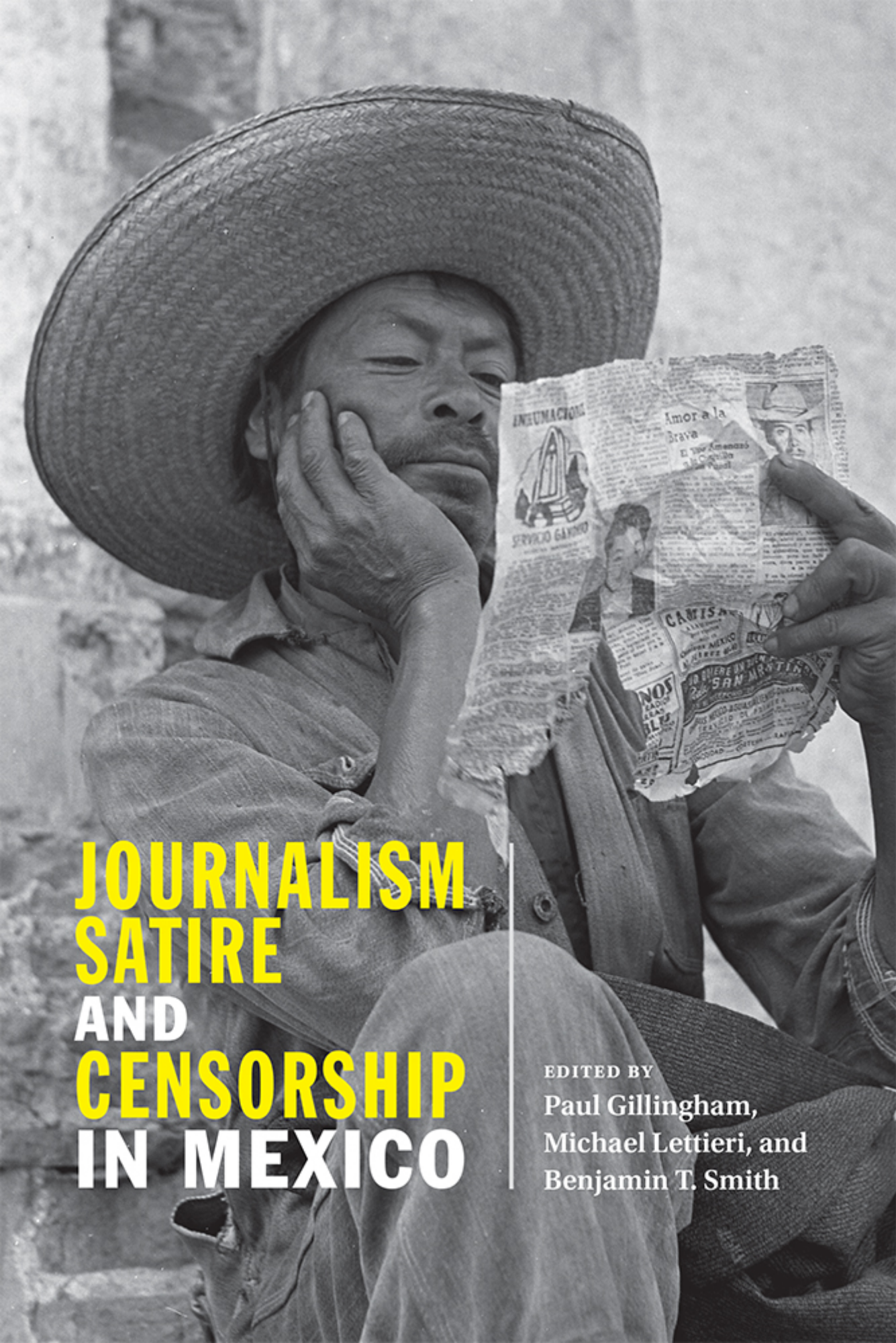

JOURNALISM SATIRE AND CENSORSHIP IN MEXICO

EDITED BY
Paul Gillingham, Michael Lettieri, and Benjamin T. Smith

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For David Bailey, Mirsada Šakić-Hatibović and Javier Valdez Cárdenas

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JUDITH MATLOFF

It started out like so many safety training sessions I have conducted for reporters. The journalists from northern Mexico gathered in a safe place to learn how to avoid being murdered. Nearly everyone in the room had lost a co-worker or had received death threats from drug gangs that target the media. Their offices had been shot at. Sinister text messages demanded they drop investigations.

The writers and photographers craved tips on survival. Mexico is one of the most dangerous places to be a journalist, due to the impunity of narcos and the complicity of the very officials entrusted with protecting citizens. Since the 1990s, more than ninety media workers have been killed and over twenty have gone missing. Seven were murdered in the first half of 2017 alone.[1] Many reporters have gone into hiding, and still more have been silenced by fear or intimidation.

In 2006 Mexico set up a special prosecutor's office to investigate crimes against freedom of expression. But it is ineffectual, having obtained only three convictions in the hundreds of cases lodged.

A reporter from the state of Chihuahua described her daily ordeal. A white car tailed her every morning as she drove her small daughter to kindergarten. It was always the same maneuver. As soon as she pulled out of her driveway the sedan followed in pursuit, a couple of car lengths behind, but

never so close that she could see the driver's face in the rear-view mirror. The journalist was pretty sure he represented the Zetas, one of the most vicious syndicates. The group had killed several colleagues and phoned threats to at least a dozen more.[2] The driver would follow as she dropped the child at school and then continue behind her most of the way to the office. A single mother, she dreaded leaving her daughter orphaned or having her harmed. How could she live with that? The journalist felt guilty, torn, desperate. Every day when she put her bag down at the office she saw the empty cubicle of a photographer who had been assassinated by the *malos* (bad men).

What could she do? I raised a couple of possibilities for the group. The reporter could try divergent routes, I ventured. She could vary the time she left the house. She could travel in convoy with a friend or relative. Someone else could take the girl in the mornings. The mother could drive with an emergency number on speed dial, ready to press if the man got too close to her car. Or take a defensive driving class.

Her expression dulled as we brainstormed more options. Circle the block several times. Get a bulletproof car ("Too expensive"). Hire armed guards ("Can't afford that either"). Change jobs ("And work where?"). Move to another town (same problem). More proposals, none viable. As we ran out of ideas, she said in a flat voice: "They'll get me if they want to."

Tragically, she was right. Safety is a fatalistic matter in Mexico, and the customary preventive measures won't withstand the dangerous juggernaut. Impunity is so rife, and the collusion between organized crime and law enforcers so profound, that only self-censorship saves lives.[3] That's why so many Mexican media professionals have stopped reporting on the violence.

I've been conducting these security workshops on and off for several years now, going from north to south, east to west. Veracruz, Jalisco, Veracruz again, Nuevo Laredo, Chihuahua City, Ciudad Juárez, Nuevo León, Chiapas, Mexico City. I've worked with journalists from nearly all of the thirty-one states. They all share the same lament: contingency planning goes only so far.

Risk assessment is the linchpin of security plans. You identify the worst-case scenarios and then figure out how to mitigate them. Who are the hostile parties? What is their modus operandi? Are you likely to be kidnapped or murdered at home? Seized outside the office? Are they snooping on your Facebook communications? Do they target relatives as well? Will they email

a warning before cutting off your head? Do they string tortured bodies from bridges?

Then you work backward. Set up a communication plan with a trusted person who knows where you are hour by hour. Be vigilant about your surroundings. Safeguard digital and mobile communications to prevent eavesdropping or the hacking of accounts. Be wary of narco spies planted in the newsroom. Don't leave the computer switched on when you go to the restroom; don't leave cell phones on the desk. Don't broadcast your plans or post family snapshots on social media. Cover stories in a group.

But that only works so far. What's the point of reporting threats to police who may be working with the bad guys? What if your boss refuses to take you off the police beat? The sheer variety of what can go wrong is staggering in Mexico. You can't stay away from the front line, because you live on it. And that front line is ever mutating. The violence has so many actors and variables that following one line of caution isn't enough. Different syndicates control different plazas, or markets, in different parts of the country. Stratfor, a geopolitical intelligence firm, illustrates this balkanization in its periodic maps of cartel control.[4] They show how the landscape changes from year to year as groups chase away rivals or new ones splinter off. These shifting sands make it doubly hard to keep track of infiltration into the judiciary and law enforcement. There are a lot of underpaid cops willing to take bribes among the two federal, thirty-one state, and hundreds of municipal police forces.

I have spoken to dozens of Mexican journalists across the country, and nearly all say that appeals for transfers to safer beats or for hiring armed sentries are laughed off. Salaries are low—the average monthly wage is US$650—and employment so scarce that reporters are often scared to push for their rights. Forget about strong unions. "My editor expected me to return to work right after being beaten," one reporter from a border town told me.

Without money, lawyers, or sympathetic bosses, journalists improvise. One police reporter in the state of Guerrero goes to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, not for a booze problem but because he needs to vent somewhere. He figures that the narcos drink heavily so this is a safe environment to talk about his fears. Other journalists drive across the border to the United States once a week to get a break from the relentless pressure. They don't talk to family about their work and have removed their children's pictures from

Facebook to make it harder for abductors to kidnap them. Others have given up successful careers, or fled town.[5]

That didn't work, though, for Rubén Espinosa, a photographer from Veracruz, one of the worst states for the assassination of journalists. He told the media advocacy group Article 19 that he was followed in several locations and given sinister looks. He relocated to Mexico City, previously a safe haven for journalists. Not anymore. Espinosa was shot dead there soon after.

Ironically, Veracruz has a mechanism set up to protect journalists. The Commission for the Care and Protection of Journalists was formalized in late 2012 to provide measures such as alerting authorities in cases of emergency. It followed the creation of the National Mechanism to Protect Human Rights Defenders and Journalists. If it worked properly, a small circle of people would weigh a request for, say, bodyguards, panic buttons, or assistance in relocation. Then a committee would analyze the severity of the situation and, hopefully, take action before the applicant was killed.

However, many Mexican journalists harbor a distrust of the government, so they don't reach out. A sampling of journalists from five states whom I surveyed in late 2015 scoffed at the notion of asking for state-sponsored help, since half of the aggressions reported against journalists come from authorities. The body that oversees the mechanism is the Secretaría de Gobernación, not a robust champion of free speech. Several of the 200-odd journalists who have actually sought protective measures report painfully slow responses. And the panic buttons don't always work.

The federal system was based loosely on one in Colombia, another Latin American nation where cartels have tried to intimidate the media. The Colombian mechanism, among other measures, finances armed bodyguards or plane tickets so that threatened journalists can fly to other locales. The Mexican initiative, however, lacks the same teeth.

In addition, Colombia enjoys conditions that are more favorable to building solidarity. Competitors collaborate on investigations and coordinate publications, and they even staged a news blackout to protest a killing. That level of collaboration is unthinkable among Mexico's fragmented media.

Also, the world of journalism in Mexico is alienated from the rest of civil society; the general populace often views reporters as irresponsible vultures, which is not the case in Colombia. And often media workers in the hinterland lack links with colleagues in other towns, including Mexico City, where

power lies. In some cases, the publishers of Mexican newspapers live across the border in the United States, and have little, if any, contact with reporters. Colombian journalists tend to be better connected.

Furthermore, unlike their Colombian equivalents, Mexico's media giants seem disinterested in lobbying for protection as a group, according to the Center for International Media Assistance.[6] This leaves provincial reporters out on a limb with no strong advocates in the seat of government. In contrast, the influential national media in Bogotá have joined forces with the political elite, which had been similarly targeted by the Medellín drug cartel.

"Almost all of the attacks in Mexico have been far from the capital city, carried out against local targets, and thus drawing little sustained national attention," noted a report by the center. "There is almost no contact among the local and national media in Mexico, no coordinated efforts by publishers and editors to develop a common strategy to protect their journalists."[7]

Mexico also lacks a robust judicial system to bring killers to justice. In 2013, Mexican lawmakers approved an amendment to the constitution that made attacks on journalists a federal crime, and gave federal authorities the power to prosecute in situations that would normally fall under local or state jurisdiction. However, the legislation has failed to yield prosecutions.

Abandoned in these ways, Mexican journalists are making their own security arrangements. A loose network called Periodistas de a Pie has reached out to Colombian reporters for tips. Over the past couple of years, seasoned experts have flown to meet with their counterparts from Mexico. The common language facilitates communication, as does an understanding of what it's like to deal with the shadowy world of drug gangs. "We believe that we can serve as a useful example for Mexicans," said Ignacio Gómez, the former head of Colombia's leading press freedom group, Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP).[8] He has lost track of how many seminars FLIP has conducted in Mexico for colleagues facing danger.

The workshops have spawned an informal association of reporters, from Ciudad Juárez to Oaxaca, who share things—the names of affordable psychologists, a couch if someone needs to escape town, photocopies of counter surveillance guides. And they have begun to form local chapters in order to lobby as a group to win officially sanctioned protection.

One regional leader is Rocío Gallegos, an editor of *El Diario de Juárez*, from the border town that long held the dubious distinction of being the world's homicide capital. Things got so bad in Juárez in 2011 that *El Diario* begged the drug lords to define the rules so that its journalists knew what was off-limits. "What Do You Want from Us?" asked the editorial, which ran on the front page.

The editors never got an answer, so Gallegos took matters into her own hands. In 2012, she created an informal association of independent-minded reporters fed up with self-censorship.[9] They team up on stories and invite experts to explain such things as password protection and altering routines. They regularly check on each other's emotional state. It's sort of a combination support group and professional development union. "We established alliances between individual journalists so that we can watch each other's backs," explained Gallegos. "Scoops take second place."

The word is spreading. A reporter from Chihuahua city who attended one session left so fired up that she formed her own chapter back home. Members are vetted to ensure they are not serving as informants for drug dealers; distrust in the newsroom is a common complaint. "We had to take the initiative," said Patricia Mayorga a prominent local journalist. "No one else was looking after us." That's for sure. Last year she fled Mexico after receiving death threats and following the murder of a close colleague, Miroslava Breach Velducea.

Safety remains especially elusive for reporters in places like the border city of Nuevo Laredo, where the Zetas command such terror that many people won't utter the name out loud. In 2013, *El Mañana* newspaper announced that it would stop covering violent disputes among rival groups after a second grenade attack against its offices in two months. Residents of the town rely on Facebook and other social media to learn about shootouts, which are often referred to by the euphemism "parties." This leaves journalists wondering again how they can do their job properly.

"Collaboration wouldn't work, because we don't cover news anymore," dryly noted Daniel Rosas, the online editor of *El Mañana*. "I like the idea though."

The mother of the kindergarten student similarly self-censored. She changed beats and stays away from sensitive stories. When I last checked, the white car had stopped following her. She was still alive. Unable to work freely, but still alive.

Notes

1. By the time you read this, it will be out of date. For (varying) current statistics and reports, see the Committee to Protect Journalists, https://cpj.org/americas/mexico/2017 and https://cpj.org/killed/americas/mexico; Reporters Without Borders, "Mexico," https://rsf.org/en/mexico; Article 19, "Latinoamérica," https://www.article19.org/pages/es/latin-america-translation.html (all accessed Nov. 9, 2017).
2. For one reporter's experiences with the Zetas, see Corchado, *Midnight in Mexico*.
3. Cacho et al., *La ira de México*.
4. See https://worldview.stratfor.com/image/geography-mexican-drug-cartels (accessed Sept. 8, 2017).
5. For groundbreaking investigative journalism, see Javier Valdez Cárdenas's award-winning work from Sinaloa, *Narcoperiodismo* and *The Taken*. Valdez Cárdenas was murdered outside his newspaper office in May 2017.
6. See http://www.cima.ned.org (accessed Sept. 8, 2017).
7. Farah, *Dangerous Work*, 23.
8. See https://www.flip.org.co/index.php/es (accessed Sept. 8, 2017).
9. Self-censorship characterizes both reporters and reported; many victims of violence do not engage with the authorities, since they fear being suspected of being narcos themselves. For stories, see Turati, *Fuego cruzado*.

Acknowledgments

This book relied on the support and funding of multiple institutions. Most important, we would like to thank the Center for US-Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). The center hosted a two-day conference in May 2014 on the history and contemporary state of journalism in Mexico, organized by Michael Lettieri. That conference provided the basis for this edited collection. We thank all the conference attendees, the wonderful and efficient administrators at UCSD, and the fantastic, smart, and engaged postdoctoral students at the center. Special thanks to Gema Santamaría, Sam Quinones, David Shirk, Peter H. Smith, Alfredo Corchado, and Froylán Enciso.

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Mexican press. That history provided the inspiration for much of this work. Finally, we thank the Global History and Culture Centre at the University of Warwick, and in particular Giorgio Riello, who provided additional funding and support for the 2014 UCSD conference.

Beyond these institutional debts, we also owe a lot to the three anonymous readers of the text, who provided so much provocative and useful commentary; to the ever sharp and engaged Clark Whitehorn at the University of New Mexico Press, with whom we have worked before and will hopefully work again; and to Andrew Paxman, who has provided continued knowledgeable input into this project.

Acknowledgment pages are not the space for eulogies; there is more than enough death in this book. But during the making of this volume three people passed away, all of whom have a link to our interest in the subject of the press and politics. The first is David Bailey, Benjamin Smith's mentor at Michigan State University and one of the kindest and most generous people Smith ever had the pleasure to spend time with (though not enough). The second is Mirsada Šakić-Hatibović, winner of the International Women's Media Foundation award for courage in journalism; she was brave not just on the front lines. The third is Javier Valdez Cárdenas, who attended the 2014 workshop, wrote some of the best investigative journalism on Mexico's contemporary drug war, and provided the basis for much of Everard Meade's work on Mexican journalism in this time of crisis. He was executed outside his newspaper, *Ríodoce*, on May 15, 2017.

Introduction

Journalism, Satire, and Censorship in Mexico

PAUL GILLINGHAM, MICHAEL LETTIERI, AND BENJAMIN T. SMITH

Risky criticism, satire, and censorship have a long history in Mexico. As soon as Hernán Cortés captured Tenochtitlan the first libels appeared, daubed daily on the whitewashed walls of his Coyoacán headquarters. They ranged from artfully composed verse to the unprintable "palabras que no son para decir en esta relación" (words with no place in this chronicle), and Cortés's reaction was first to match wits with his scurrilous critics, then to disdain them ("pared blanca, papel de necios," white wall, fools' paper), and finally to ban them.[1] Bernal Díaz del Castillo is silent as to what happened next, but the assumption—given the timely deaths of various of those inconvenient to Cortés—must be that the threats worked to silence the dissidents.[2] Thus began some five centuries of censorship. Churchmen burned books (and occasionally their authors); kings banned printing presses and treatises on indigenous people; dictators deployed violence both improvised (Santa Anna) and systematic (the penitentiaries of the Porfiriato, with their presidential suites for journalists).[3] The revolutionary governments took an evolutionary step forward, coercing less and co-opting more. To that end, politicians used multiple subsidies ranging from the formal (lavishly paid adverts, cheap newsprint, generous loans) to the informal—but inspirational—payoffs to individual hacks. The Mexican rulers of the *dictablanda*—a state

that combined authoritarian and democratic elements and that exerted tenuous control over markedly autonomous local societies—smoothly and comprehensively censored the twentieth-century media: happily handing out carrots to an oft-complicit press, prepared when needed to pick up the stick.[4] In short, the arch-Machiavellian Cortés might well be painted as a worthy predecessor of the arch-Machiavellian Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI).

So, at least, runs an old and powerful story, which until recently ended on an uplifting note with the democratization of the print press in the 1980s and '90s.[5] Yet as the contributors to this book argue, such an emancipatory narrative no longer holds. These authors come from varied professional backgrounds. Many are historians, drawn to examine the complex roots of the contemporary situation. Some, like Judith Matloff and Rafael Barajas, are journalists forced by necessity to ponder the old assurances of press liberalization. Others, like Javier Garza Ramos and Jacinto Rodríguez Munguía, combine investigation of the past with concern for present-day problems to bridge both professions. Finally, scholars such as Everard Meade and Paul Eiss have turned from history to contemporary cultural commentary to discern patterns and dislocations in our new and shocking reality. The diversity of approaches, methodologies, and assumptions is inevitable and self-evident. Yet amid that diversity, the chapters are linked by three common observations, which also structure this book.

First, as even a cursory glance at the headlines suggest, journalism is more dangerous, and consequently more constrained, now than at any other point in modern Mexican history. Since 2006 reporters have been murdered at a far greater rate than at the PRI's peak.[6] There is no longer a liberal story of press democratization with a happy ending.[7] Second, the new scrutiny and a shift from memoir and polemic to history have knocked the linchpin out of any simple dichotomies of domination and resistance from an earlier print world. A world in which an authoritarian conservative president (Gustavo Díaz Ordaz) helps bring the most influential opposition journalist (Julio Scherer) to power; or where a conservative Mexico City mayor (Ernesto Uruchurtu) props up a genuine opposition outlet (*Política*); or where another unpopular president (José López Portillo) funds an opposition daily (*Unomásuno*) is a world considerably more complex than any just-so story can tell.[8] (Perhaps, as Everard Meade suggests in this volume, it is one in which both

liberal teleologies and Gramscian imaginaries break down.) Third, this empirical shift toward a new narrative complexity parallels comparative and conceptual shifts in studies of the media in other times and places. It is now clear that globalized media competition does not inevitably translate into more democratic flows of information or newly empowered consumers. The press in the United States is no historical yardstick, bent as it is by its own pressures of commercial imperatives, state co-optation, "fake news," and violence.[9] Above all, censorship is not a solely political phenomenon, existing in Manichaean opposition to freedom of expression. As several authors demonstrate, censorship can also be market-driven, or criminal; it involves complex relations of "complicity, collaboration, and negotiation" between censors and the censored.[10] In Ana María Serna Rodríguez's description, it is "a cultural-political practice emerging from a multiplicity of sites, voices, and subjectivities."

Old Stories, New Histories: Mexico's Print Culture until 1910

Mexican historians have begun embracing what Robert Darnton terms the "new history" of communication.[11] Delving into Mexicans' relationships with printed texts, they have started to chip away at old liberal certainties.[12] The Inquisition, for example, was depicted by liberals such as Vicente Riva Palacio (in both papers and novels) as an efficient machine of totalitarian censorship; in reality inquisitors lacked enough copies of their lists of banned books to cover New Spain (and only updated them every twenty years anyway).[13] At the other end of the colony, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were times of widespread enthusiasm for France's revolutionaries and evil-minded attacks on Spaniards, bureaucrats, and churchmen. Across the hierarchies of this increasingly literate culture, readers got their hands on the newspapers, gazettes, and satirical pamphlets that transmitted new and dangerous ideas. Some publications, newspapers, and tracts were explicitly political; others were spaces of backdoor commentary, such as the medical journals in which doctors and folk healers discussed innovative ways to view society, or the thin religious booklets with commentaries on and prayers to unsettlingly heterodox saints.[14] People read them together in the new spaces of Enlightenment sociability: the Masonic lodge, the economic society, the café, the reading group.[15] The printed word traveled well beyond

the page and the literate, as authors both drew on and developed a critical vernacular culture through the cries of the pamphleteer sellers, the carefully rehearsed rhetoric of public readings, and the plays, songs, gossip, rumors, letters, and libels.

This public sphere swelled dramatically during and after the wars of independence. Tumultuous discussions of autonomy, democracy, and the church echoed through the newly established town halls, and a newborn electorate—which initially included poor people, indigenous people, and Afro-Mexicans—responded with votes, insurrections, and their attendant manifestos.[16] A new, vocal, and often contrarian generation of newspapermen and pamphleteers emerged in both the capital and the provinces.[17] They met from the start with tides of censorship, which ebbed and rose according to regime.[18] Article 17 of Agustín de Iturbide's constitution ordered writers to make "a rational sacrifice of the right to think and manifest ideas freely, neither attacking nor alluding to, without prior censorship, the Catholic religion, ecclesiastical discipline, the moderate monarchy, the emperor's person, independence, and the union."[19]

Journalists deserved stiff jail sentences, Antonio López de Santa Anna decreed twenty years later, because Mexico's ruinous condition was down to "the continuous and scandalous abuse of freedom of the press."[20] Such legislation was backed up by force. Between 1831 and 1832 numerous printing shops were closed and editors arrested; in the late 1830s journalists were incarcerated in Mexico's nastier jails, such as San Juan de Ulúa.[21] Censors, though, could still be evaded: under Santa Anna *Le Trait d'Union* used an improbable combination of French and fashion commentary to criticize the president.[22] Such satire ran too deep in Mexican culture to eradicate with legislation; it was the dominant tone of pamphlets from the beginning, its targets running across society, its power to harm recognized in laws that specifically targeted nicknames, sarcasm, and ridicule.[23] Even priests, it seemed, were satirists; in Tabasco one padre was murdered for his verses mocking the governor.[24] During the Reform era, satire only intensified, including both the Horatian mode of irony and mockery (often general) and the Juvenalian tradition of bitter vituperation (often personal). Satire was seen in written polemics and in the first political cartoons, which took up one of the four pages of *Mi Sombrero*, launched in 1860 and later rebaptized *La Orquesta*, and which quickly spread to other

papers.[25] With the liberal party triumphant, political debate between relatively large, established newspapers such as *El Siglo XIX* and *El Monitor Republicano* peaked.[26]

The story of the Porfiriato was long one of the death of these press freedoms through persecution and subsidy: the suppression of juries devoted to assessing cases of press freedom, the serial jailings of journalists, the closure of mainstays such as *El Monitor Republicano*, and the unfair competition of the larger, cheaper, commercial papers that received extensive official subsidies.[27] As Pablo Piccato notes in this volume, however, "the influence of the press did not diminish." There was, as even Daniel Cosío Villegas noted, a continual rumble of criticism across the period, from both liberal and conservative editors—why else, after all, the prison suites?—and as Claude Dumas and Zamudio Vega observe in their study of the main conservative newspapers, there was "the slightly chaotic but constant existence of an opposition press."[28] Set piece battles still broke out, as when *El Demócrata* reported the Tomóchic massacre in the guise of a novel.[29] Cartoons survived and grew more refined; coverage of and commentary on social issues and crime provided half-hidden critiques of the dictatorship. (Not always hidden either: one José Guadalupe Posada cartoon in *El Diablito Rojo* explicitly rebuked Díaz for the Creelman interview.)[30]

Beyond the broadsheets of the capital, censorship was even less complete. In the poorer suburbs, workers-turned-journalists resisted patronizing official discourses and sought to create alternative and critical stories of working-class culture and masculinity.[31] Their satirical papers traveled far beyond the capital: by 1906 the popular *La Guacamaya* (which styled itself a "newspaper of gossip and good humor, agile and a teller of truths, not puffed up or snobby, scourge of the bourgeoisie and defender of the Working Class," according to its masthead) had a print run of 29,000 and was sold in Orizaba, San Luis Potosí, Aguascalientes, Toluca, Parral, and Guanajuato.[32] Alongside these imports, radical newspapers emerged in the provinces and borderlands, tapping Reform era traditions of criticism, exposure, and debate.[33] Revisionism concerning the incomplete nature of Porfirian censorship is not, perhaps, all that surprising; the same roundabout but effective communication systems—gossip, songs, libels, pamphlets, the gutter press, Kremlinological signs in the big papers—and the same weakened grasp of provincial

information flows are evident in other states where authoritarian dreams outpace reality, such as ancien régime France.[34]

Visions of the More Recent Past

While authoritarian dreams were likewise hard to realize under the post-revolutionary governments, a similar reassessment is only just beginning in studies of twentieth-century Mexico's newspaper industry, traditionally subject to profoundly normative and negative assessments. That post-revolutionary press, commentators have held, was "submissive and unconditional"; newspapers were "factual deserts," "timid, over-sensational, often influenced by official optimism and possibly more concerned over profits than honest and objective presentation of the news."[35] Technology was primitive, and many publications lacked "the installations, the humans, or the equipment that modern newspapers need."[36] Print runs were so short that many owners "neither competed for readers nor formed public opinion independently."[37] Owners were businessmen first and editors second, principally concerned with using their papers to further their commercial ends. *Novedades*'s owners were "car salesmen"; Rodrigo de Llano, the editor of *Excélsior*, was more publicity agent than newsman; Regino Hernández Llergo, the owner of *Hoy*, was "very intelligent but extraordinarily corrupt"; the media mogul José García Valseca was immortalized in Carlos Fuentes's revolutionary-turned-plutocrat, Artemio Cruz.[38] The journalists were apparently even worse: lazy, unprofessional, ill-educated, profiteering drunkards, whom Mexicans colloquially dismissed as coyotes, blackmailers, *pícaros* (blaggers), *lambiscones* (brownnosers), journalism merchants, and gangsters.[39]

Although commentators held that institutional and coercive forms of censorship were rare, they argued that official control of newspapers was effectively absolute. The press was "one of the sectors of the country where subordination to power was most obvious."[40] Shared ideological positions on anticommunism, national progress, and economic stability united officials, editors, and journalists.[41] Financial incentives, including discounted newsprint, government advertising, cheap loans, and regular payoffs—the *sobornos* (bribes) known in slang as *igualas* (fees), *embutes* (bribes), *sobres* (envelopes), or *chayotes* (squashes)—tightened these bonds.[42] Formulaic press releases laid down clear party lines; stories wrote themselves.[43] In

Mexico's newsrooms, "censorship extended and implanted itself as something natural"; all journalists knew "the limits of what they could write"; and self-censorship was the rule, something like the "scissors in the head" of East German writers.[44] Empty eulogy, fawning, and flattery of officials were all commonplace, while the "core features of the political system—presidential authority, official corruption, state violence and electoral fraud etc.—were decidedly off limits."[45] If journalists occasionally transgressed the boundaries, owners and editors silenced or sacked them.[46] At best, the print media were "a free press which does not make use of its freedom"; at worst, freedom of expression was a "great lie" that "was subject to so many limits, it does not exist."[47]

As a result, the political influence of newspapers was perceived as extremely limited. They were echo chambers *avant la lettre*. "The mass media were in essence ineffective, they persuaded those already persuaded and could inhibit those still on the fence, but they did nothing more."[48] State control, high prices, elitist subject matter, and an obscurantist, overly elaborate prose alienated the majority of potential, if semiliterate, readers.[49] The press acted as little more than an elite talking shop, "read by politicians for its hidden messages, used by the government to float controversial ideas and exploited as a forum for infighting between different political mafias."[50] Public opinion was "the patrimony of the initiated," a narrow and exclusive section of the privileged class; in short, the public sphere was not all that public.[51] If Mexicans outside the inner circle did read the newspapers, they either imbibed a one-way stream of "unified messages and symbols reinforcing regime legitimacy" or they did so with cynicism.[52] Writing in the 1970s, Cosío Villegas argued that the "incredulity of the immense majority of readers" was such that Mexicans "didn't simply judge journalists as liars, but took it as a rule to believe exactly the opposite of what they wrote."[53] One popular dictum held that "the person who reads nothing is better educated than the one who only reads the newspapers."[54] If everyday Mexicans did exchange political opinions, they did so through rumor and gossip, around the water fountain, in the market, over a coffee, or inside their families.[55] If they sought to challenge state authority, they did so not through print media but rather through rituals, ranging from choreographed riots to savvy disruptions of official celebrations, "spaces in which people could express ideas that were not allowed in the public sphere."[56]

Such negative assessments of the press have considerable weight—and some empirical backing. Large parts of the story, however, rest on political polemic, normative approaches, and questionable comparisons. Right-wing critics have drawn on a romanticized teleology of Western press freedoms to denigrate the Mexican press for its technological backwardness, moribund commercial policies, lack of professionalism, and political subordination.[57] In the twenty-first century such an approach has been bolstered by theorists of media democratization, who argue that it took increased commercialization and competition to bring innovation, professionalization, and a new level of public debate on power.[58] For observers on the left the story is more political and individual than commercial, centering on the role of Julio Scherer and his generation in combating state control. For influential writers like Vicente Leñero, Carlos Monsiváis, and Elena Poniatowska, the pivot was *Excélsior*'s challenge to the state from the 1968 student massacre until the 1976 expulsion of Scherer and his allies from their newsroom.[59] The unintended consequence of this governmental coup against Mexico's only serious independent newspaper, what cartoonist Rius called the "Pinochetazo of *Excélsior*," was the launch of several new opposition publications. Scherer founded the pathbreaking weekly *Proceso*; other "civic pioneers" founded the dailies *Unomásuno* and *La Jornada*; and these, finally, guided Mexico to the sunlit liberal uplands of a free press.[60]

If right- and left-wing narratives of oppression and emancipation differ on process and details, they share three flawed assumptions. First, they exaggerate the coherence and power of the state. Even in its pomp, the PRI's grasp on Mexico was weak, the regime a dictablanda by necessity. Regional autonomies, central factionalism, and a fundamental shortage of money and manpower all made totalitarian press control impossible.[61] The laws governing information flows were aggressive, but went largely unenforced. There was only one dedicated censorship agency, the Comisión Calificadora de Publicaciones y Revistas Ilustradas (Assessment Commission of Publications and Illustrated Magazines), which was set up to deal with the moral threat of comic books. It subsequently expanded to include sports, *nota roja* (crime), and soft porn magazines, yet it was rarely very effective, and what censorship did take place came on an ad hoc basis from the Ministry of the Interior.[62] Second, they are heavily based on Mexico City's broadsheets, the self-declared *gran prensa*, and the writings of their

stalwarts. The hegemonic narrative of oppression and (post-1968) resistance has lent Julio Scherer (among others) what Arno Burkholder terms a "mystifying halo"; this undermines critical study and condemns the rest of the press to accusations of state control, corruption, and essential civic irrelevance. Whether coming from before '68 or from outside the city, other print media are generally ignored or dismissed.[63] Provincial newsmen, Monsiváis wrote, were devoted to "banality, adulation, local credulity, and parochial anticommunism."[64] Critical newspapers like *Por Qué?* were "tabloid" and "exaggerated," their denouncements the "fruits of desperation and not careful reflection."[65] The nota roja enthusiasts of tabloids and crime magazines were "sensationalist" and "bloody."[66] Yet these media did provide forums for criticism and debate; they constituted a fourth (not Cosío Villegas's "fifteenth") estate.[67] As Piccato notes in this volume, "The trade still involved many of the values of nineteenth-century periodistas de combate: integrity, concern about reputations, and a close relationship with readers." Finally, critics of all stripes underestimate notably the strength of Mexican civil society under the PRI. Censorship was widely deplored (even by the censorious), and its ultimate manifestation, the murder of journalists, was politically perilous, toppling regional politicians from mayors to governors.[68] The net effect was the survival of a broad range of media, consumed by readers who did not always know much about political journalism but knew what they liked.[69]

Toward a New History of the Press, 1910–1970

This book is a collective history of that broad range of print media. The authors apply the revisionist scrutiny of earlier periods to the twentieth century, above all to the time of the PRI, 1929–2000. In doing so, they do not throw the baby out with the bathwater; on the contrary some contributors convincingly reinforce parts of the traditional narrative. Press manipulation and journalistic self-censorship were rife. The single intelligence document that Jacinto Rodríguez Munguía unpacks, a carefully considered proposal for subtle and total press manipulation, lends a new weight to belief in the Orwellian fantasies (though not capacities) of sectors of the ruling class. Andrew Paxman's case study of the Puebla press is a detailed substantiation of how some of those fantasies were realized by hard-line governors. In other

chapters, however, old suppositions go down the plughole. Some of the contributors make it clear that provincial newspapers, metropolitan cartoons and crime pages, newsmagazines, and even trade publications collectively provided considerable political news and critical commentary.[70] Renata Keller's chapter on *Política* depicts a powerful leftist magazine that until 1967 took on any and all comers, including, in defiance of "the so-called unwritten rules of Mexican journalism," the president. On the other side of 1968, Vanessa Freije shows how censorship frequently intensified rather than silenced controversy. The sum is a book that recognizes ambiguities and considerable temporal and geographical variation in the interactions of press, politicians, cultural managers, and readers. Starting and finishing with the tragic stories of the press of our time, however, the volume raises unsettling questions: at the structural level of how much politically controversial debate goes on in the public sphere, has all that much changed? In extremis, has change run in the opposite direction, from debate to diversion and silence? Are there more limits to what can be written in a formally democratic Ciudad Juárez, or Michoacán, or Acapulco, or Veracruz than there ever were under single-party rule?

Ambiguities, of course, are nothing new in this history. The revolutionaries wrote press freedom into the 1917 Mexican Constitution, making it illegal to shutter or destroy printing establishments or to close down papers for defamatory articles. They also wrote the 1917 press law, which made it illegal to even "covertly" criticize individuals, and a penal code that promised up to two years' imprisonment for any journalist threatening the public peace through "discrediting, ridiculing, or destroying the fundamental institutions of the country" or "insulting the Mexican nation or its political entities."[71] Yet for all the repressive aspects of the press laws after the death of President Francisco Madero, who had been savaged mercilessly by the papers he initially protected, and even when set against revisionist versions of Porfirian press history, the revolution was, as Serna Rodríguez and Piccato demonstrate in this volume, a clear rupture. By the 1920s popular demands were "channeled through both formal and informal routes, . . . [and] journalism acquired its primordial function as the intermediary between public opinion and the state."[72]

During the revolution and the decades immediately following, radical workers' newspapers flourished; voicing their demands was the key to

success.[73] But so did their opponents: Catholic organs, like the earnest Cristero newspaper *La Epoca*; their vituperative hard-line conservative successors, the tabloids *Hombre Libre* and *Omega*; and the mouthpieces of the regional bourgeoisie, like *El Siglo de Torreón*, *El Dictamen*, *El Diario de Yucatán*, and *El Porvenir*.[74] The expanded industry of mass-produced nationals, like *Excélsior*, *Novedades*, *La Prensa*, and *El Universal*—which walked a delicate line between official support and overt criticism—also flourished. As flagships of the revolutionary state's liberal credentials, they were often given a long rope. But this could be yanked fairly aggressively, particularly at times of political tension, to keep them in line.[75] If journalists changed, so too did the structure of media ownership. By the early 1940s it had undergone its own revolution: the old owners, like the aristocratic Rafael Reyes Spíndola, had gone, and ambitious businessmen from the lower middle classes, like José García Valseca, had taken their place. Moreover, two of Mexico's biggest dailies, *La Prensa* and *Excélsior*, were owned by worker cooperatives.[76]

If the early post-revolutionary decades witnessed an overhaul of press discourses and structures, it was the midcentury that saw a genuine change in print readership. This had multiple causes: education, better communication, a soaring birth rate, relative prosperity, and comparatively little competition from other media forms. Revolutionary schooling and literacy programs paid off: in 1940, 42 percent of adults were literate; by 1970, the number was 76 percent. These new readers lived in towns and cities of a new size—the 1960 census found more Mexicans in town than country—where newspapers, often local, were readily available.[77] Both local and national papers traveled farther and quicker on the new road networks, often by using the free second-class mail granted to the press by President Lázaro Cárdenas.[78] Print media now reached far beyond the immediate environs of the printshop. Economic growth also mattered. Increased advertising gave owners greater financial support: between 1963 and 1970 annual spending on advertising increased from 1.6 billion pesos to nearly 4 billion.[79] For some, the big sixty-centavo broadsheets remained out of reach, but for many the twenty-centavo or thirty-centavo tabloids and local eight-page weeklies did not cut too far into rent and food. Finally, while other media made inroads they had yet to dominate the market. Radio listening, intense since the 1930s, complemented rather than supplemented newspaper reading. Television, the future, was limited to Mexico City and provincial capitals until the 1970s, and until then

Televisa's newsreaders tended to repeat the front pages of the newspapers anyway.[80] The sum of these changes was a veritable explosion of newspaper production, far outpacing population growth. In 1930 there were 44 dailies in Mexico; by 1974 there were 256.[81]

Their readers were not evenly spread across class or place. The capital's three main broadsheets—*Excélsior*, *El Universal*, *Novedades*—lost ground in relative terms, their readership growing slower than the population and much slower than that of the tabloids.[82] While they faced competition from new broadsheets, more significantly they failed to reach much beyond middle- and upper-class residents of the capital. Dull subject matter, limited sports and crime, clunky language, oft-impenetrable columns, and a distinct air of snobbery put off workers, students, teachers, taxi drivers, and clerks. In 1970 an Informex survey concluded that even Scherer's *Excélsior* rarely penetrated beyond professionals, merchants, and industrialists.[83] But Mexico City tabloids like *La Prensa*, *La Prensa Gráfica*, *Últimas Noticias*, *Ovaciones*, and *Tabloide* saw circulation soar. "We are the main newspaper in Mexico," claimed *La Prensa*'s editor as early as 1942, "because in reality we are [a] truly popular newspaper and can sustain ourselves without great problems."[84] By 1960, the twenty-centavo *Tabloide* allegedly sold over 150,000 copies per day.[85] Ten years later, *La Prensa* had a certified circulation of 185,361, and *Ovaciones* was outselling *Excélsior* by more than two to one.[86] Content was key: scandal, sports, crime, and celebrity news sold. But so was language. Roberto G. Serna, the editor of *Zócalo*, insisted that his journalists employ a style that "was colloquial, anecdotal, seasoned with jokes and wordplay," using "the greatest amount of popular terms but without losing grammatical form."[87] These papers were designed for Mexico City's working class, and they worked.

Provincial newspapers were also often success stories. Scholars have regularly denigrated the regional penetration of the press, using statistics which show that per capita readership at the national level was relatively low, around one issue per ten inhabitants.[88] Changes in villages and hamlets are difficult to see, and some anthropologies suggest minimal (if politically important) readership.[89] But taking into account the urban-rural divide, more focused approaches reveal a burgeoning regional industry—a genuine readers' revolution. In cities across the country owners claimed to produce more papers than there were households. Even allowing for deliberate

overestimates and sales in the hinterlands, the figures are startling. In 1967 Monterrey's five dailies produced around 241,000 copies for 114,000 households. In Mérida notarized counts of *El Diario del Sureste*, *El Diario de Yucatán*, and *Novedades de Yucatán*'s circulations totaled 101,900 copies for 28,000 households.[90] In the same year, an extensive US government survey estimated that 79 percent of urban Mexicans read their local newspapers regularly.[91] If you were literate and you lived in a town or city, you read the press.

The precise extent, rhythms, and mechanisms of state censorship are still to be established. That the state attempted to control the press is beyond doubt. Initially attempts were ad hoc and comprised a distinctly dictablanda mix of personal approaches, bribery, threats, and violence.[92] By the mid-1960s, as Rodríguez Munguía demonstrates in this volume, there were those in government who sought to construct "an invisible tyranny" through conscious, subtle, and total manipulation of the mass media. Many owners, editors, and journalists embraced this, both for ideological reasons and for financial gain.[93] In the national broadsheets some targets, like the president, and some themes, like military violence, were forbidden.[94] And particularly after 1948 print satirists were sparse, incomprehensible, or nonexistent.[95]

But this fails to tell the whole story of pressure on print media. Private enterprises also tried their hands at censorship. Up until the 1960s the powerful Monterrey group had a censor in the newsroom of *El Norte*, who would redact or change sensitive stories on strikes and workers' rights.[96] (In the twenty-first century, as Javier Garza Ramos and Rafael Barajas argue in this volume, such pressure has increased, far outweighing the censorship attempts of the state.) Furthermore, even during the mid-twentieth century official censorship was far from complete. In the provinces local governments lacked the cash to accomplish anything near "an invisible tyranny." Instead they relied on irregular bouts of dirty tricks, violence, and intimidation to shut up or punish the critical press.[97] As Paxman's chapter demonstrates, even when they succeeded the process was lengthy and open to some haggling: faced with the Ávila Camacho *cacicazgo*,[98] *La Opinión de Puebla* took years to bend entirely to Maximino's will.

Because censorship was irregular, spaces for criticism, debate, and popular input were relatively commonplace. In the nationals, the crime news, cartoons, and to a lesser extent photographs served these roles. By the 1940s

most broadsheets and all the tabloids ran the nota roja, though *Excélsior*, "wanting to cooperate with authorities and educational centers of the country oriented toward the popular classes" had piously forsworn bloody crime news in 1930.[99] The crime pages were implicitly political. They probed suspicious murders, exposed government corruption, and suggested links between the upscale restaurants of the "lawyerocracy" and the spit-and-sawdust cantinas of professional hitmen.[100] As Piccato has argued, "crime news was the terrain on which civil society addressed the separation between truth and justice, the disjuncture between people's knowledge about the reality of criminal acts and the state response to these acts."[101] The crime pages also encouraged popular interaction. They experimented with readers' polls; letters pages were stacked with amateur detectives' theories; and crime magazines ran collaborative columns like "You Are the Judge."[102] As the Sonoran crime journalist Cesar Vallejo made clear, "I believe the crime page has the most contact with the people, with reality. I believe that it is the most human, the nearest to the problems of the people."[103]

During the immediate postwar era, anticommunist cartoonists dominated the national newspapers. Most cartoonists condemned perceived left-wing movements, including the 1958 teachers strike, the 1959 railway workers strike, and the 1968 student movement. In 1954 the US National Editorial Association even employed the caricaturist Rafael Freyre to support US intervention in Guatemala.[104] But right-wing cartoonists also mercilessly mocked the regime's claims to revolutionary policy. In *Presente*, Antonio Arias Bernal's cartoons not only lampooned the president's cronies but also critiqued Miguel Alemán directly. He was less Mr. Colgate, the beaming president, and more a buck-toothed buffoon locking up the constitution.[105] Meanwhile more radical, left-leaning cartoonists were emerging. By the 1950s, illustrated satire had taken over from written press or stage versions of the genre. Abel Quezada led the way with complex and scathing cartoons, images that drew on Posada's tradition of the visually grotesque while pioneering the multiple boxes and long texts that characterized his successors. Quezada's fifty-year career in many ways epitomized the censorship of his times. His contribution to *Ovaciones* of June 10, 1950, savaged the self-censorship of the reporters accompanying a presidential tour:

Of course [the journalists'] patriotism, combined with the excellence of

> the banquet, led them not to see, for example, that on Sunday, May 21, in Ixtepec, Oaxaca, while they were eating opulently in Alemán's company, soldiers were marshaling a queue outside of people piling up to eat the leftovers; and neither did they see, perhaps through studying too closely the president's smile, a banner that was displayed on the 5th of June in Motul, Yucatán, which read "Mr. President, we the *ejidatarios* of Motul are dying of hunger."[106]

After the ensuing ten days of attacks from his colleagues, Quezada resigned with an elegant final cartoon on absent press freedoms; within months he was back at work, unabashed; in 1976 he was expelled along with Scherer and company from *Excélsior*; in short order he was at work once more.[107]

Eduardo del Río, also known as Rius, followed, earning a living wage in the tabloids *Ovaciones* and *La Prensa* before running scathing cartoon supplements in left-wing magazines like *Política*, *Sucesos*, and *Por Qué?* and publishing his own comic book, *Los Supermachos*. In his autobiography the cartoonist admitted that in *Política* he "published some of the most violent cartoons that post-revolutionary Mexico had ever seen." By 1968 he and three other cartoonists set up a cooperative, which put out *La Garrapata: El Azote de los Bueyes*, a supremely critical selection of pro-student cartoons.[108] Even more officialist cartoonists started to undermine state policy. Jorge Carreño's frontispieces for *Siempre!* "contribut[ed] to the gradual erosion of presidentialism."[109] And by the 1960s caricature had become "the foundation for the creation of popular political culture."[110]

Photographs could also offer counterhegemonic versions of contemporary news. By their very nature they were more open to interpretation than were written texts. Although editors tried hard to control the visual presentation of controversial events through apposite selection and calculated caption writing, they were not always successful. Alberto del Castillo Troncoso's careful studies of photographic representations of the student movement in 1968 reveal that even the most bourgeois broadsheets occasionally acknowledged students' demands through oversight or deliberate error. After soldiers used a bazooka to open the doors of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (National Polytechnic Institute), university rector Javier Barros Sierra led a student march through Mexico City. Even the notoriously conservative *Heraldo de México* acknowledged the march's popular support, showing the

applauding people hanging out of the Miguel Alemán housing complex in the center of town. Similarly, on August 31, 1968, the newspaper included a picture of two older women walking down the street with crossed arms in support of the student strike. There was no caption. Readers were free to interpret the photograph as demonstrating that civil society was beginning to back the revolt.[111]

If space within the gran prensa existed but was somewhat limited, other print media were much less controlled. Provincial newspapers ran the gamut from exceptionally officialist (and dull) through the strictly commercial (and apolitical) to a degree of focused political radicalism unthinkable in the Mexico City dailies. This was due to the federal government's drive and ability to control the capital's public sphere, but also to the lesser importance of electoral politics there. There were no elected positions to fight over in Mexico City, whereas the oft-bitter competition for state and municipal offices in the provinces made local politics and local reporting far more significant. The provincial press was consequently far less docile or predictable than traditionally thought and distinctly more willing to enter into personalized opposition—in the main against regional politicians, but also concerning the president.[112] The growing number of papers in the García Valseca, Bercun, and Healy publishing chains did make coordinated central influence easier, but even they periodically entered into local politics with a critical vigor; meanwhile some independent newspapers were genuinely independent. A 1960 Ministry of the Interior survey of regional papers could not find overt government influence in 41 percent of the titles, and the agents classified the editorial stance of 50 percent as either independent or oppositional.[113] Some critical papers were sober centralist broadsheets, such as Guadalajara's *El Informador*; others were radical tabloids, such as *La Verdad de Acapulco*, the port's left-wing stalwart for some twenty years. All used their editorials for virulent political attacks; some extended this criticism overtly into their reporting, while others used "structural slyness"—the meaningful juxtaposition, the mock-innocent aside—to undermine their oficialista coverage.[114] They exercised an everyday, qualified but meaningful press freedom that was absent in Mexico City.

Right-wing and left-wing magazines also provided ample space for relatively free, informed journalism. The Partido Acción Nacional's paper, *La Nación*, was much more than a party political organ. Coverage of electoral

fraud was particularly acute, revealing how dirty tricks and violence curtailed the PAN's popular candidate for the Baja California governorship in 1959 and Salvador Nava's independent run for the San Luis Potosí position two years later.[115] On October 15, 1968, the paper ran an extremely bloody front-page photograph, which showed three dead students at Tlatelolco, above the headline "Huichilobos Returns to Tlatelolco."[116] Left-wing magazines were also overtly critical. As Renata Keller argues in this volume, *Política* broke all the "unwritten rules of the press," attacking Adolfo López Mateos's treatment of workers, supporting political prisoners, revealing the increasing repression of opposition, and openly ridiculing presidential candidate Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.[117] In the mid-1960s, *Sucesos* under Mario Menéndez took up the role of countercultural critic, publishing investigative reports into official corruption and providing a road map for radical change in the form of extensive, favorable interviews with Fidel Castro and guerrillas in Venezuela, Guatemala, and Colombia.[118] Finally, in early 1968 Menéndez started *Por Qué?*, a sensationalist tabloid weekly replete with bloody nota roja visuals of state violence.[119] These magazines transformed politics, becoming required reading for a generation of students and opposition activists.[120]

Union magazines also provided forums for debate and critique. During the late 1950s the electricians' publication, *Solidaridad*, became what José Luis Gutiérrez Espíndola terms "a tribune of the labor insurgency." Tips on tactics were exchanged, and sympathetic strikes were offered coverage and support. Such open discussions were well liked. Backed by union dues, the magazine hit an estimated print run of 10,000–12,000 per month, more than Vicente Lombardo Toledano's increasingly official *El Popular*.[121] As Michael Lettieri demonstrates in this volume, *El Informador Camionero* likewise provided a relatively open, critical forum for the nation's bus workers.

Reform and Good-Bye, 1970–2000

During the 1970s, relations between the state and the national print media changed. President Luis Echeverría announced a new period of "political opening," and front stage he encouraged "independent, honest and timely journalism." "If he means it, this would be [a] clear departure from what currently exists in Mexico," observed the US ambassador.[122] His press secretary,

Fausto Zapata, reiterated the shift. "We don't want to supplant our reality with rigged information. . . . The government doesn't want to disguise problems but resolve them."[123] This was partly theater. During the *sexenio* (six-year term), Echeverría's government used state pressure or allies in the private sector to close down *Por Qué?*, usurp control of *El Universal* and García Valseca's *Sol* chain, and most famously harass and then take over *Excélsior*.[124] But the statement was not wholly spurious either: back stage Echeverría confessed to *Excélsior*'s head, Julio Scherer, that he thought too much censorship "thins the blood, weakens the juices, and makes a real man a eunuch."[125] Echeverría's successor, José López Portillo, took a similar line, reforming Article 6 of the constitution to include the "public right to know" and starting a debate on the state's relationship to the mass media.[126]

Such opinions shaped the new tone of national newspapers. Political columns in particular started to offer greater space for public discussion. These had started as elitist, money-making enterprises. Salvador Novo had punned on their name and termed them *calumnias políticas*, "political calumnies."[127] Carlos Denegri's "Miscelánea" in *Excélsior* provided the model. Described by Scherer and Monsiváis as "a flatterer without scruples, precious beyond measure, and a specialist in the abuse of power," Denegri sold his column to the highest bidder.[128] During the early 1970s, however, more critical writers came to the fore. As Vanessa Freije has shown, columnists like Manuel Buendía, Miguel Granados Chapa, and Julio Manuel Ramírez (the pen name for the combined skills of Julio Scherer, Manuel Becerra Acosta, and Fernando Ramírez de Aguilar) revealed government corruption, denounced poor policy, and increasingly included popular voices in their columns. Even the "front pages of the mainstream press could be quite confrontational."[129]

The work of these writers also opened space for the expansion of a more independent, left-wing press. At first this included relatively marginal magazines like *Punto Crítico*, *La Fragua*, and *El Causa del Pueblo*, which were established by former members of the student movement and members of the Communist Party. There were also publications linked to specific movements, like the Colonia Rubén Jaramillo's *Frente Popular* and the Chihuahua Comité de Defensa Popular's *El Martillo*.[130] But by the 1980s this newly critical press also included large-scale, industrially produced newspapers and magazines with national reach like *Proceso*, *Unomásuno*, and *La Jornada*.[131] Even if they failed to acknowledge it, most were inspired by Menéndez's *Por*

Qué? They were written in a simple, accessible language, engaged with the actual problems of Mexico's working classes, and paid attention to the competing voices of civil society. They embraced civic journalism; *El Martillo* even contained a special section devoted to the "denunciations" of the people, which, its editors argued, "laid bare the classist character of the actual system."[132] Like *Por Qué?*, the new publications often aped the format and concerns of the nota roja, continuing the tradition of using crime news to expose politicians' corruption, repression, and criminal collusion.[133] This led to accusations of *amarillismo*, or yellow journalism. It also meant they were read.

In the provinces, the critical spaces afforded by local newspapers endured and broadened. As Javier Garza Ramos shows in this volume, even the big, industrial regionals were increasingly linked to the country's growing democratization movements. In the late 1970s, Coahuila's *El Siglo* and *La Opinión* gave ample coverage to opposition politicians and investigated claims of electoral fraud. Freed from the control of the Garza Sada family, Monterrey's *El Norte* did the same. In 1985 the newspaper pioneered the system of placing unaffiliated observers in polling stations. These observers countered the official party's claims to a clean sweep and offered in-depth coverage of the losing PAN candidate's protests that there was vote rigging. In fact, the ongoing abrasive quality of regional newspapers both foreshadowed and helped create change at the national level. They provided editors, journalists, and stringers unencumbered by traditions of self-censorship or close relations to metropolitan elites; they printed stories from the frontiers of state repression; they provided spaces for national journalists' more subversive critiques; and at times they even provided cash backing. *El Norte*'s Junco family started up the national *Reforma*; Jorge Alvarez del Castillo, the owner of Guadalajara's *El Informador*, gave Scherer the start-up money for *Proceso*.[134]

By the late 1980s such changes had shifted the press coverage even of national elections. In 1970 only the PRI's candidate had appeared on the news pages of the major nationals. *Excélsior* averaged around three mentions per issue; the more obsequious (and indebted) *El Universal* averaged around eighteen. Opposition candidates went virtually unmentioned.[135] By 1988 reporting had changed. The press now reflected the more plural, democratic elections. The proportion of coverage given to each party was almost