endeavors that aligned with the status quo. Finally, there is the temptation to evaluate radical actors by whether or not their movement succeeded, a measure that, as Robin Kelley puts it, would render virtually all of them failures "because the basic power relations they sought to change remain pretty much intact." Rather than regarding this as a fatalistic assessment, however, Kelley reminds us that precisely these alternative visions drive new generations of struggle.⁴⁸

For these reasons, I have chosen to privilege normalista radical voices—the ways they contended with and created their institutional world; the debates, strategies, and contradictions they encountered; their interactions and confrontations with those who occupied the seats of power; and the inspiration they drew from local, national, and international struggles. Within the capitalist forces that structured the political economy of education, these dynamics shaped their history. The unrest of campesino students created an institutional culture that slowed down the erosion of revolutionary rights, awakened an expansive form of consciousness, and continues to reveal the counterrevolutionary process that resulted in neoliberalism's imposition. Their perspective, their struggle, brings into sharp relief the power relations that created the past and produced the present, puncturing the dominant narrative that sees teachers primarily as a reflection of an officialist leadership.

SOURCES AND STRUCTURE

The story that follows draws on seven different source bodies, including intelligence documents that were declassified in 2002.⁴⁹ Within this collection, reports on rural normales are extensive—in some instances produced daily—and focus primarily on student political activity. Their content provides essential chronology, numbers, and information on government views of and strategy toward these schools. My other source bodies include



press reports, US State Department records, SEP documents, local school archives, published memoirs, and over fifty oral histories that I conducted. Documents from the SEP are extensive and provide additional material for context, policy, and state vision. While the SEP's National Archive (Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Educación Pública) collections are vast, few go beyond the early 1940s, especially for normales.⁵⁰ To fill this void, I traveled to rural normales throughout the country, working at the handful of schools that had available archives. Varying in quantity, organization, and accessibility, these collections housed an array of national directives, curricula, institutional correspondence, student files, meeting reports, and petitions that help fill the post-1940s void in the SEP's National Archive. Despite my time at individual schools and the fact that some rural normales—Salaices and Saucillo in the north, Ayotzinapa and Amilcingo in the coastal and central south, and Tamazulapan or Mactumactzá in the indigenous south—at times occupy prominent places in this account, the history told here is a national one that privileges the rural normal system, its student networks, and federal policy over microhistories of individual schools.⁵¹

These archival sources help contextualize and cross-reference the oral histories on which this book is also based, gathered beginning in 2006 and for over a decade thereafter from normalistas across the country; those interviewed for this work span from generations who studied in the 1930s to those graduating as recently as 2019. Working with oral histories requires, as Alessandro Portelli wrote, operating at different levels: reconstructing the past, analyzing how events are narrated, and "connecting what we know about the facts with what we know about the narratives."52 While written documentation also necessitates context and attention to narrative structure, oral history has an added complexity since it is mediated by memory. "Less about events and more about their meaning," oral testimonies are thus intrinsically different from written documents and therefore specifically useful.⁵³ Recounted decades later, normalista accounts are often contradictory, partial, and usually romanticized. If turned into analytical categories, however, these apparent limitations can help decipher the meaning students attached to particular experiences. Concerned as this work is with political consciousness—itself expansive, contradictory, and contingent—student reflections provide an essential way to understand individuals' relationship to the student body, institutional norms, changing frameworks of social justice, and national education policy.

Political participation tends to play an outsized role in student accounts about life at the normales. This narrative quality reflects an objective reality:



the obligatory encounter with the FECSM, the socialist student organization whose hold on dorm life meant students confronted a politicized world from the moment they arrived at the normal. Coming at a turbulent moment in a youngster's life—living away from home for the first time, learning to live as part of a collective, and preparing to make the most of this opportunity to study—the experience was gripping for many. Others took it simply as another component of their education—the particular variant of dorm culture—and thus recount FECSM assemblies, school strikes, and student marches in the most matter-of-fact manner. For still others, such practices, ideological formation, and public speaking and organizing skills became a tool kit and source of knowledge deployed years later either in the classroom, in dissident political groups, or even in official government circles.⁵⁴

A telling insight into the politicized world comes from a normalista opposed to it. A 1987 graduate of the rural normal of Panotla in Tlaxcala, and that school's director when I interviewed her in 2012, Victoria Ramírez recounted her own experience as a student:

The most difficult part was not so much the separation from my family—which was hard. The most difficult thing was when I saw that there was a student committee and that there was going to be a strike, and we were going to commandeer buses, and the school director and teachers were worth peanuts.... I came from a strong, authoritarian home, in which the father and mother had to be obeyed, and from a [junior high] school where there were rules, where there was a principal and a teacher who you had to obey. Seeing what for me was total student impunity just didn't make sense.

Narrating these events twenty-five years later while she herself was barred from campus as students shuttered the school during a strike, Ramírez stated that then, as now, students had to participate in such mobilizations. The fierce debates about actions and strategies that others recall as part of the collective decision-making process are absent from her account. And yet when I asked what her parents thought of her participation, her narrative converged with those from across the political spectrum: "It was that sense of justice. Even when [my parents] told me I was in danger, and they warned the [student] committee that if anything happened to me they were the ones responsible, my parents never withdrew me. Well, there was one moment when my father said, 'Come home, leave.' But where to?! I had to stay. It was a challenge to myself. And it was also that sense of justice. In that, the normalistas are right.



Which is the same thing that parents say today, 'The government won't give [resources], it lets students starve.' . . . That was my parents." Half guarding her, half supporting normalista petitions, Ramírez's parents accompanied her on marches, at mobilizations in Mexico City, and at conventions at other normales. While she was disdainful of collective action—students should come together according to individual preferences, Ramírez emphasized—her account underscores a key dynamic at the center of this study: how the precarity of rural normales as institutions, and the lack of other educational options in the countryside, made student mobilizations there a necessity.

The story that follows is largely chronological. Chapter 1 sets the stage by exploring Mexico's early twentieth-century educational architects, their new pedagogical approaches in the wake of the revolution, and their place in a wider transnational context of state formation. It likewise provides a panoramic picture of rural normales, their changing structure and unique place within Mexico's larger teacher-training system. Chapter 2 delves into the rural normales' early history in the 1920s and their consolidation under radical Cardenista principles in the 1930s. It shows how socialist education had a lasting effect on an institutional culture whose mores the FECSM preserved and reproduced, setting the stage for the schools' long-lasting politicized culture.

Chapter 3 begins in 1940 as post-Cardenista regimes steered state policy to the right. In this context, the number of rural normales was reduced by almost half, and new educational reforms ended socialist pedagogy and coeducation, decreased the schools' autonomy, and replaced previous appeals to social justice with appeals to national unity. Significantly, the Cold War would give the right new tools with which to demonize activist teachers, a context that established rural normales as bulwarks of the revolution.

By the late 1950s, two decades of state neglect of campesinos had produced an increasingly urbanizing nation, concentrating teachers in the cities while the greatest need for them lay in the countryside. Chapter 4 telescopes outward and, through the lens of education, assesses the different sectors vying to define the course of the revolution. Loath to address educational needs through structural reform as rural normalistas demanded, the state doubled down on its appeal to teachers' missionary duty and self-sacrifice. Normalistas and teachers fought back, prompting the state to paint them as dangerous subversives. At the same time, the government's own effort to expand primary education emboldened old foes—namely, the Catholic Church and powerful business groups—which harnessed the panic over the 1959 Cuban Revolution in an effort to roll back previous limits on private and religious education.



During the 1960s new repertoires of struggle emerged in rural normales. This decade, which crystallized the association between these institutions and the radical protest of their students, is the focus of chapters 5 and 6. Key to this dynamic were the joint teacher-student-campesino land takeovers in northern Mexico, which soon gave way to a regional guerrilla group in the northern state of Chihuahua. Chapter 5 examines the nature of rural normalistas' participation in this state's agrarian struggle to highlight how student protest characterized Mexico's periphery before the widely recognized 1968 movement in the capital. It shows how the rural background of normalistas marked them in unique ways as they drew on two politically rich categories, that of the campesino with its deep roots in the Mexican Revolution and that of the student, which during the 1960s acquired such charged meaning. Chapter 6 follows this dynamic at the national level through the FECSM-led strikes. By analyzing the nature of normalista demands and the experience of those who participated in the struggle, I show how their unrest manifested elements of old- and new-left politics.

Chapter 7 explores the state's effort to contain rural normalista organizing with particular attention to the 1969 SEP reform that reduced the country's rural normales from twenty-nine to fifteen, disbanded the FECSM, and implemented unprecedented harsh disciplinary measures at the remaining schools. Given this severe blow to student power, chapter 8 traces normalista efforts to recover and reconstitute the FECSM. It shows how student organizing became more militant but also more fractured. President Luis Echeverría's (1970–76) democratic opening provided a space for normalistas to regroup. In this context, normalistas—together with campesino activists—achieved the creation of a new rural normal in the state of Morelos. But the 1970s also saw the proliferation of guerrilla groups, to whom the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre signaled the impossibility of working within the system. Many rural normalistas collaborated with or joined these armed movements, a dynamic that cemented their radical reputation. By the decade's end, state surveillance, infiltration, and demonization of rural normales marked the system.

The epilogue recounts the SEP's decentralization process, which, coupled with the economic crisis of the 1980s, paved the way for the increasing neoliberal restructuring of education. It addresses the latest changes to the rural normal system and other educational reforms of the subsequent three decades, closing with a discussion of some of the recent episodes of normalista protest and repression.



THREE YEARS BEFORE the Missing 43 became a worldwide symbol of Mexico's state and narco-violence, police killed two Ayotzinapa students who, along with their peers, had blocked the Mexico City—Acapulco highway in December 2011. The normalistas were protesting the Guerrero governor's stonewalling of their yearly negotiation over school resources. The killings shook but did not deter Ayotzinapa students, who closed their school in protest and organized subsequent mobilizations. Among the banners the normalistas prepared, one depicted their peers' deaths as part of a larger history of campesino massacres. The image they drew up included several blood-soaked corpses; in addition to the two normalistas, bodies represented the 1995 Aguas Blancas massacre, in which police killed seventeen campesinos en route to a demonstration, and the 1998 El Charco massacre, in which soldiers killed eleven indigenous Mixtecs participating in a community assembly. The banner shows yet another body outline, this one with a question mark, an open interrogation about the next instance of state terror.

Even as this sign illustrated how much Ayotzinapa students understood themselves as a persecuted group, they likely never imagined the nature and scale of the attack that came in Iguala on the night of September 26 and elicited such far-reaching national and international condemnation. Some of the survivors of both attacks stated that, had the police been prosecuted for the 2011 killings, the 2014 ones might not have happened, or at least not so brazenly. That assertion may be difficult to maintain, but, along with the student banner, it reflects normalistas' keen understanding of the long relationship among protest, state violence, and impunity. Ayotzinapa laid that dynamic bare for the world to see. The mobilizations it inspired, in turn, added another lesson in resistance to institutions that, for a century, have made justice for campesinos a constituting element of their existence.



Notes

Abbreviations

AGN Archivo General de la Nación

AHENR/CH Archivo Histórico de la Escuela Normal Rural de Cañada Honda,

Aguascalientes

AHENR/SM Archivo Histórico de la Escuela Normal Rural de San Marcos,

Zacatecas

AHENR/T Archivo Histórico de la Escuela Normal Rural de Tamazulapan,

Oaxaca

AHSEP Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Educación Pública

C Caja [Box]

CONALTE Consejo Nacional Técnico de la Educación

DEANR Departamento de Enseñanza Agrícola y Normal Rural

DFS Dirección Federal de Seguridad

DGEN Dirección General de Enseñanza Normal

DGIPS Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales

EXP. Expediente [Record]

н Hoja [Page]

LEG. Legajo [File]

NARA National Archives and Records Administration

P-MAC Presidentes, Manuel Ávila Camacho

SEP Secretaría de Educación Pública



Introduction

- 1. Three other people were also killed, and twenty-four suffered gunshot wounds, including seven *normalistas*. On the army's tracking of the students, see Anabel Hernández and Steve Fisher, "La historia no official," *Proceso*, December 13, 2014. For a blow-by-blow account of the attack on the normalistas and the state's cover-up, see Hernández, *Verdadera noche*.
 - 2. Human Rights Watch, "Vanished."
- 3. For example, just two and a half months earlier, the military had killed twenty-two people in Tlatlaya, Mexico State, claiming the casualties resulted from a confrontation with drug traffickers. Investigations soon revealed the military had executed at least twelve of the individuals who were unarmed or trying to surrender and altered the scene to look like a confrontation had taken place. A much larger massacre, of 193 people, mostly Central American migrants, took place in 2011 in San Fernando, Tamaulipas. It was perpetrated by the Zetas cartel, but investigations also revealed the participation of Mexican police. On Tlatlaya, see Human Rights Watch, "Mexico." On San Fernando, see "Mexican Police Helped Cartel Massacre 193 Migrants Documents Show," NPR, December 22, 2014, https://www.npr.org/2014/12/22/372579429/mexican-police-helped-cartel-massacre-193-migrants-documents-show.
- 4. While much of this violence took place under the presidential administrations of Vicente Fox (2000–2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006–12), both from the National Action Party, the violence itself resulted from the PRI's decreased hegemony and the ensuing turf battles. With the ascendance of opposition parties since the 1990s, the PRI no longer held a monopoly over regional drug-trafficking power arrangements.
- 5. During the summer and fall of 1968, students from campuses across Mexico City organized a series of protests. Initially sparked by the government's excessive use of force against a skirmish between two rival high schools, the movement that developed soon issued a demand list that, among other things, included freedom for political prisoners, the abolishment of Mexico City's riot squad, and respect for university autonomy. More generally, participants denounced the enormous amount of resources devoted to the Olympic Games Mexico was preparing to host that fall. On October 2, as students held a massive rally in Tlatelolco's plaza, the army surrounded them and fired into the crowd, leaving an estimated two hundred to five hundred dead. Although it was known primarily as a student massacre, the mobilizations included many other sectors of the population who were also victims of repression.
- 6. In the 1930s the rural normales became explicitly for the sons and daughters of campesinos as well as the children of rural teachers. The term *campesino* is itself expansive and generally refers to those from the countryside who are poor.
 - 7. For a sample of these thinkers' writing, see Loyo Bravo, Casa del pueblo.



- 8. Paul Gillingham has studied this dynamic in Guerrero for the 1930s and 1940s, but there is little other work for subsequent decades or other regions. See "Ambiguous Missionaries."
 - 9. Grandin, Last Colonial Massacre, xvi.
- 10. On critical pedagogy see Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Paulo Freire emphasized that the means of transmitting knowledge matter as much as the content. At rural normales the education process rarely followed the dialogic approach envisioned by Freire.
- 11. For an overview of theories of consciousness, see Carpenter and Mojab, "Adult Education."
 - 12. See Thompson, Making of the English Working Class.
- 13. For a Latin American case study that looks at the diverse origins of consciousness among Chilean workers, see Winn, *Weavers of Revolution*.
- 14. See, for example, Choudray, *Learning Activism*; and Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*.
- 15. Organizations like the Black Panthers or the Young Lords, for example, devoted much time and energy to breakfast programs for Black and Brown children, community health care, or campaigns to bring attention to toxic or dilapidated inner-city housing.
 - 16. See, for example, Gould, To Lead as Equals.
- 17. For two works that detail this process for dramatically different times and places, see Aviña, *Specters of Revolution*; and Hylton and Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons*.
- 18. In the first chapter of *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*, Elisabeth Jean Wood provides a concise summary of various explanatory frameworks of this puzzle.
- 19. For the 1950s independent teachers' movement, see Loyo Brambila, *Movimiento magisterial*; for the 1970s, see Cook, *Organizing Dissent*.
- 20. In 1964, for example, only 2.9 percent of school-age children in the countryside completed the six years of elementary education, a number that also reflected the small proportion—one in ten—of schools in the countryside that went up to sixth grade. Greaves, *Del radicalismo a la unidad nacional*, 266–67.
 - 21. Sanderson, Agrarian Populism, 144-55.
- 22. Wright, *Death of Ramón González*, 6–7. As Wright shows, such large-scale use of chemical fertilizers also had devastating effects on the environment and on the health of farmworkers.
 - 23. Gollás, "Breve relato de cincuenta años," 232-33.
- 24. Latapí, *Análisis de un sexenio*, 140; and Torres, "Corporativismo estatal," 167.
 - 25. Torres, "Corporativismo estatal," 164.
 - 26. Muñoz Izquierdo and Lobo, "Expansión escolar," 10.



- 27. Cook, *Organizing Dissent*, 2n2. In the late 1970s, the SNTE had over half a million members; by 1985 it had 700,000 and by 1990 close to a million. Torres, "Corporativismo estatal," 162, 166.
- 28. For example, Carlos Jonguitud Barrios, himself a graduate of a rural normal who later studied law at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, headed the SNTE from 1974 to 1977. Before leading the official teachers' union, he served on the PRI's executive committee and was later a national senator for the party. He was also the director of the country's social security system and governor of San Luis Potosí in the early 1980s.
 - 29. Torres, "Corporativismo estatal," 166.
 - 30. Street, "SNTE," 47.
- 31. Greaves, *Del radicalismo a la unidad nacional*, 116; and Arnaut Salgado, *Historia de una profesión*, 96n4.
- 32. For example, Jackson Albarrán, Seen and Heard in Mexico; Civera Cerecedo, Escuela como opción de vida; Lewis, Ambivalent Revolution; Vaughan, Cultural Politics in Revolution; Vaughan, State, Education, and Social Class; Britton, Educación y radicalismo; Raby, Educación y revolución social; and Ruiz, Mexico.
- 33. Pensado, *Rebel Mexico*; Gómez Nashiki, *Movimiento estudiantil*; Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices*; and Zolov, *Refried Elvis*.
- 34. Henson, Agrarian Revolt; McCormick, Logic of Compromise; Alegre, Railroad Radicals; Aviña, Specters of Revolution; Walker, Waking from the Dream; and Padilla, Rural Resistance.
- 35. While there is now an emerging historical literature on elections, with a few exceptions, such as Luis Javier Garrido's El partido de la revolución institucio*nalizada*, the state party that emanated from the revolution and ruled Mexico continuously for seven decades has received scant historiographical attention. While historians acknowledge that what came to be known as the PRI underwent important shifts, power struggles, and changes, there have still been few historical studies about the institutions that played a key part in its function as a state party. For example, there is no historical study on the SNTE, Mexico's biggest and most powerful union, whose leadership was intimately tied to the party's corporatist structure. Thom Rath's Myths of Demilitarization in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1920–1960, and Aaron W. Navarro's Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938–1954, are important examples of works that have now begun to probe the state party's inner workings and its relationship to other institutions. María Muñoz's Stand Up and Fight likewise examines how a sector of the indigenous leadership became incorporated into and engaged with the PRI. For recent work on elections, see Gillingham, "Mexican Elections"; Magaloni, Voting for Autocracy; Gómez Tagle, Transición inconclusa; Servín, Ruptura y oposición; Loaeza, Partido Acción Nacional; and Pansters, Política y poder en Puebla. On the PRI's early years, Gillingham's Unrevolutionary Mexico.



- 36. This follows Greg Grandin and Gilbert Joseph's call to consider Latin America's century of revolution as a distinct historical period. See Grandin and Joseph, *Century of Revolution*.
 - 37. Joseph, "Latin America's Long Cold War," 402.
 - 38. Grandin, "Living in Revolutionary Time," 28.
 - 39. Pensado and Ochoa, México beyond 1968.
 - 40. Gillingham and Smith, Dictablanda.
- 41. How hard or how soft the state's heavy hand came down depended on a group's socioeconomic standing. Mexico's most marginalized—the rural poor—bore the brunt of the state's use of force. The 1968 Tlatelolco massacre was exceptional not in its brutality but in its attack against middle-class protesters in the nation's capital before the eyes of the international community as Mexico prepared to host the Olympic Games. State violence in the countryside—both selective and indiscriminate—was a constant feature of the PRI regime. See, for example, Aviña, Specters of Revolution; McCormick, Logic of Compromise; and Padilla, Rural Resistance.
 - 42. Knight, "Peculiarities of Mexican History," 132-42.
 - 43. Grandin, Last Colonial Massacre, 186.
- 44. Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith, for example, argue that "for the majority of Mexicans the Cold War may instead have depoliticized everyday life" because expressions of discontent "remained wedded to pre-existing rhetoric, alliances and organizational structures." "Introduction," 24.
 - 45. Dubois, "Atlantic Freedoms."
- 46. Novick, *That Noble Dream*. See also Linda Gordon's critique of Peter Novick's framework, which, she writes, sets up an objectivity/relativism binary that "oversimplifies the meaning and tensions between structuralist determinism and emphasis on agency." "Comments," 685. These questions are thus not new, but it behooves us to keep them in mind as we take stock of the first post-1940s Mexicanist historiographical generation in a field that, as Jaime M. Pensado and Enrique C. Ochoa remind us, has long been inaccessible to working-class students of color. "Preface," xiii.
- 47. While noting an inherent tension in acknowledging our position as historians while taking distance from it, Trouillot rejects "both the naive proposition that we are prisoners of our pasts and the pernicious suggestion that history is whatever we make of it." Silencing the Past, xix.
 - 48. Kelley, Freedom Dreams, ix.
- 49. Part of the General Directorate of Political and Social Investigations (Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, DGIPS) and the Federal Security Directorate (Dirección Federal de Seguridad, DFS), these collections were formally declassified in 2002 (though the former collection had been partly accessible since 1999). Beginning in 2014, access was increasingly restricted, but as of February 2020, Mexico's National Archive (Archivo General de la Nación)



announced that these collections were once again open and available for consultation. My own research with the DFS collection took place in 2007.

- 50. The SEP archives have changed locations three times since I first began my work there in 2007. Their reference system has also undergone some modifications. My repeated inquiries about post-1940s documentation on rural normales never received a clear answer, other than these documents are still part of personnel files and therefore inaccessible.
- 51. Individual institutional particularities, themselves marked by regional context and histories, are beyond the scope of this study. Regional or comparative ethnographies will hopefully be the subject of future research. For two historical works on individual normales, see Hernández Santos, *Tiempos de reforma*; and Ortiz Briano, *Entre la nostalgia y la incertidumbre*. Students in education programs in Mexico have also written theses on individual rural normales, though neither these nor the historical studies cited here make claims about the particularities of the institutions that are the subject of their work. Examples of such theses include Reynoso Sánchez, "Ser estudiante normalista rural"; Pinto Díaz, "Formadores"; and Vite Vargas, "Formación docente."
 - 52. Portelli, "Living Voices," 248.
 - 53. Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 67, 64.
- 54. For example, many participants cite the prominent leadership of rural normalistas in the challenge to the SNTE's authoritarianism and corruption in the 1970s and 1980s as resulting from the political formation at rural normales. There, mandatory FECSM marches, *boteos* (soliciting donations on buses or along highways), and political assemblies meant that many of their graduates had experience in the art of public speaking, political recruitment, and popular organizing. No such institutionalized practices existed in state and urban normales. Significantly, it was not just the left that tapped into such skills; rural normalistas also relate that these very qualities made them attractive among official circles eager to co-opt them.
 - 55. Victoria Ramírez, interview.

One. Normales, Education, and National Projects

- 1. Fowler-Salamini, Agrarian Radicalism, xv.
- 2. On teacher resistance during the Díaz regime, see Vaughan, *State, Education, and Social Class*, 75–76; and Cockcroft, "Maestro de primaria."
- 3. Cockcroft, "Maestro de primaria," 568. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.
 - 4. Fell, José Vasconcelos, 119.
 - 5. Fell, José Vasconcelos, 127.
 - 6. Vaughan, State, Education, and Social Class, 140-42.
- 7. Vasconcelos, "Discurso pronunciado en el Teatro Arbeu en la Fiesta del Maestro," May 14, 1921, *Boletín de la Universidad* 2 (July 1921): 240, quoted in Fell, *José Vasconcelos*, 119–20.

Notes to Introduction