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Review/Reseña

Fernando Herrera Calderón and Adela Cedillo, eds. *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War, 1964-1982*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Unearthing the Mexican Dirty War

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Fernando Herrera Calderón and Adela Cedillo's work, *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War, 1964-1982*, deals with various aspects of the political mobilization that emerged during the period known as the Mexican Dirty War. Herrera Calderón and Cedillo's work fills a significant gap in our understandings of Mexican political activism of this period beyond the Tlatelolco student massacre of 1968. Their attention of presenting intellectual work produced by Mexican, U.S., and European scholars, including a former guerrilla member, together with their focus on the experiences of everyday Mexicans, provides us with a useful overview of armed Mexican social movements amidst international Cold War ideologies. In keeping with its focus on

armed struggles against Mexican authoritarianism, this work illustrates important links between the Mexican Dirty War (1960s and 1970s) and the current political atmosphere affecting Mexico. Hence, such linkages make this introductory work even more critical for scholars interested in understanding the history of political activism in Mexico.

The authors of this brief collection are confronted with the following issues: How does one represent the multiplicity of political resistance across Mexico? How can one discuss and understand the conditions that pushed Mexican popular mobilization into armed resistance? How does one understand the Mexican Dirty War with regards to the government's revolutionary rhetoric? How can we understand the relationship between Mexican authoritarianism, the formation of historical consciousness, and the collective memory about the Mexican Dirty War?

Herrera Calderón and Cedillo's short, but substantial introduction outlines the historical background that gave rise to the Mexican Dirty War. The authors establish the relationship between the rise of armed movements as a viable venue by activists to achieve social transformation and the increasing authoritarian nature of the ruling party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), during the international conflicts of the Cold War. The Dirty War emerged in the midst of the economic growth of the so-called "Mexican Miracle" (1940s-1968), which supported the Mexican state's rhetoric of a prosperous and democratic post-revolutionary state, led by the PRI. Furthermore, the civilian control of the PRI further cemented the myth of a peaceful Mexican democratic society in contrast to the military dictatorships emerging across Latin America. The influence of the Cold War also featured the spread of revolutionary ideas amongst objectors, especially students who emerged as a new political force. In this context, Mexican political activists romanticized social revolution, idealized the response of Mexican civil society, and underestimated the repressive power of the Mexican state.

The contributions in this short volume consist mostly of chronicles about the political activism that shaped this overlooked period of Mexican history. The main problem with the book stems from its conciseness, given that eleven contributions are packed in a little over 200 pages. Nonetheless,

it is clear that the editors of *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico* want to lead readers into the complexities of the period through their wide selection of articles. Some of the chapters in this volume make valuable contributions to our knowledge on the historical origins of the current political situation in Mexico. For instance, the two pieces by Alexander Aviña and Adela Cedillo explore the historical roots of two political movements that have captured the attention and imagination of people across the globe: Neo-Zapatismo and Ayotzinapa. The former came about after the disappearance of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teacher's College in the state of Guerrero on September 26, 2014. The events in Ayotzinapa ignited a mass mobilization of Mexican civil society and supporters across the globe protesting against state corruption, drug violence, economy, and demanding justice for the families of the missing students. Aviña's work helps to contextualize the historical roots of the Ayotzinapa movement in the social and political context of Guerrero.

Cedillo's article offers a concise, but substantial account of the origins of the mostly indigenous Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN*), which captured the attention of the world on January 1, 1994. Her piece offers an excellent overview of the structural factors that gave rise to the National Liberation Forces (*Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional, FLN*), an urban politico-military organization from which the EZLN sprouted. The EZLN's indigenous identity and its anti-neoliberal discourse have generated enormous fascination on the part of U.S. and European activists, however, its urban non-indigenous origins remain unknown. Cedillo's work serves as an important introductory work for understanding the origins of the EZLN. Likewise, Aviña's article looks at the transformation of teacher and worker activism into guerrilla movements in the southern Mexican state of Guerrero. His contribution provides the historical basis for comprehending the roots of the Ayotzinapa movement that has swept Mexico since September 26, 2014. His piece challenges the presupposition that armed activism had its origins solely on ideological influences. Through the use of declassified Mexican government records, Aviña illustrates the way that

state terror forced peasant organizations to gradually take up arms against the Mexican state.

Another important theme present in this edited volume is the need to de-nationalize and decentralize the study of Mexican history in order to understand the intersection of local, regional, and global factors. In many ways, all authors in this volume go beyond political activism in Mexico City by showing the interconnections between urban and rural struggles. Indeed, in the collective memory of the Mexican Dirty War, the Tlatelolco student massacre of October 2, 1968 that took place in Mexico City has predominated as the symbol of martyrdom for the Mexican left. However, the Mexican countryside has been and continues to be a place where political dissidents and civilians have endured the most violent episodes of repression, and yet it continues to be ignored. Although, Mexican scholars and activists have produced a large body of scholarship and materials revealing the Mexican state's use of indiscriminate repression, it has been the declassification of Mexican government records in 2001 that opened the floodgates for U.S. and European scholars to explore the Mexican Dirty War. All the articles in this volume were generated thanks to this archival opening.

The contributions by Elizabeth Henson, Alan Eladio Gómez, Verónica Oikión Solano, Romain Robinet, José Luis Sierra Guzmán, and Fernando Herrera Calderón illustrate the ideological influence of the global Cold War on the transformation of Mexican political activism across urban and rural spaces. These studies lay the groundwork for further inquiry through a transnational lens enabling historians to untangle the historical processes of the Mexican Dirty War as part of a global historical moment. Their contributions spark further research questions such as: To what extent did Mexican ideals—both urban and rural—of rebellion influence other political struggles and how, in turn, did they influence them? What about the patterns and dynamics of the connections among Latin American political struggles outside of Cuba?

Moreover, the subject of gender relations and constructions in Mexican history continues to be an underdeveloped area of research. Despite the fact that a significant percentage of political activists in armed

movements were women, the present historical memory of the Mexican Dirty War has relegated them to the role of mothers, wives, and daughters of male *guerrilleros*. The piece by Lucía Rayas on the experience of women combatants is a useful introduction to the gender dynamics of the guerrilla groups as a reflection of larger Mexican society. However, her main source of information about the experience of women in guerilla warfare comes from the written record of a public gathering of former guerilla women from a variety of social backgrounds in mostly urban areas. Therefore, the exclusion of *campesinas* and indigenous women from the historical narrative reflects the attitudes of the larger Mexican society toward these communities. Rayas' introductory piece opens the door for further analysis of gender constructions and relations of those individuals who participated in armed struggles to include diverse ideas of masculinity and femininity not only among urban areas, but also among *campesinos*, indigenous communities, and different regions to present more complex discourses about gender and culture in Mexico.

Also of note is the piece by Elaine Carey on the historical memory and limited scrutiny of human rights violations that took place during the Mexican Dirty War. Her work like all the contributions in this volume, points towards the PRI's use of indiscriminate violence that characterized this historical moment, but more importantly it focuses on the role of the State and the challenges of prosecuting those responsible for human rights violations. Carey's thought process clearly shows the links between the PRI's power and limited historical memory, which has made the Mexican Dirty War an understudied historical period. Carey describes hurdles that human rights institutions and survivors confronted to force the Mexican state to declassify documents about this period. Further research could be done to understand the role of social class, ethnicity, and discrimination against rural communities in shaping historical consciousness about the Dirty War.

Finally, despite the efforts of the leadership to portray Mexico as a pluralist constitutional democracy resting on the ideals of its liberal constitution and its revolutionary past, most people today agree on the authoritarian nature of the Mexican state. Conversely, understanding of the

historical roots and nature of political resistance by students, workers, indigenous communities, intellectuals, peasantry, and civilians remains understudied. In many ways, this short edited volume only provides a primer on the topic of the Mexican Dirty War, which suggests more work needs to be done. For example, what role did the Catholic Church play in the development of the Mexican Dirty War? What were the rhetorical interactions between the PRI's sanctioned media and the propaganda generated by activists? What role did non-violent forms of political activism such as performance art and music play in the creation of a counter-narrative to state rhetoric? What has been the role of oral history and personal narratives in the formation of a political consciousness at the local level? Some readers will undoubtedly feel that more emphasis on non-violent forms of revolutionary struggles against Mexican authoritarianism would have offered a more multifaceted image of the Mexican Dirty War, but given the introductory nature of *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico*, the volume provides abundant scholarly material to appreciate this period. For those who teach undergraduate Latin American history courses, many of the contributions in this volume could be useful to introduce students to the complexity of armed social movements beyond urban student activism. However, in many ways famed Mexican guerilla movements from the Dirty War, and all the romanticism that goes alongside the popular historical memory about its leaders, continues to relegate *campesinos* and indigenous people to the background. Therefore, readings from *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico* used alongside primary documents, films, and music will complement understanding of this historical moment.