

©2008

Sandra C. Mendiola García

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

STREET VENDORS, MARKETERS, AND POLITICS IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY

PUEBLA, MEXICO

by

SANDRA C. MENDIOLA GARCÍA

A Dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School-New Brunswick

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

written under the direction of

Mark Wasserman

and approved by

---

---

---

---

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October, 2008

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Street Vendors, Marketers, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Puebla, Mexico

By SANDRA C. MENDIOLA GARCÍA

Dissertation Director:  
Mark Wasserman

This dissertation examines the business and political organizing of street vendors and marketers in Puebla, one of Mexico's largest cities, during the twentieth-century. Paying special attention to female sellers, who constituted a large majority of the street vending population, this work explores the challenges that they faced when they tried to sell their merchandise in the city's public areas. Established store keepers, municipal inspectors, and the police constantly sought to remove street vendors from Puebla's downtown. Street vendors responded by organizing the Popular Union of Street Vendors (UPVA) in 1973. This militant and independent organization emerged during the height of left-wing student activism.

The vendors' union played an active part in grass-roots politics in the aftermath of the 1968 uprising in Mexico City. The UPVA was organized in part by students, many of whom identified themselves as Maoists, and by female vendors. Women were tough and militant, willing to do practically anything to defend their rights to sell on the streets and care for their families. Several female vendors destroyed police cars and engaged in

fight with authorities. They were also skilled negotiators and delivered speeches in front of hundreds of vendors.

Street vendors were political actors who petitioned and organized to defend their economic rights and after the 1970s, participated in a larger movement that carried out struggles for better conditions outside the structure of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). From the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, the state was relentless in its effort to destroy the vendors' union. The UPVA remained a militant, independent organization despite state violence against its members.

## Acknowledgements

My deepest appreciation goes to all the archivists who helped find every possible record about vendors and marketers. I especially want to thank María Aurelia Hernández, Rubén Goque, and Alejandro Pérez. They make the Archivo Municipal de Puebla at the Centro Histórico a wonderful and fun place to conduct research. They were tremendously helpful and opened their hearts to me. At the other Archivo Municipal de Puebla (32 Poniente), I would like to thank Rocío del Carmen Hernández, Felicitas Ocampo, and all the staff members who keep the archive running. They are all wonderful and hardworking women who took care of me. At the Archivo General del Estado de Puebla, I want to thank historian Pilar Pacheco.

Special thanks go to Mexican historian Mariano Torres Bautista. He introduced me to a former UPVA leader, Doña Rosa. From that connection, I was able to establish additional links with a number of street vendors and participants in the street vendors' union. My oral interviews would not have been the same without the selfless support of José Luis Díaz Miñón. I cannot thank him enough. He spent endless hours talking with me, helping me find former vendors in Puebla, and cheering me up. We talked about every single problem in Mexico and how to solve it. We drank a lot of coffee and he smoked many cigarettes. I was also fortunate to meet a number of people who in the early 1970s studied at the Preparatorias Populares and then joined the UAP.

I thank all the street and market vendors who described their lives in interviews. I met many incredible women. They shared their memories, documents, and photographs

with me. Working conditions have not been easy for them but they have lived proud and dignified lives. Muchas gracias señoras.

I want to thank a number of professors who have helped me throughout the years. In the late 1990s, Jeffrey Bortz introduced me to history and archival research. He encouraged me to pursue a graduate degree in history. Temma Kaplan is a source of inspiration. She is an excellent historian, a wonderful professor, and a passionate activist. She has forced me to become a better historian and writer. Gail Triner has always been available, and her encouragement and advice helped me during my most difficult times in graduate school. She is a sharp thinker and I have learned much from her. Aldo Lauria Santiago gave me the chance to teach at the Latino Studies Department at Rutgers while providing me with office space and financial support when funds were scarce. At conferences, I would like to recognize Jocelyn Olcott, Greg Crider, and Erica Armstrong Dunbar for giving me highly useful comments. Jeffrey Pilcher has also provided great advice. He proposed ideas and recommended readings that I would not have thought of otherwise.

Special thanks go to Mark Wasserman. He has supported all I have done in my graduate years at Rutgers. I could always rely on him. He was a supportive, wise, and warm advisor. His comments, advice, and criticisms helped me clarify my ideas. I have also enjoyed his sense of humor.

Dawn Ruskai, Candace Walcott-Shepherd, Robin Chapdelaine, Tim Alves, and Sarah O'Meara deserve my appreciation for all the important administrative work.

At Rutgers, I learned so much from discussions with my good friends and fellow historians Greg Swedberg and Robert Alegre. I have also benefited from conversations

and electronic correspondence with Gareth Jones, Elsa Herrera, Louise Walker, and Andrew Paxman. My fellow graduate students have made my life and research so much better: Terry Younghwa, Jennifer Miller, Laurie Marhoefer, Emily Westkaemper, Iben Trino-Molenkamp, Meghan Lau, Rachel Schnepfer, Amy Tims, Steven Allen, Young-In Oh, Hsiao-Pei Yen, and Kwinn Doran.

While doing research in Puebla's archives, I met two historians: Rosa María García Juárez and Janette Gayosso del Valle. We shared the same table at the archive, took breaks together, and as the days went by, became close friends. I feel very lucky to have met them. Rosa María used to live very close to the hospital where my father died while I was doing research. She opened her apartment to me when I needed it the most. I will never forget her help during those days. Gracias amiga.

While he was alive, my father supported me unconditionally. Serafín Mendiola worked since age six and only finished elementary school. He was proud that I was completing a doctorate. Both my parents grew up in poverty and taught me to be sensitive to people's economic struggles. I also thank my mother Celia García for all she has done for me. She is a strong, hardworking, and caring woman. My brother Juan Manuel and his daughters Ileana and Ximena have provided lots of happiness.

Lastly, I want to thank my best friend, fellow historian, and husband, Chad Pearson. He has read every word I have written and has enthusiastically discussed all aspects of my research. He has taught me much about US history, historians, and historiography. I thank him for his love, support, and companionship.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	vii
List of Illustrations.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One Street Vendors, Marketers, City Dwellers, and Authorities during the First Half of the Twentieth Century .....	17
Chapter Two Taking Children to Work: Vendors' Labors on the Streets .....	54
Chapter Three The Emergence of a long-lasting Alliance: Street Vendors and Students, 1964-1973 ...	94
Chapter Four "Unidos, Organizados y Luchando Venceremos": The Street Vendors' Union .....	137
Chapter Five The Repression of the Vendors .....	186
Conclusion .....	237
Bibliography .....	244
Curriculum Vita .....	256



## List of Illustrations

Letter from P. Richaud to Municipal Authorities, December 18, 1913 .....	25
Puebla's downtown streets before and after the 1959 removal .....	40
Mercado El Alto circa 1946 .....	42
Stall design, circa 1946 .....	43
Fee collector, Administración Cué Merlo 1975-1978 .....	67
Stall, Administración Cué Merlo, 1975-1978 .....	75
<i>Recogedores de Canastas</i> , Administración Cué Merlo, 1975-1978 .....	85
<i>Los Vendedores Ambulantes</i> , documentary scene .....	126
<i>Acarreados</i> , <i>El Sol de Puebla</i> , October 22, 1973 .....	144
Stalls in El Corralón, <i>El Sol de Puebla</i> , May 23, 1974 .....	158
UPVA logo .....	163
Rubén Sarabia Sánchez (aka Simitrio) with a group of vendors .....	183
Oscar Vega Rosales in <i>La Opinión</i> , November 1, 1977 .....	196

## Introduction

Street vendors are part of the informal economy, which is the fastest growing “sector” in many parts of the globe.<sup>1</sup> According to the United Nations, since the 1980s, two-fifths of the economically active population of the developing world engaged in the informal economy.<sup>2</sup> In March 1998, the Inter-American Development Bank in its annual meeting in Cartagena, Colombia stated that 57% of the Latin American’s workforce was engaged in the informal economy, and four of every five new jobs were in the same sector.<sup>3</sup> This percentage contrasts with the 46% of workers who were in the informal sector in 1950 and the 42% in 1980.<sup>4</sup> In 2007, the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, the Mexican equivalent of the U.S. Department of Labor, stated that at the beginning of the twenty first century, 19 million out of the 42 million Mexicans, who constitute the economically active population, worked in the informal economy.<sup>5</sup> These are approximate numbers. Nobody has an exact estimate of the thousands of young children who sell on the streets and wash windshields for a living.

---

<sup>1</sup> For debates over the informal/formal dichotomy and how scholars and international institutions coined the phrases “informal” and “informal sector” see Keith Hart, “Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 11, no. 1 (March 1973): 61-89; Ray Bromley, “A New Path to Development? The Significance of Hernando de Soto’s Ideas on Underdevelopment, Production, and Reproduction,” *Economic Geography* 66 no. 4 (1990): 328-348; Susanne, Teltscher, “Small Trade and the World Economy: Informal Vendors in Quito, Ecuador,” *Economic Geography* 70, no. 2 (April 1994):167-187.

<sup>2</sup> Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006):176

<sup>3</sup> “Great Reforms, Nice Growth but Where are the Jobs?” *The Economist* 348, March 21, 1998), 37-38.

<sup>4</sup> Manuel Castells and Alejandro Portes, “World Underneath: The Origins, Dynamics, and Effects of the Informal Economy,” in Portes, Castells, and Lauren A. Benton, eds, *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1989):16

<sup>5</sup> “Uno de cada dos Mexicanos no tiene empleo formal: admite la STPS,” *La Jornada*, September 4, 2007.

Despite street vendors' numerical importance and their virtual omnipresence, historians have paid scant attention to these informal workers.<sup>6</sup> Most historians have only written about them in passing and have concentrated in the country's capital city.<sup>7</sup> Most have focused on the Porfirian and early post-revolutionary elites' conceptions of the proper use of public space.<sup>8</sup> And only one has incorporated gender in her analysis.<sup>9</sup>

This dissertation studies street vendors in the city of Puebla, Mexico from the 1910s to 1995. It explores their business and political activities, paying particular attention to females who constituted a large percentage of the city's street vending population. *Street Vendors, Marketers, and Politics* also shows how and why street vendors organized into a militant union in 1973. It looks in detail at the vendors' union, the *Unión Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes-28 de Octubre* (UPVA) and its struggle to defend vendors' rights in the face of constant harassment by state and municipal governments. It highlights the strong alliance between sellers and young students at the Autonomous State University of Puebla in organizing and supporting the union. This dissertation exposes state repression and explores the various responses to it. From 1977 to 1995, local and state authorities sought to destroy the UPVA, because it had refused to join the popular sector of the Institutional Revolutionary Party. Authorities were

---

<sup>6</sup>The exceptions are Gary I. Gordon, "Peddlers, Pesos, and Power: The Political Economy of Street Vending in Mexico City" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1997) and Ingrid Bleyntat, "Markets and Informal Labor in Mexico City," (PhD dissertation in progress, Harvard).

<sup>7</sup> Christina Jiménez has studied vendors in Morelia, Michoacán. Christina M. Jiménez, "Making the City Their Own: Popular Groups and Political Culture in Morelia, Mexico, 1880 to 1930" (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Pablo Piccato, "Urbanistas, Ambulantes and Mendigos: The Dispute for Urban Space in Mexico City, 1890-1930," in *Reconstructing Criminality in Latin America*, eds. Carlos A. Aguirre and Robert Buffington (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Susie S. Porter, *Working Women of Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003). See chapter six.

relentless in their efforts to crush the UPVA, using beatings, kidnappings, arrests, and trumped up charges against its leaders.

This dissertation argues that street vendors were political actors who petitioned and organized to defend their economic rights and, then, after the 1970s, participated in a larger movement that carried out its struggle for better conditions outside the structure of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The UPVA bravely remained a militant, independent organization despite state violence against its members.

No visitor to Mexico can fail to notice the presence of *vendedores ambulantes* selling their wares on virtually every street, at every corner and traffic light, subway stations, parks, and cemeteries of every major city and town across the country. Street vendors are omnipresent and sell every product that the mind can imagine. Street vendors serve the needs of millions of customers, from seasonal fruits outside a market, to multi-colored jello-masks in a wrestling arena, from the more traditional mini Jesus Christ figurines glued to CDs to decorate dashboards, to dolls of the Santa Muerte that guarantee the safety of anyone crossing the US-Mexican border. Depending on the season, people find a range of products from beautiful, orange *cempasuchitl* flowers for Day of the Dead to Chinese-made Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer for the Christmas season. Street vendors sell everything, everywhere, all year round.

The colorful and boisterous nature of street vending and markets have intrigued and fascinated foreigners. As early as the sixteenth century, the Spanish invaders noted

in their writings the wide variety of products that sellers offered. The Tlatelolco market, especially, caught the attention of the Spanish, but there were other specialized markets, such as Coyoacán, Azcapotzalco, Texcoco and Tepeaca that were noticed by the European conquerors. The organization of stalls, sellers, and supervisors impressed Europeans.<sup>10</sup> Nineteenth-century travelers could not escape the street markets, their customers, and they did not fail to romanticize their sellers: “the Indian woman with the inevitable child strapped across her back in her *rebozo*.”<sup>11</sup> More recently, a National Public Radio’s correspondent in Puebla reported on the “sweet sounds of *comercio*.” The reporter alluded to the multiple and very distinct sounds that peddlers, such as the balloon-man, the *camote*<sup>12</sup> vendor, and other small-scale business people produce to attract the attention of a clientele that increasingly lives behind gated-communities.<sup>13</sup>

There is no doubt that the colorfulness of the makeshift markets and vendors “sweet” sounds have captured the attention and imagination of those who first encountered them. But this romantic view hides the fact that life for most vendors is difficult. They work long hours under harsh conditions and face constant harassment from the police. Many women literally carried their children on their backs as they worked because they could not afford child care. Most lacked social security benefits,

---

<sup>10</sup> Frances Berdan, “Markets in the Economy of Aztec Mexico,” in *Markets and Marketing*, Monographs in Economic Anthropology, Stuart Plattner, ed. (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985):339-367; Jeffrey Pilcher, *Que Vivan Los Tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998): 7-10.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas U. Brocklehurst, *Mexico To-day* (New York, Scribner and Welford, 1883):52-54 quoted in Judith Marti, “Breadwinners and Decision Makers: Nineteenth-Century Mexican Women Vendors,” in Mari Womack and Judith Marti, eds. *The Other Fifty Percent: Multicultural Perspectives on Gender Relations* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1993): 220.

<sup>12</sup> Baked or boiled yam with unrefined brown sugar (*piloncillo*)

<sup>13</sup> Jordana Gustafson, audio recording, “Sweet sounds of Comercio,” Marketplace, National Public Radio, November 24, 2006, <http://marketplace.publicradio.org/shows/2006/11/24/AM200611247.html> (accessed June 30, 2008).

steady earnings, or labor protection. Vendors and their children were and are exposed to constant noise, smog, and sometimes physical danger. A 1999 study of 426 female street vendors showed that 56% of them worked more than 48 hours a week, 87% had no social security and 13-14% had high risk of having low birth weight babies due, among other reasons, to carrying heavy merchandise and bending to display their products on the ground.<sup>14</sup>

There are two major groups I shall study: street vendors and marketers. The street vending population is a rather heterogeneous group. Street vendors range in age (children to elderly people), the kinds of products they sell, their capital, and their earnings. This work, however, follows what Puebla's municipal authorities identified as street vendors: those who did not own an establishment, who had semi-fixed stalls in public spaces such as sidewalks, parks, and private patios, or who walked the streets.<sup>15</sup> Street vendors were also those who temporarily displayed merchandise on the floors inside markets<sup>16</sup> but who did not have stalls or who sold in open-air makeshift markets.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless they shared common characteristics. They had a difficult time assuring spaces to sell. They shared the threat of inspectors and police who frequently took their merchandise, if they did not pay fees for the use of public space or if vendors did not

---

<sup>14</sup> Hernández-Peña Patricia, et. al. "Study of Street Vendors in Mexico City-Condiciones de trabajo, fatiga laboral y bajo peso al nacer en vendedoras ambulantes," *Salud Pública en Mexico* 41, no. 2 (marzo-abril, 1999): 101

<sup>15</sup> Reglamentos Municipales, Tomo 34, file 112 and 113, July 1929, Archivo Municipal de Puebla, (hereafter, AMP). City authorities used this *reglamento*, with a few modifications until 1986.

<sup>16</sup> For example, the largest and most important public market, La Victoria, had special areas for *vendedores ambulantes*.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the heterogeneity of street vendors see Susanne Teltscher, "Small Trade and the World Economy: Informal Vendors in Quito, Ecuador," *Economic Geography* 70, no. 2 (April 1994):167-187. For an earlier study of diverse business people in markets and street markets, see Scott Cook, "Craft Businesses, Piece Work and Value Distribution in the Oaxaca Valley, Mexico," in *Markets and Marketing*: 235-258. For a discussion of marketers' heterogeneity in comparative perspective based on "sex" and race see Ester Boserup, *Woman's Role in Economic Perspective* (London and Sterling: Earthscan, 2007):75-83.

offer bribes. Street vendors earned money to reinvest and pay the barely basics for their families. Practically nobody had much disposable income or any savings. UPVA vendors also commonly had no illusions that the state would serve their needs. They knew that they had to organize in order to defend their rights and fight the police and their bosses. These vendors also identified more with workers and peasants, than with other petite-entrepreneurs, and sought to create alliances with them.

Some of the staunchest enemies of street vendors were marketers. Marketers are those sellers with fixed stalls in public markets. Usually, marketers' capital was larger than that of street vendors as marketers had the money to buy or rent stalls in markets and pay the multiple fees to municipal authorities for the use and maintenance of the facility. In some cases, the distinction between marketers and street vendors is blurry. On many occasions, marketers had stalls on the streets surrounding the markets where they sold. Usually they hired or placed family members to work in those stalls. After the summer of 1986, a vast majority of vendors in downtown Puebla became marketers after city authorities relocated them to markets in the outskirts of the city. Thus, after 1986, the vast majority of UPVA's members went from street vendors to marketers almost overnight.

In this dissertation, I also discuss store keepers or established business owners who were also enemies of the street vending population. Established merchants had larger capital and registered their businesses with the Secretaria de Hacienda and thus were subject sales taxes. Although street vendors, marketers, and store keepers were all rational economic actors and their income depended on commerce, store keepers made

tremendous efforts to differentiate themselves from the other two, claiming that their merchandise was better and that their customers were more sophisticated and better off than those of street vendors and marketers. The vast majority of store keepers were staunch enemies of street vendors, especially those vendors who blocked the entrance to their stores. While not all of them, many business owners voluntarily joined or had to join the local Cámara Nacional de Comercio (CANACO), the business employers association, which in 1986 played an important role in removing street vendors from Puebla's downtown.

*Street Vendors, Marketers, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Puebla-Mexico* attempts to contribute to this small number of works on street vendors in Mexican history. By emphasizing their political activities, I contend that the UPVA's vendors were instrumental in the larger struggle of grassroots independent organizing in Mexico. Since its inception in 1973, this organization, which became a 10,000 member-union, was committed to remaining outside the umbrella organizations of the PRI, the 70-year old political party. Not only was its independence important, but it also contributed to building alliances with other sectors of Mexican society, especially with disposed peasants. This is particularly important because the PRI-state sought to create and maintain a divide between workers, peasants, and the popular sector.

Organized street vendors in Puebla were not pawns of the PRI nor did they form organizations in order to work the system from within. In his well researched work on Mexico City vendors, sociologist John C. Cross has argued that vendors in Mexico City took advantage of the state's clientelism and formed organizations in order to gain favors



from authorities, in exchange for vendors' political support.<sup>18</sup> While clientelism was somewhat favorable for some street vendors, it is incorrect to think of them as subjects of easy co-option. This dissertation shows that it was almost impossible for the PRI to convince a large number of Puebla's vendors to join the party's institutions. Since the late 1960s, vendors were politically aware that PRI authorities responded to the interests' of the upper-classes and that the state imprisoned and killed those who sought to organize independently of the party.

Scholars have noted that vendors were politically active and some have noted the limits of vendors' political consciousness. In her work on informal sellers in India, anthropologist Johanna Lessinger concluded that while vendors organized and saw "the world in terms of an opposition between the rich and the poor" they were not in the vanguard of social change and they lacked a "class analysis, which explains why the world is so divided."<sup>19</sup> But in Puebla's case, street vendors organized the UPVA at the height of radical political activism in Puebla, which involved militant students. Left-wing students, broadly defined, became the ideological guides of informal sellers. These students of *Preparatorias Populares* and their young teachers organized study groups with vendors. They explained to them the ideas of Marx, Engels, and Mao. Class analysis made perfect sense to them. Street vendors lived class tensions and divisions on a daily basis and the students spotlighted theoretical insights that reinforced their practical realities.

---

<sup>18</sup>John C. Cross, *Informal Politics: Street Vendors and the State in Mexico City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Johanna Lessinger, "Nobody Here to Yell at Me": Political Activism Among Petty Retail Traders in and Indian City," in Stuart Plattner, ed. *Markets and Marketing* (Lanham, University Press of America, 1985): 326.

Inspired by the not-so-new-anymore “new labor history” and recent anthropological work on market women, this dissertation looks at the labor that street vendors, especially women, performed on the streets. Anthropologists have done a wonderful job in describing the lives and work of female street vendors and market women.<sup>20</sup> They have detailed the daily routines of people. Some have used specific life-stories to inform readers about the complex and difficult lives of vendors.<sup>21</sup> Inspired by that body of literature, but incorporating historical analysis, I intend to describe street vendors’ work at home and on the streets. This dissertation explains how precisely common work experiences and challenges from authorities made vendors organize. Female vendors, especially those who were mothers, performed multiple tasks including selling and caring for their children. In addition, many members of the UPVA engaged in labor to support their union. Some women printed fliers, others painted slogans on the city’s walls, and others cooked and provided food to UPVA protestors in marches and sit-ins.

Every street where vendors sold became their community where they made friends –and enemies- with other vendors. They discovered that there is strength in unity, and they used this unity to protect themselves against collectors, inspectors, and the police. After 1973, when the UPVA was formed, the union also became a community

---

<sup>20</sup>Some anthropologists do not make a clear distinction between street vendors and market vendors.

<sup>21</sup> Ruth Behar, *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza’s Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) and Hans Buechler and Judith-Marie Buechler, *The World of Sofia Velasquez: The Autobiography of a Bolivian Market Vendor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). The Buechlers interviewed Sofia Velasquez for a period of more than 30 years.

that protected them from authorities' abuses and the union gave members a sense of belonging and comradeship.

Puebla is located approximately 100 kilometers south east of Mexico City and it is the capital city of the state that bears the same name. It is Mexico's fourth largest metropolis with a population of 2,109,049 inhabitants. According to a 2005 census by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática (INEGI), the state of Puebla has 5,383, 133 inhabitants of which 1,485, 941 live in the municipality of Puebla. The city was founded by the Spanish in 1531 and soon developed as a producer of wool and silk textiles. In the nineteenth century, it was one of the most important producers of cotton textiles. Cotton mills dominated industrial production in the city up until the 1960s when foreign investment and heavy manufacturing emerged in the city. The German automobile plant, Volkswagen, opened its operations in 1964. Around VW auto-related factories boomed, making Puebla famous for its old-beetle manufacturing and textile production. Politically, the city has been ruled by corrupt politicians from both the PRI and PAN. They are mostly unaccountable rulers who have enriched themselves at the expense of ordinary people. Culturally, Puebla is also known for its cuisine, thousands of women have prepared the famous and highly complicated *chiles en nogada* and mole sauce.

Scholars have studied in depth Puebla's workers in the cotton textile mills and the automobile industries.<sup>22</sup> For the most part these factories employed men. But Puebla's inhabitants, especially women, also worked in all sorts of service and commercial activities. This dissertation attempts to explore the lives and work of the people involved in informal trade.

Chapter 1 tells the history of Puebla's street vendors and marketers from approximately the 1910s to the late 1960s. This chapter looks at the tensions between established business owners, marketers, city dwellers and peddlers. Established business owners in particular disdained street sellers for their supposed "uncultured," backward, and unsanitary commercial practices. They wrote letters to authorities stating that street vendors caused cultural and economic damage to their businesses, their homes, and the city in general. Authorities had an ambivalent position toward vendors. City officials understood that both vendors and established entrepreneurs had to make a living, thus they mediated between the two groups. On some occasions, the city council was tolerant of vendors and on other cases they denied commercial permits and removed them from the streets.

---

<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey Bortz, *Revolution within the Revolution: Cotton Textile Workers and the Mexican Labor Regime, 1910-1923* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008) ; Susan Gauss, "Working-class Masculinity and the Rationalized Sex: Gender and Industrial Modernization in the Textile Industry in Post-revolutionary Puebla", in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics and Power in Modern Mexico*, Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughn, and Gabriela Cano, eds. (Durham, Duke University Press, 2006); Leticia Gamboa, *La urdimbre y la trama: historia social de los obreros textiles de Atlixo, 1899-1924* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, BUAP, 2001) Coralia Gutiérrez, *Experiencias contrastadas: Industrialización y conflictos en los textiles del centro-oriente de México, 1884-1917* (México: El Colegio de México, 2000) and Ian Roxborough, *Unions and Politics in Mexico: The Case of the Automobile Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Street vendors were not passive. They sought to continue their businesses and they usually channeled their individual demands and problems to local and federal authorities through petition letters. When these failed, vendors began *juicios de amparo*, a federal legal mechanism that protected vendors' against authorities' decisions that negatively affected vendors' interests. Other times, vendors simply disobeyed and continued selling products without any permits to sell on the street.

Focusing on female vendors, who constituted a large percentage of the street vending population, chapter 2 analyzes the productive and parental labor that women completed in public spaces. Women from both the city and the countryside sold a variety of products and began their business with small amounts of capital. Some began selling at an early age and most taught their children their trade. Indeed, children also worked in different capacities with their parents or single mothers.

This chapter broadens the notion that domestic/reproductive labor only occurs at home or at public and private institutions, such as daycare centers, hospitals, nurseries, and orphanages. Labor historians, who have been interested in working mothers and care-workers, differentiate between the paid and unpaid work at the home and the paid labor outside of it. In the case of street vendors, the boundaries between the home and the outside world do not fit precisely into this dichotomy. For itinerant sellers, the streets were both their homes and their workplaces, and childrearing and care work was always unpaid regardless of its location. Women spent most of the day outside their home, on the streets, and completed commercial and parental work at both locations. Peddling was

one of the few job options that allowed them to simultaneously earn a living and take care of their children.

Female vendors worked in close proximity to each other. At times, they took care of their children or temporarily watched other women's stalls while vendors tended other responsibilities. Women formed ties and links of solidarity with each other while on the job. They faced similar problems while working on the streets, such as police harassment and difficulties taking care of their children. Solidarity among women, as vendors and as mothers, was essential to the development of their union.

Chapter 3 examines the alliance between street vendors and students at the beginning of the 1970s. High-school and college students from working class backgrounds helped organize vendors into an independent and militant street vendors' organization. The more formally educated students from the State University system provided vendors with theoretical ideas and organizational techniques. But vendors were not the only ones who benefited from this relationship. Sellers helped students in their efforts to have a democratic and affordable institution. Together they guarded the buildings that students took over and provided food and support to left-wing students. This chapter also looks at the political climate that existed in Puebla during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The alliance of street vendors and students allowed vendors to broaden and contextualize their demands. In other words, their contact with students made them participate in Puebla's politics, and street vendors began to support other workers' and students' struggles.

Chapter 3 also traces the background and history of these very young students. The seventeen- and eighteen-year olds at the *Preparatorias Populares* were the students of young teachers who studied in Mexico City when the Tlatelolco massacre occurred in 1968. A couple of them survived and moved to Puebla and got involved in workers' struggles. When street vendors approached students, these young teachers and their students soon sympathized with their lives. The teachers and students, reflecting a world-wide current of leftist agitation, identified themselves as Maoists and thought that working together with vendors made perfectly sense. Students' and the university's high-rank administrators did not always agree, and periodically engaged in sectarian bickering. In the 1970s, the university's high-ranking administrators were part of the Mexican Communist Party, which did not prioritize organizing vendors. PCM members thought the industrial workers were the force of change. Informal workers, in this sense, did not matter much. Despite, the institutional rejection toward street vendors, the university provided a space for young students to develop their own ideas and act accordingly.

Chapter 4 focuses on the structure, goals, and leadership of the street vendors' union, the *Unión Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes-28 de Octubre*, (UPVA) which was formally organized in 1973. It highlights the UPVA's attempt to become a democratic and independent union. Students and vendors worked together to build and sustain the union. In addition, the UPVA avoided, at least in theory, the rule of a one powerful leader who did not commit to the membership. The UPVA did so by creating mechanisms that made of their union a grassroots democratic organization.

This chapter looks not only at the leadership, but also at the rank-and-file, especially women, and the different roles they played within the union. Female vendors were instrumental in supporting and maintaining the UPVA's daily activities. Women attended marches and confronted the police. They also negotiated with authorities, seeking to win concessions. In addition and unlike their male counterparts, women cooked for hungry UPVA protestors during marches or sit-ins.

This chapter argues that while the vendor-student leadership was important, this connection of all males excluded women from top-leadership positions. Up to 1977, the union had multiple top leaders, but after that year, there was an all powerful leader and decisions became less democratic. Chapter 5 also looks at these top leaders.

Chapter 5 analyzes the ways in which the state clamped down on the UPVA. In an effort to halt organized street vendors' militancy and to divide the organization, from 1977 to 1995, local and federal authorities tried a number of repressive tactics, which included kidnappings, beatings, and the imprisonment of the UPVA's most militant members. The consequences of this repression, however, affected almost all members and their families. Local and state authorities, with blessings from the mainstream business community, came together to destroy the organization. They were able to spy on UPVA members and infiltrate the organization.

In 1986, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) granted the city of Puebla the denomination of "World Heritage Center." This denomination gave authorities and city boosters the best excuse to remove vendors from downtown in an effort to beautify and restore the city center. In the summer of



1986, authorities finally removed vendors from the downtown and relocate them to markets in the outskirts of the city. In 1989, state and federal authorities incarcerated a number of UPVA's members that included its main leader. Through a rather obscure process, authorities sentenced him to 112 years in prison. In 1995, local and state authorities viciously attacked vendors and destroyed thousands of stalls. The police arrested and beat vendors once again. The state also engaged in less violent attacks against sellers using the media, especially newspapers, to create a negative image of the UPVA.

Despite all these efforts, authorities failed to destroy or divide the organization. While the UPVA lost membership due to the constant harassment and punishments, street vendors sustained their organization, which still protects the interests of street vendors and marketers. After years of struggle, street vendors were able to secure markets with basic services and a loyal clientele. The UPVA remains a significant organization for two major reasons. The UPVA never joined the PRI and its leader is a woman.

## Chapter One

### **Street Vendors, Marketers, City Dwellers, and Authorities during the First Half of the Twentieth Century.**

In an effort to make ends meet, thousands of people have peddled and sold their wares on the streets of Puebla. Sellers have chosen Puebla's downtown streets where commercial, administrative, educational, and political activities took place. For decades, La Victoria Market, two blocks away from the *zócalo*, was a magnet that attracted Puebla's dwellers to buy their everyday staples. During the first decades of the twentieth century, both the wealthy and the poor purchased goods at open market.<sup>23</sup> People also found a large variety of products from hundreds of street vendors that walked on the streets or set up semi-fixed stalls on sidewalks and street corners.

This chapter explores the tensions between street vendors and established business owners from the 1910s to the late 1960s. Puebla's shop keepers and neighbors living in downtown wrote to Municipal authorities to air their dissatisfaction toward street vendors. Thinking that they lived in a "cultured" and "civilized" city, they tried to get rid of vendors from certain areas. This chapter also demonstrates the role played by the state toward street vendors. Up until the late 1960s, authorities were relatively tolerant toward vendors. I argue that despite authorities' relative tolerance, street vendors

---

<sup>23</sup> According to anthropologist Judith E. Marti, it was likely that rich women sent their maids to the market to buy household's products and food. Judith E. Marti, "Nineteenth-Century Views of Women's Participation in Mexico's Markets," in *Women Traders in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Linda Seligmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001):28, 32.

lived in a state of anxiety, consistently fearful of losing their selling space, merchandise, and semi-fixed stalls. But street vendors were not merely victims. They were resourceful and resilient. They petitioned, sought protection from federal authorities or simply disobeyed authorities.

### La Victoria Market and its surroundings

From the sixteenth century on, the *zócalo* or main plaza provided a gathering space for vendors. On Thursdays the plaza functioned as an open market, a *tianguis*, where indigenous vendors sold their merchandise. From the eighteenth century on, market activities took place on a daily basis, and in 1714, some stalls became permanent.<sup>24</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, the site where La Victoria market later stood, served as a *tianguis* where hundreds of vendors traded their merchandise.<sup>25</sup> The area developed after failed removals from the *zócalo* by the authorities during the early nineteenth century. In 1854, vendors finally agreed to move to the site proposed by authorities next to the Santo Domingo Convent, the place that became La Victoria market.<sup>26</sup> Two months before the beginning of the Revolution of 1910, in an effort to beautify the city, authorities remodeled the facility, transforming it into a monumental neo-classical building.<sup>27</sup> La Victoria Market served the needs of merchants who bought

---

<sup>24</sup> Manlio Barbosa Cano, *Plan de Ordenamiento Espacial de la Actividad Comercial para la ciudad de Puebla*, (Puebla: Centro Regional Puebla, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1981):18-19.

<sup>25</sup> Socorro Santín Nieto, *El Mercado Guadalupe Victoria* (Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Colección Tercer Milenio, Serie Casas de Puebla, 1999): 9

<sup>26</sup> Socorro Santín Nieto, *El Mercado Guadalupe Victoria*: 8

<sup>27</sup> The renewal project lasted from September 1910 to May 5, 1913.

wholesale, including street vendors who purchased their merchandise very early in the morning at relatively lower prices. People from Tlaxcala, Veracruz, Morelos, and Oaxaca also made their wholesale purchases at La Victoria. It was a market that served the needs of Puebla's citizens and people from smaller towns of Mexico's south.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, an anthropologist described this market as a "gigantic live museum" where people could find all sorts of products.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to serving as a commercial center, in the 1910s La Victoria market had a laboratory for water testing and apartments for rent on the second floor.<sup>30</sup> In the late 1940s, the market also housed a shelter for about 20 street children under 12 years of age, a small radio station, AXA-Audio Victoria, and a day-care center (*guardería*) for marketers' and street vendors' children.<sup>31</sup> In the late 1950s there was a doctor's office and a classroom for women who wanted to learn how to sew.<sup>32</sup> The market was a big facility with an area of 17, 670 square meters and nine entries from four different streets. Without a doubt, it was the commercial heart of the city.

On the streets surrounding this Porfirian-era building, hundreds of vendors walked on sidewalks or set up rudimentary, semi-fixed stalls to display fruits, vegetables, pots, meats, live animals and flowers.<sup>33</sup> Men, women, and children spent long hours

---

<sup>28</sup> Socorro Santín Nieto, *El Mercado Guadalupe Victoria*: 15

<sup>29</sup> Manlio Barbosa Cano, *Plan de Ordenamiento Espacial de la Actividad Comercial para la ciudad de Puebla*:15.

<sup>30</sup> Libro 532, file 10, p. 348 and Comisión de Fomento, libro 630, file 343, 1919, Archivo Municipal de Puebla, (hereafter AMP).

<sup>31</sup> Primer Informe de Gobierno del presidente Municipal Enrique Molina Johnson, January 2, 1949, volumen 1365, p. 154 and Expedientes, vol. 1365, 1948-1949, n/f, foja 154, AMP.

<sup>32</sup> Tercer Informe de Gobierno, Rafael Artasánchez, 1960, AMP.

<sup>33</sup> In a 1913 document, authorities fixed the fees for those vendors around the market and the kinds of products they sold. "Documento que explica las tarifas a pagar por los puestos en el nuevo edificio," March 12, 1913, libro 544, expediente 8, p.8, AMP. Mexicans were not the only peddlers in Puebla. Middle

trying to attract the attention and the loyalty of those who went to do their shopping at the market. Some peddlers even walked inside the halls of La Victoria in special areas that the market assigned for them. Not all vendors remained in or around the market; others chose other commercial spots especially in the *portales*, the arches that surrounded the zócalo to display their wares. Others decided to sell their merchandise outside established shops, trying to gain attention from the pedestrians who walked around these shops. Up to the 1960s, all commercial activities took place in a small radius in the downtown area, which consisted of about eight blocks from the zócalo.<sup>34</sup>

### Puebla's snobs

The well-off people, who inhabited the downtown and those who owned small- and medium-size businesses in the same area, disdained street vendors for both economic and cultural reasons. Shop keepers perceived all street vendors as impediments to their own businesses. Business owners disliked the products street vendors sold, the customers they attracted, and the way they talked and behaved. Municipal authorities received hundreds of letters from dissatisfied business men and women who complained that vendors were an unwelcome form of economic competition.<sup>35</sup> Others thought that vendors bothered their clientele. In 1919, the French owner of *La Princesa* bakery

---

Eastern immigrants began their immigrant lives in Mexico as peddlers. In the 1940s, there were two films that about these peddlers: *El baisano Jalil* and *El barchante Neguib*. Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far From Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007): 137 and 145.

<sup>34</sup> During most of the second half of the twentieth century, customers did not necessarily travel to the downtown area to buy their products. Puebla's dwellers could go to supermarkets, large convenience stores and at the end of the 1970s, they shopped at malls.

<sup>35</sup> Similarly in Mexico City and since the nineteenth century, some neighbors and established shopkeepers also wrote to authorities demanding the removal of vendors and other undesirable people. See Pablo Piccato, "Urbanistas, Ambulantes and Mendigos: The Dispute for Urban Space in Mexico City, 1890-1930," in *Reconstructing Criminality in Latin America*, eds. Carlos A. Aguirre and Robert Buffington, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2000):113-148.

located under one of the arches that surrounded the *zócalo*, the *portal* Hidalgo, was outraged by the street vendors –and their products- that obstructed the entrance to his store. The baker stated that the *enchiladas*, beans, *mole*, and tacos that vendors sold were “filthy merchandise,” which caused “repulsion” to “Puebla’s correct and educated classes” who shopped in his bakery.<sup>36</sup> In his view, food vendors were “a danger” to his refined female customers whose dresses might be stained by street foods.” The baker assumed that his elite customers did not eat food from the street vendors; he even believed that they would get contaminated by simply passing next to the vendors. Street vendors’ children were an additional nuisance; the little ones “pitifully begged for money” from his well-off customers. Clearly, he added, vendors’ presence in front of his shop damaged its prestige and the aesthetics of one of the city’s best sites.<sup>37</sup>

Other business owners were concerned not so much about sellers’ products, but about vendors themselves. Most perceived them as inferior citizens. Carrie Purdy, the owner of a kindergarten located close to La Victoria Market, asked authorities for the removal of the stalls in front of her institution. Without mentioning what kind of products vendors sold, Ms. Purdy considered that vendors and their customers were *gente del pueblo*, who created troubles in front of her kindergarten. Ms. Purdy said that “stalls encouraged crowds of people who did not use a “cultured language” and who were a “bad example” for the children who attended her institution.<sup>38</sup> Ms. Purdy was afraid that

---

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Enrique Belague to municipal authorities, June 13, 1919, libro 630, file 318, AMP. Similarly, the Mexican elite exiled in San Antonio, Texas during the Mexican Revolution detested the chili queens and the food they sold. Jeffrey Pilcher, “Who Chased Out the Chili Queens? Food, Ethnicity and Reform in San Antonio, Texas, 1880-1943,” (Conference paper:19-20.)

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Enrique Belague to municipal authorities, June 13, 1919, libro 630, expediente 318, AMP.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Carrie Purdy to the Municipality, August 16, 1911, libro 511, Comisión de Mercados, file14B, p. 280, AMP.

the children would come into contact with the vendors. Vendors were, once again, a negative cultural element to the upper-classes, regardless of their age.

Many years later, authorities continued to receive similar complaints from shopkeepers. In 1931, the owner of a shoe store believed that a candy stall outside his store created a shadow where thieves could hide at night to steal his shop's merchandise. The shoe store owner was bothered not only because of the possibilities of getting robbed, but also about the aesthetics of his store. He said that the stall gave an "ugly view" to his business.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, in 1946, and again in 1947, an angry Arón Poltolarek Stolar, owner of a clothing store, said that his sales decreased due to the presence of vendors who blocked the windows of his *El Nuevo Mundo*. These food vendors and their customers blocked the entire sidewalk, which forced pedestrians to walk on the street and prevented them from entering his shop. And just like the French baker three decades earlier, Mr. Poltolarek argued that the vendors outside his store sold *comida corriente* whose oil stained his customers' clothing.<sup>40</sup> Mr. Poltolarek demanded authorities "justice" and the removal of the vendors outside his store.<sup>41</sup>

Food vendors were not the only obstacle for shop owners. In 1923, clothing stores owners complained that some street vendors, of "foreign nationality," sold shirts, stockings, socks, and ties. They stood right outside their stores in the *portales* and on different streets, which negatively affected the established business owners who sold the

---

<sup>39</sup> Letter from Alfredo Rojas to Presidente Municipal, December 30, 1930, libro 843, file 840, f.1, AMP.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Arón Poltolarek Stolar to Heroico Ayuntamiento Municipal, November 25, 1946, libro 1141, exp. 93, p. 129, AMP.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Aron Poltolarek to Ayuntamiento Municipal, February 20, 1947, volumen 1160, expediente 94, p. 64, AMP. Margarita Abad Sosa, owner of *El Buen Vestir* had the same problems and demanded justice and the removal of vendors. Letter from M. Abad Sosa to Presidente Municipal, July 17, 1947, volume 1160, file 94, p. 80, AMP.

same merchandise. In their view, it was not fair that established vendors paid a number of fees and taxes that street vendors did not have to pay.<sup>42</sup>

Medium-scale business owners were not the only ones who opposed street vending. Small-scale vendors, also concerned about the bottom line, protested the direct competition of itinerant sellers. For example, a group of female vendors of cakes, candy and *tortas compuestas* who had semi-fixed stalls in the portales, strongly disliked the peddlers who stood right next to their businesses. In 1923 and again in 1932, the vendors in fixed stalls said that the competition from the peddlers was such that they could not even earn enough money to pay the municipal taxes. These semi-fixed vendors, who also described themselves as *mujeres solas* with children, asked authorities to remove the peddlers.<sup>43</sup>

Throughout the twentieth-century, marketers, that is those with fixed stalls in the markets, protested against the presence of itinerant vendors outside the market and the installation of semi-fixed stalls on the streets surrounding it.<sup>44</sup> In 1936, the female members of a union of tortilla makers at La Victoria Market wanted to halt the sale of hand-made tortillas by women from the countryside who sold their products in the market though they lacked stalls. Machine-made tortilla marketers said that hand-made tortilla

---

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Cámara Nacional de Comercio (CANACO) to Mayor, October 10, 1923, libro 708, file 436, p. 267, AMP. Although the CANACO did not say it, the street vendors were Lebanese vendors. For a history of Lebanese in Mexico see Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, so Close to Mexico*. In Puebla, the Lebanese community engaged in street vending and market activities. For an example of mutual aid among Lebanese see letter from Secretario del Ayuntamiento to Mayor, May 16, 1922, libro 684, file 105, p. 885, AMP.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from 17 vendors to Presidente Municipal, October 25, 1923, libro 708, file 433, f. 241 and letter from 14 women to Presidente Municipal, November 7, 1932, libro 887, file 686, f.1, AMP.

<sup>44</sup> Most marketers complained about street vendors. Others did not oppose street vending because some marketers had stalls on the streets and hired family members. By the mid-1940s, market employees also found out that some street vendors also hired other people to have more stalls. Expedientes, volumen 1141, expediente 93, foja 138, Octubre 18, 1946, AMP.



peddlers had a devastating effect on their small businesses because customers preferred the hand-made tortillas over the machine-made ones. The union members in this market, who emphasized their economic hardships and described themselves as “*gente de conocida pobreza*,” asked authorities to forbid hand-made tortilla peddlers to sell at the market.<sup>45</sup> Ironically they signed the letter with the union’s slogan: “For a classless society” (“*Por una sociedad sin clases.*”)<sup>46</sup> In 1945, a group of marketers at the Nicolás Bravo market demanded that peddlers get stalls inside the market. The marketers said that this action was important not only for economic reasons, but also for hygienic reasons. Marketers sought the “social literacy” of street vendors. In the marketers’ view authorities had to teach vendors that selling merchandise, especially prepared and raw food on the ground was not a sanitary practice, and that they had to sell in well-built stalls in the market.<sup>47</sup>

Marketers constantly emphasized that unlike peddlers, they paid for commercial licenses, taxes, electricity, other utilities such as garbage disposal fees, and sanitary

---

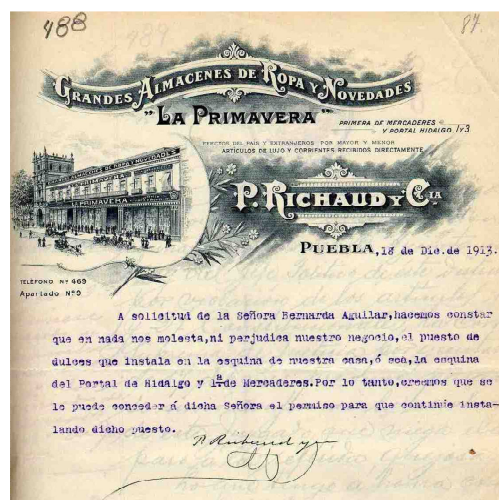
<sup>45</sup> In Morelia, Michoacán, the relationship between marketers, established shop keepers, and street vendors was usually antagonistic. On one occasion butchers complained to the authorities that street vendors sold meat, which represented unfair competition to the established butchers. Christina Jiménez, “Making the City Their Own”: 401.

<sup>46</sup> Expedientes, libro 975, exp. 228, s/f, June 17, 1936, AMP. Interestingly, an established owner of a tortilla shop (*tortillería*) had to close her store after authorities removed the peddlers on the street outside her business. After the removal, the streets were empty and she had no customers. Most probably, her customers were also street vendors, who at lunch time, went to buy tortillas to preprepare accompany their meal or make their own tacos. Letter from Flora González to Mayor Rafael Artasánchez, February 9, 1960, box 42, file 40Bis, AMP.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from Juan Blanco Segura, Secretario de la Federación de Ligas del Sector Popular del Estado de Puebla to Presidente Municipal, June 5, 1945, volumen 1114, file 102, 325, AMP. Interestingly, these marketers acted in a very similar fashion to the Porfirian and early post-revolutionary elites that Pablo Piccato (for Mexico City) and Christina Jiménez (for Morelia) describe. See P. Piccato “Urbanistas, Ambulantes and Mendigos”:113-148 and C. Jiménez, “Making the City Their Own: Popular Groups and Political Culture in Morelia, Mexico, 1880 to 1930,” (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2001): chapter 6. Jiménez states that the city council believed that “popular groups had to be culturally reformed, socially educated and ultimately controlled.” p. 296.

quotas.<sup>48</sup> In the late 1969, marketers at La Victoria also highlighted the boisterous character of street vendors, and added that “the whole city is becoming a market and this is shameful and an eyesore for Puebla’s citizens and visitors...street vendors cause a total anarchy around the market.”<sup>49</sup>

While small shop owners and marketers were concerned about street vendors’ presence, because they considered peddlers direct competitors, large store owners did not seem to care much about *ambulantes*. In 1913, the owner of a big, fancy department store wrote a letter to the Municipality stating that he did not have any objection if a candy seller set up a stall outside his store.<sup>50</sup> Indeed the seller did not pose any challenge to *La Primavera* department store and the owner did not make any cultural claims against her presence.



Letter from P. Richaud to Municipal

Authorities, December 18, 1913, AMP.

<sup>48</sup> Letter form the Unión de Locatarios y Comerciantes en pequeño, La Victoria y anexos, to Puebla’s Governor, June 3, 1970, box 42, expediente 5, AMP.

<sup>49</sup> Letter form the Unión de Locatarios y Comerciantes en pequeño, La Victoria y anexos, to Puebla’s Governor, November 17, 1969, box 42, expediente 5, AMP.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from P. Richaud, December 18, 1913, volumen 544, p. 87, AMP.

Property owners in downtown were also bothered by street vendors, even if sellers were not their competitors. Until the mid-twentieth century, upper and middle class citizens lived and held properties in the city's downtown. These neighbors also wrote letters to municipal officers explaining all the problems they faced when vendors set stalls right in front of their residences. Most of the people writing to city officials were elitist and considered vendors and their clients "uncultured people." Since the 1940s, as the numbers of cars increased, some people thought vendors represented a danger for pedestrians. A Colonel who lived in downtown worried about his children who, on their way to school, could not walk on the sidewalk because there was a fruit stall that occupied it entirely. He was concerned that a car could hit his offspring because "the maids" (*las criadas*) who accompanied them to school made them walk on the street.<sup>51</sup> One of the most verbose protestors was one of the wealthiest entrepreneurs of the city, Ernesto Espinosa Yglesias who owned two downtown movie theaters. In 1946, he wrote a long letter to the municipality complaining about the presence of street vendors outside the movie theaters. Espinosa Yglesias commented that the number of street vendors on the sidewalks was unbearable, that they obstructed the free movement of pedestrians who could be hit by cars.<sup>52</sup> Although street vendors were not his competitors, he defended his business interests; he sought to shield movie-watchers from the street vendors.

---

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Coronel de Infanteria Fernando P. Dávila to Presidente Municipal, June 16, 1947, volumen 1160, file 94, p. 78, AMP.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Ernesto Espinosa Yglesias, June 10, 1946, expedientes, libro 1141, file 93, p.133, June 10, 1946, AMP.

A woman who lived in a downtown home wrote a letter saying that it was impossible to open the windows of her balconies because of the stench produced by the garbage that vendors dumped right outside her home.<sup>53</sup> In 1945, another woman, who owned a house that she rented as a *pulquería*, was upset because the *chalupa*, *garnacha* and taco vendor dirtied the wall of her property with the oil and smoke of the food (*fritanga*) she sold. The landlady of this *pulquería* claimed that the stall outside her property was extremely ugly (*un adefecio*) and a “shame for Puebla’s culture.”<sup>54</sup> Undoubtedly, she thought that selling pulque was chic while selling tacos was not.<sup>55</sup>

While both shop keepers and large numbers of middle class city dwellers complained about street vendors, they only asked authorities to relocate sellers to other streets or to markets. From hundreds of letters, only in a few cases, people asked authorities to remove them completely. In 1909, a frequent visitor to the main square bitterly complained about ice-cream sellers who were a “plague” for those who visited the *zócalo*. Ice-cream vendors, in his words, used a “tavern-like language in front of the children and ladies who just want to listen to the music played in the main square.” He added that the sellers dumped their “indecent” waters into the grass, and washed their dishes in fountains. “Worst of all,” the complainer continued, “benches have become

---

<sup>53</sup> Letter from María del Carmen Teyssier to Presidente Municipal, volumen 1114, expediente 102, p. 300, August 6, 1945, AMP. She complained again in 1946, volume 1141, expediente 93, p. 121, AMP.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from María Cadena to Presidente Municipal, September 4, 1945, volumen 1114, expediente 102, p. 306, AMP. Pulque selling was a controversial issue. Authorities had banned its sale at La Victoria Market. And people of all social classes complained about pulquerías in other parts of the city. In 1950, people in colonia popular Santa Cruz Angeles were upset with the owner of a pulquería, “La Bronca,” because his clients drank their alcoholic beverages on the streets negatively affecting ladies, young people, and children. Clients at the pulquería caused problems and swore (using “un grosero vocabulario y palabras soeces”), which was a problem for neighbors and for the children who attended two schools nearby. Volumen 1358, n/f, foja 210, AMP.

<sup>55</sup> It was common that women sold food outside pulquerías. See Jeffrey Pilcher, *Qué Vivan los Tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998):51-52.

tables for their clients, who are uncultivated people (*gente inculta*).” He asked authorities to ban the vendors from selling on the zócalo and the use of benches for “public entertainment.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in 1921, the heirs of Angel Díaz Rubín, a wealthy Spanish textile factory owner, wrote to the municipality, stating that street vendors dirtied the floors of the *portales*. These elite men asked the police to remove all vendors. Feeling overtly entitled, they went as far as talking on behalf of the city. They said that “the city” hated the *enchiladas* that vendors sold and the kinds of tables sellers set up for their clientele.<sup>57</sup> While it is hard to believe that all of Puebla’s inhabitants despised *enchilada* vendors, certainly the brothers of Spanish descent felt repulsed by the looks and smell of working-class delicacies.

### Ambivalent positions

The authorities’ answers to community’s complaints varied widely. Up to the 1960s, city government officials felt that they had to respond to the interests of both street vendors and the rest of the community. The relationship between authorities, street vendors, and established business owners was complex. They were not always in conflict. In her study of late nineteenth-century female sellers in Guadalajara and Mexico City, anthropologist Judith E. Marti concluded that relations between sellers and municipal authorities were not always confrontational.<sup>58</sup> This was also the case in

---

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Luis Arriaga to Presidente Municipal, March 3, 1909, libro 490, expediente 10D, AMP.

<sup>57</sup> Letter from Hijos del Angel Díaz Rubín to H. Ayuntamiento de la ciudad, April 2, 1921, Comisión del Síndico Municipal, libro 691, expediente 481, AMP.

<sup>58</sup> Judith E. Marti, “Subsistence and the State: The Case of Porfirian Mexico,” in *The Economic Anthropology of the State*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brumfiel (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994).

Puebla. For decades, in the city of Puebla, officials who regulated the use of public space and certain commercial activities had an ambivalent posture in relation to street vendors. On the one hand, authorities tolerated street vendors. On the other, responding to increasing pressures from established business owners, authorities temporarily removed street vendors. When authorities decided to clean the streets of vendors, they removed all; they did not distinguish between male and female vendors. In her work on Mexico City, historian Susie Porter has argued that during the Porfiriato and early revolutionary period, elite's projects concerning the use of space had a gendered component. According to this argument, city officials targeted female vendors and, in response, women contested authorities by constructing identities around their sexual morality, honor, and alleged weaknesses.<sup>59</sup> Evidence in Puebla, however, shows that authorities cleaned the streets of all vendors.

Authorities tolerated vendors because they provided inexpensive merchandise to the city's needy population. As Judith E. Marti has noted, street vendors fulfilled the important role of sustaining the poor.<sup>60</sup> Not only did poor people, including recent migrants, find cheap products, but they also could buy them on a daily basis, at all hours, and in very small quantities or by the piece. Customers could take advantage of street

---

Recently a group of scholars have argued that the relationship between the state is more complex than simply assuming that their relation is one of conflict. See Patricia Fernández Kelly and Jon Shefner, *Out of the Shadows: Political Action and Informal Economy in Latin America*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University: Press, 2006).

<sup>59</sup>Susie Porter, *Working Women of Mexico City, 1879-1931*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003): chapter 6.

<sup>60</sup> Judith E. Marti, "Subsistence and the State: The Case of Porfirian Mexico," in *The Economic Anthropology of the State*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brumfiel (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994):319-322.

vendors' "sales." Some vendors sold very ripe and rotten fruits and vegetables to the poor for very low prices.<sup>61</sup>

Additionally, in the case of prepared food, as historian Jeffrey Pilcher noted, since the early twentieth-century, vendors sold relatively fast and cheap food to workers and to people who had no kitchens in the impoverished tenements where they lived.<sup>62</sup> Also, labor migrants from the countryside to Mexico City, found it satisfactory to buy certain food on the streets that reminded them of the one they ate in their towns of origin.<sup>63</sup> After all, especially before the Revolution of 1910 and before the government enacted the 1931 federal labor law, workers did not have more than thirty minutes during their lunch break.<sup>64</sup> It is possible that those who could not run to their homes, where a woman in the family typically had the food ready for the male, wage-earners grabbed something to eat from street vendors. Sellers were strategically located close to factories, always ready to serve an overworked population. Others with flexible lunch-time schedules also found it attractive to buy from street vendors.<sup>65</sup>

Puebla's poor and the rich found a great variety of prepared food in the streets, *portales*, parks, and outside churches, cemeteries, which included *chalupas*, *molotes*, *enchiladas*, *mole*, candy, tamales, *aguas frescas*, *aguamiel*, *pulque*, and *nieves*. After the

---

<sup>61</sup> Reporte de Médico Director to Crecencia Bonilla, August 23 and November 14, 1922, libro 685, file 108, p. 547, 573, AMP,

<sup>62</sup> Jeffrey Pilcher, "Was the Taco Invented in Southern California?" *Gastronomica*, vol. 8, 1 (Winter 2008) pp. 26-38.

<sup>63</sup> Jeffrey Pilcher, "Was the Taco Invented in Southern California?" While Marti and Pilcher referred to Mexico City, it is very likely that the migrants, who came to Puebla attracted by the textiles factories, followed the same pattern as those workers in Mexico City.

<sup>64</sup> Jeffrey Bortz, *Revolution within the Revolution: Cotton Textile Workers and the Mexican Labor Regime, 1910-1923* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

<sup>65</sup> Sandra Aguilar-Rodríguez mentions that in Mexico City construction workers were loyal customers of street vendors. "Cooking Modernity": Nutrition Policies, Class, and Gender in the 1940s and 1950s Mexico City," *The Americas* 64, no. 2 (October 2007):177.

1950s, people found a larger variety of food on the streets such as *tortas compuestas*, sea food (especially oysters), *garnachas*, *guajolotes*, *barbacoa*, *churros*, hot-dogs, pop-corn, chips, pancakes, and sodas.<sup>66</sup> For many people, buying from street vendors served a number of purposes: pragmatic (lack of kitchens and time), cultural (tasty foods familiar to their palates), and economic (affordable prices). Authorities were well aware of this and allowed the vendors to sell these foods.

Another good reason to tolerate street vendors was because they contributed to the city's treasury. While itinerant vendors did not have to pay sales taxes, they did have to pay a number of fees, such as the daily fee for the use of public space, and commercial licenses or permits that authorities granted them in order to sell on the streets. Fees varied from street to street and for the kind of products vendors sold. While some fees were written in the Reglamentos de Mercados, fee collectors charged vendors at will.<sup>67</sup>

The officials in charge of collecting the fees (*cobradores*) were under the supervision of the Administrador de Mercados. All of them were municipal employees and their daily salaries varied greatly. In 1947, the Administrador de Mercados earned 15 pesos, while fee collectors earned 3.5 pesos each, and *ayudantes de cobrador* earned 2.50

---

<sup>66</sup> In petitions to authorities, vendors or vendors-to-be, usually stated the kind of products they wanted to sell. Women usually were the ones who prepared food such as *mole*, *chalupas enchiladas*, *molotes* and *tamales*. Men sold less complicated food such as *tortas compuestas*, pop-corn, hamburguers, pancakes, and hot-dogs. For the process of adding foreign products to Mexican cuisine see Jeffrey Pilcher, *Qué Vivan los Tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998): 134-138.

<sup>67</sup> In letters, street vendors complained about abusive fee collectors and the lack of clarity on the amount of fees they should pay to the municipality.



pesos each.<sup>68</sup> Indeed fee collectors and their aids were poorly paid, but they supplemented their income with street vendors' fees.

Street vendors paid their daily fees to the *cobradores* or to their aids. It was very common that fee collectors kept these fees for themselves. Street vendors subsidized municipal employees' wages.<sup>69</sup> Every time that vendors paid fee collectors were supposed to give them a ticket or receipt (*un boleto*). Vendors, however, complained that *cobradores* did not give them the receipt even if they paid. Other collectors charged vendors numerous fees several times during the day and if they failed to pay collectors seized their merchandise or personal items.<sup>70</sup> Due to fee collector's low salaries, these practices were not surprising

Despite the mismanagement of resources, street vendors represented a large source of revenue for the municipality. Street vendors were aware of this and used it when defending themselves against authorities. In 1909, a group of *pulque* sellers protested the city government's ban on the sale of pulque. The vendors said they protested the "lack of freedom to sell" their product. They grew magueyes in their towns and emphasized that they only produced small amounts of *pulque tlachique*.<sup>71</sup> The sale of pulque, vendors said, was their only means of survival. If authorities banned the sale

---

<sup>68</sup> The general market inspector earned 5 pesos; inspectors 4.5 pesos, the night watchers 3.5 and the *barrenderos* 2.50 pesos each. Expedientes de mercados, volumen 1157, 1947, p. 17, AMP.

<sup>69</sup> Established marketers also witnessed fee collectors abuses. In the Carmen Serdán market, vendors complained about a fee collector, Abel Cejudo Cuellar, who charged lower fees to vendors he liked. Letter to Presidente Municipal Enrique Molina Johnson from Secretarios de la FROC, October 28, 1950, expediente 1375, fojas 359-361, AMP.

<sup>70</sup> For example see letter from Mariano Tlapanco and Macario Apanco to Presidente Municipal, January 23, 1918, libro 608, file 186; letter from Lucrecia Torres to Presidente Municipal, March 13, 1947, volumen 1157, file 49, p. 235, and letter from Antonia Mendoza to León García, Jefe de la Oficina de Quejas de la Presidencia de la República, Palacio Nacional, June 12, 1962, box 42, file 99, AMP.

<sup>71</sup> Pulque tlachique is a cheap kind of pulque.

of pulque, “everyone’s interests would be affected, even the municipal authorities who would stop receiving our fees and taxes.”<sup>72</sup> Their argument was compelling. Authorities renewed their permit to continue selling.<sup>73</sup>

The city government also tolerated street vendors because it was easier and less costly for authorities to allow peddlers to stay on the streets than build new facilities. People in working-class neighborhoods asked authorities to build markets close to their homes. In theory, street vendors could sell in these new facilities. People expressed the need to have affordable and markets nearby. The markets would represent a “social good” (*un bien común*) for people at different neighborhoods. Groups of neighbors even offered tracks of land to the municipality to build the markets. In the case of colonia Obrera Lázaro Cárdenas, founded in 1935, neighbors demanded the construction of a market in 1945 and their demand continued up to 1968.<sup>74</sup> In 1966, the neighbors offered a lot of 2,000 square meters that street vendors could use after the municipality built the market. Two years later, the “Junta de Mejoramiento Moral, Cívico y Material del Municipio de Puebla” finally decided that the municipality could not build the facility.<sup>75</sup> Similar cases occurred for the neighbors of the colonia Héroes de Nacozari, a railroad workers’ neighborhood and colonia Santa Cruz Angeles. They also demanded the

---

<sup>72</sup>Letter from Toribio Cozatl, Micaela Caselis, Pascuala Ortega y Leandro Oropeza, November 23, 1909, Expediente 19, letra H, Comisión de Mercados, AMP.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from Manuel Ramos to vendedores de pulque, December 10, 1909, expediente 19, letra H, Comisión de Mercados. AMP.

<sup>74</sup> Letters from Directiva de la Colonia Obrera Lázaro Cárdenas, to Presidente Municipal, Lic. Nicolás Vázquez and Arcadio Medel Marín, May 31, 1951 and August 1966, expedientes del año 1948, volumen 1355, file 223J, fojas 306-395, AMP.

<sup>75</sup> Letter from Junta to Colonos de la Colonia Obrera Lázaro Cárdenas, November 7, 1968, volumen 1355, file 233J, p. 372, AMP.

construction of marketplaces on tracks of land they had.<sup>76</sup> Authorities, however, did not build any markets.

### Authorities' responses to complaints

Authorities offered a number of excuses to Puebla's inhabitants about why they did not remove vendors. City officials had to reply to complainants' letters and offer a solution to their problems. In 1911, Carry Purdy had complained about the presence of street vendors outside her kindergarten. She thought that the vendors were a bad example for the little ones who attended her school because of vendors' "uncultured language." She asked authorities to relocate them.<sup>77</sup> Almost two weeks later, Ms. Purdy received a letter that disappointed her. City authorities said that "the Municipality did not have anywhere else to relocate the vendors and could not meet her demand." However, they would "recommend [that] the police" keep a watchful eye on vendors to avoid "immoral acts."<sup>78</sup> Without a doubt, vendors continued selling close to Purdy's kindergarten, using "immoral" language.

Similarly, the French baker who in 1919 complained about the food vendors sold outside his bakery probably was dissatisfied about the response that authorities gave to his letter. They agreed with the baker that street sellers were "despicable." In addition, authorities emphasized that sellers were dirty and unsanitary because their food, which

---

<sup>76</sup> Letter from Colonos de la Colonia Héroes de Nacozari to Presidente Municipal, expedientes año de 1948, volumen 1356, no date, fojas 186-188; Letter from Francisco Ubaldo, Juez de Paz de la Colonia "Santa Cruz Los Angeles" to Honorable Ayuntamiento Municipal, January 23, 1950, expedientes año de 1948, volumen 1358, foja 87, AMP.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from Carrie Purdy to the Municipality, August 16, 1911, libro 511, Comisión de Mercados, file 14B, p. 280, AMP.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from Municipality to Carry Purdy, August 25, 1911, libro 511, file 14B, AMP.

was uncovered, caught “dust, soil, and microbes.” City officials’ solution was to force vendors to cover their food and sell it inside crystal cages (*armazones encristalados*).<sup>79</sup> This solution made no sense to the French baker. The vendors prepared the food on-site and it was practically impossible to cover it, unless vendors acquired their own established restaurants. How would authorities expect vendors to sell beans, *enchiladas*, *mole* and tacos in crystal cages? The food vendors continued to sell their uncovered, “filthy merchandise” outside *La Princesa* bakery.

Established shopkeepers continued to get more unsatisfactory responses from authorities. In 1931, a shoe store owner stated that a vendor’s semi-fixed stall created a shadow in front of his store that served as a hiding place for thieves to rob his business.<sup>80</sup> Authorities responded to him and said that they regretted they could not remove the candy vendor because a municipal inspector had investigated the case and concluded that during the five years that the vendor was on the street, only once had the shoe store been robbed. Moreover, “the sidewalks were wide enough” for everybody to sell.<sup>81</sup>

The marketers of the Nicolás Bravo market were not happy either when they received a brief response from authorities. In 1945, the marketers had asked them to force street vendors to sell in the stalls at the market as part of vendors’ “social literacy.”<sup>82</sup> But authorities, especially the Administrador de Mercados, claimed that city officials could not encourage peddlers to get into the facility because “there would not be

---

<sup>79</sup> Letter from Municipality to Enrique Balague, July 8, 1919, libro 630, file 318, AMP.

<sup>80</sup> Letter from Alfredo Rojas to Presidente Municipal, December 30, 1930, libro 843, file 840, f.1, AMP.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from Municipality to Alfredo Rojas, March 6, 1931, libro 843, file 846, s/n, AMP.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from Juan Blanco Segura, Secretario de la Federación de Ligas del Sector Popular del Estado de Puebla to Presidente Municipal, June 5, 1945, volumen 1114, file 102, 325, AMP.

enough stalls in the market to house all of the street vendors.”<sup>83</sup> The frustrated marketers wrote another letter and said that the Administrador was lying: there were more than enough stalls for the peddlers inside the facility.<sup>84</sup> Whatever the case, the Administrador and fee collectors benefited from allowing vendors sell on the streets.<sup>85</sup>

### Authorities

Up to the late 1960s, authorities were relatively tolerant of vendors, but this did not mean that they permitted them to remain without harassment. In order to regulate street vendors’ use of space for their commercial activities, city authorities used a number of excuses and rhetoric to remove, relocate, and fine vendors. Hygiene was a constant theme in authorities’ rhetorics, especially during the first decades of the twentieth century. After all, many people in Puebla, especially children, died due from gastrointestinal diseases.<sup>86</sup> From the 1940s on, the main excuse was the fact that vendors’ semi-fixed stalls obstructed the free flow of cars, creating chaos on the streets and lots of traffic disturbances.

City officials, especially sanitation authorities, have always perceived vendors as a threat to public health. They criticized vendors for what they believed were their

---

<sup>83</sup> Letter from Municipality to Nicolas Bravo marketers, June 19, 1945, volumen 1114, file 102, p. 329, AMP.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from Nicolas Bravo marketers to Municipality, July 17, 1945, volumen 1114, file 102, p. 333, AMP.

<sup>85</sup> Ten years later, in his Informe de Gobierno, Mayor Arturo Perdomo Morán said that there were not enough stalls in the markets, thus the municipality allowed vendors. Informe de Gobierno, February 15, 1955. p. 27. AMP.

<sup>86</sup> David G. LaFrance, *Revolution in Mexico’s Heartland: Politics, War, and State Building in Puebla, 1913-1920*, (Wilmington: SR Books, 2003):26. In Mexico City the most common causes of death in the 1940s were diseases caused by nutritional deficiencies. These diseases were parasitosis, diarrhea, enteritis, anemia and pellagra. Sandra Aguilar-Rodríguez, “Cooking Modernity”: Nutrition Policies, Class, and Gender in the 1940s and 1950s Mexico City,” *The Americas* 64, no. 2 (October 2007): 185.

ignorant and backward practices. In 1908, the Regidor de Mercados visited several markets and plazas and realized that many vendors took care of sick family members in the market or in their stalls. This was a serious threat to public health. Authorities then convened to prohibit sick people from staying in stalls or carrying out sales.<sup>87</sup> For city authorities, and for some newspaper editors, street vendors were the main carriers of all sorts of illnesses. Both claimed that street vendors, in particular those who sold prepared food, took no sanitary precautions when they cooked. Moreover, they displayed their merchandise uncovered, and lastly they touched the products with their “filthy” hands, (*con sus manos inmundas*).<sup>88</sup> The municipality only granted permits to those who proved they were healthy (vendors should carry a health card with them at all times granted by the Department of Health) and to those vendors who maintained clean bodies and outfits (*aseado en su persona y vestido*).<sup>89</sup> Vendors also had to keep their stalls clean.

In order to make ends meet, some street vendors sold products of low quality. In November 1922, sanitary officials wrote a report on vendors’ unsanitary practices. According to the document, at the end of the day, vendors sold very ripe or rotten fruits to very poor people.<sup>90</sup> They preferred to sell these items than throwing them away and lose the money they invested. Other vendors, for example, put water into the milk they sold.<sup>91</sup> Others simply sold very old products such as cheese and meats. Sanitary officials

---

<sup>87</sup> Acuerdo que prohíbe que haya personas enfermas al frente de los puestos de mercados, September 2, 1908, libro 482, expediente 9N; see also Disposiciones municipales, tomo 13, p. 92, 1908, AMP.

<sup>88</sup> Letter from Médico Director de Salubridad e Higiene to Presidente Municipal, expedientes, libro 704, file 248, p. 425, February 25, 1922, AMP.

<sup>89</sup> Reglamentos Municipales, Tomo 34, file 112 and 113, July 1929, AMP.

<sup>90</sup> Reporte de Médico Director to Crecencia Bonilla, August 23 and November 14, 1922, libro 685, file 108, p. 547, 573, AMP.

<sup>91</sup> Reporte sobre Esperanza Conde, vendedora de leche, November 10, 1922, libro 685, file 108, p. 577, AMP.

were angry about these practices and threatened to seize their merchandise if they continued selling rotten merchandise.<sup>92</sup> But threats and fines did not deter some vendors. Vendors knew that sanitation authorities were few and could not control all of their vendors' actions. Rules meant one thing; enforcement meant something else.

Sanitation officials also tried to teach vendors and consumers hygienic practices. In 1932, a federal health delegate invited people to attend the screening of movies that discussed the "protection of individual and public health." People could attend for free and could choose among two movie theaters.<sup>93</sup> In 1961, local authorities carried out "*semanas de higiene*" for marketers and street vendors.<sup>94</sup>

Street vendors also displayed fruits and vegetables on the ground. Sanitation authorities disliked this practice and tried to ban it on numerous occasions. Vendors could not place their merchandise on the ground; instead they had to build platforms at least forty centimeters high, so that they could sweep and wash the sidewalks beneath their wares.<sup>95</sup> To authorities' frustration, the practice of setting up merchandise on the ground continued over time. In 1919 and 1922 authorities prohibited it. Also, in 1946 the chief of the Servicios Coordinados de Salubridad y Asistencia, Dr. Luis Molina Johnson, asked the Administrador de Mercados to remove vendors who did not comply with this measure. Dr. Molina Johnson recommended that vendors use tables to display

---

<sup>92</sup> Reporte de Médico Director to Crecencia Bonilla, August 23 and November 14, 1922, libro 685, file 108, p. 547, 573, AMP.

<sup>93</sup> "Invitación para exhibición cinematográfica," Disposiciones Municipales, Tomo 36, p. 124, January 1932, AMP.

<sup>94</sup> Segundo Informe de Gobierno, Eduardo Cué Merlos, February 14, 1962, AMP.

<sup>95</sup> Disposiciones Municipales, Tomo 17, p. 56, July 31, 1912, AMP.

their merchandise.<sup>96</sup> For authorities, street vendors posed a problem to people's good health.<sup>97</sup>

From the mid-1940s on, authorities denied hundreds of permits to people who sought to sell on the streets. City authorities simply replied to vendors' petition letters saying that the stalls they wanted to set up would obstruct the *vía pública*, which would cause chaotic traffic and a dangerous situation for pedestrians. This was especially the case if vendors wanted to put stalls in corners or on very busy streets.<sup>98</sup> Despite authorities' official denial of permits, vendors continued to set up stalls. In 1959, the Mayor claimed that due to the fact that so many stalls had invaded the streets, his government was able to remove them. In his 1960 yearly speech he mentioned that stalls represented an eyesore to the city, but most importantly they were "an obstacle to the free flow of cars and pedestrians." With the financial aid of Puebla's business association, the Cámara Nacional de Comercio de Puebla, the municipality cleaned the streets of vendors. In the published version of his speech, the municipality printed pictures of different downtown streets where people could observe streets with and without vendors and their stalls.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Dr. Luis Molina Johnson to Presidente Municipal, expedientes, volumen 1141, file 93, foja 152, June 20, 1946 and vol. 1114, file 103, f. 439 AMP.

<sup>97</sup> For elite and middle-class views on food consumption see Sandra Aguilar-Rodríguez, "Cooking Modernity: Nutrition Policies, Class, and Gender in the 1940s and 1950s Mexico City" *The Americas* 64 no. 2, October 2007.

<sup>98</sup> Volumen 1141, file 97 is filled with negative responses to vendors to install semi-fixed stalls, AMP.

<sup>99</sup> Tercer Informe de Gobierno, Rafael Artasánchez, 1960, AMP.





Puebla's downtown streets before and after the 1959 removal. Fototeca. AMP.

### Petitions

Authorities in Puebla, like their counterparts in other parts of the country, were obsessed with modernizing and beautifying the cities, especially during the Porfiriato and the post-revolutionary period. Many citizens could not agree with authorities more that Puebla was a “civilized” and “cultured” city. And both groups thought that street vendors and their products were an obstacle and an eyesore for Puebla’s splendor. Interestingly, and contrary to what authorities and the upper classes thought, street

vendors did not think of themselves as backward or anti-modern. Sellers also wanted to make the necessary changes to their stalls and the space they occupied in order to continue vending, earn a living, and modernize their city. Vendors demonstrated that they were not the backward people that some city dwellers thought they were. For example, vendors wanted markets with basic services. In 1908, a group of sellers in a makeshift market complained that the street where they were located was not adequate because there were many animals and vehicles passing very close to their stalls. In addition, they did not have any protection in case it rained. They wanted authorities to fix the street where they sold but in the meantime they wanted to sell in a better street or in a plaza with access to potable water.<sup>100</sup> A milkman wanted to have a fixed stall where he could sell milk, because for years he had peddled the product. He knew that authorities had new sanitation measures that encouraged vendors to have stalls. In addition to complying with authorities' wishes, he was able to secure a fixed stall on the street and perhaps his business became more profitable.<sup>101</sup>

Others sought to use their ingenuity and own resources to improve the public spaces where they sold. A woman wanted to fix and modify the front of a small market, *El Alto*, in order to install a corn mill (*molino de nixtamal*).<sup>102</sup> She wrote to city authorities to ask their permission to fix certain stalls in the market. She attached a

---

<sup>100</sup> Letter from 27 sellers from Mercado La Carbonera to Secretaría del Ayuntamiento, August 7, 1908, Comisión de Mercados, expediente 9L, AMP. For a discussion of people's demands for basic services see Jiménez, Christina M. "Popular Organizing for Public Services: Residents Modernize Morelia, Mexico, 1880-1920," *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>101</sup> Letter from Eduardo Camacho to Municipality, December 16, 1946, volume 1114, expediente 107, p. 520, AMP.

<sup>102</sup> On the making and eventual mechanization of tortillas see, Jeffrey Pilcher, "Industrial *Tortillas* and Folkloric Pepsi: The Nutritional Consequences of Hybrid Cuisines in Mexico," in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2002):224-229.

picture highlighting the changes she wanted to complete. She wanted to facilitate the flow of customers.<sup>103</sup>



Mercado El Alto circa 1946, Fototeca, AMP.

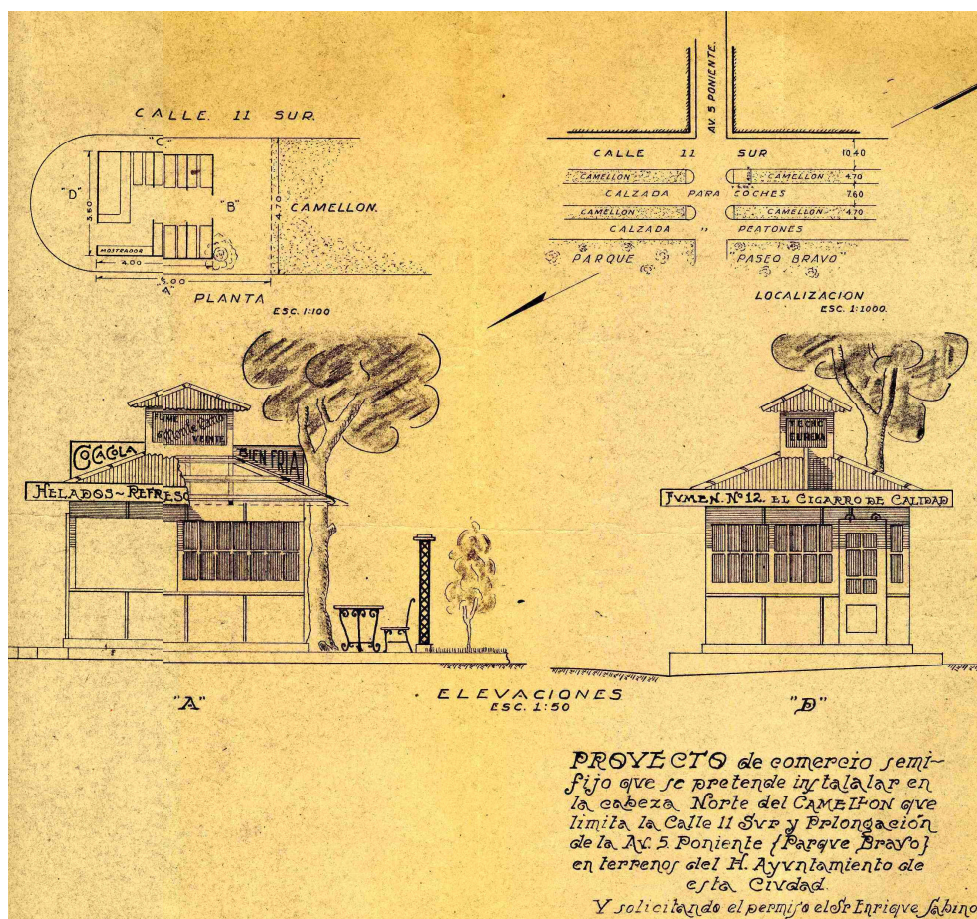
In 1946, a railroad worker trying to improve his economic situation, wanted to set up a stall next to a big park, *El Paseo Bravo*, where he could sell sodas and *tortas compuestas*. Most probably he would employ his wife or any other female relative in his semi-fixed stall. After all, it was not uncommon that men petitioned and women prepared the food. In addition to his petition he attached a large, laborious, and detailed street map with an original design of the stall that included ads for cold Coca-Cola and

---

<sup>103</sup> Letter from Elvira Meneses Trujillo to Municipal authorities, June 8, 1946, volume 1141, expediente 95, p.165, 175-76, AMP. Authorities denied the petition.



Monte Carlo cigarettes.<sup>104</sup> This petitioner was rather unique because nobody was as ambitious –or had the resources- to build a semi-fixed stall the way he envisioned it. And he thought that hardly anything could get more modern than drinking coke.



Stall design, circa 1946, Expediente de Mercados, AMP.

<sup>104</sup> Letter from Enrique M. Sabino to Municipality, May 2, 1946, volume 1141, expediente 97, pp. 220-221. Authorities denied the petition because they wanted to avoid a precedent for other vendors.

### Petitions and *amparos*

No person can be prevented from engaging in the profession, industrial or commercial pursuit, or occupation of his choice, provided it is lawful. The exercise of this liberty shall only be forbidden by judicial order when the rights of third parties are infringed, or by administrative order, issued in the manner provided by law, when the rights of society are violated. No one may be deprived of the fruits of his labor except by judicial decision.

The law in each state shall determine the professions which may be practiced only with a degree, and set forth the requirements for obtaining it and the authorities empowered to issue it.

Article 4, Chapter 1, Title 1, Mexican Constitution of 1917

Some vendors believed that the law was on their side. Most street vendors, especially women, were illiterate, but this did not stop them. They merely had someone write petition letters to authorities. When sellers considered that authorities violated their rights or when they were abusive, vendors did not remain quiet. In their writings, sellers were careful to use legal terminology while emphasizing that authorities' actions violated their constitutional rights. In other letters, vendors appealed to the authorities' "reason" (*razón*) and asked for "justice." Others stated that they were "Mexicans" and authorities were obliged to respect them. The tradition of writing letters using legal references is part of an older tradition that goes back at least to the second half of the nineteenth century. According to historian Christina Jiménez, in the 1880s and early twentieth century, street vendors in Morelia, Michoacán, used "classical liberal ideals and rhetoric to their advantage to claim their rights to sell in public space based on their [1857] Constitutional rights." These rights included the right to free trade and their right to make

an “honest living” by engaging in any occupation they chose.<sup>105</sup> And the 1917 Constitution also provided people with the same guarantees, especially Article 4. Petitions to Puebla’s authorities from street vendors throughout the post-revolutionary decades, followed the same pattern than those of vendors in Morelia a few decades earlier.

Most vendors stated that city authorities violated Articles 4, 14, and 16 of the 1917 Constitution. They all claimed that selling wares in makeshift markets and other public spaces was a constitutional right, a means of earning a living, especially if they were selling legal products (*productos licitos*). They added that street vending or vending in markets was an honest way to earn a living.

Their writings used a sophisticated legal tone that contradicts the idea that street vendors were backward people. In the early 1920s, a group of shawl vendors wrote to the Comisión de Fomento to defend themselves against authorities’ accusations that they were thieves who tricked customers. These vendors complained that the police prevented them from selling their wares on the street, which, they insisted, was a violation to their “commercial freedom” (*libertad de comercio*), a guarantee that article 4 of the 1917 Constitution granted to all citizens.<sup>106</sup> Another group of vendors wrote a letter complaining about the market administrator who charged them a fee for bringing

---

<sup>105</sup> Christina Jiménez, “Making the City Their Own”:14, 275, 567.

<sup>106</sup> Letter from vendors to Comisión de Fomento, September 3, 1921, libro 674, file 335, AMP. After a few months the vendors were able to continue their trade.

products into the market from the countryside. The vendors identified these fees as the updated colonial *alcabalas* which the Mexican Constitution forbade.<sup>107</sup>

In addition to their references to the 1917 Constitution, street vendors made allusions to gender and class when petitioning authorities. Judith E. Marti has pointed out that in letters to authorities, women vendors “used the prevailing ideology of the times to their advantage when petitioning city hall” and describing themselves “as vulnerable and helpless.”<sup>108</sup> While Marti has observed that women represented themselves as widows, petition letters in Puebla showed that women used a more ambiguous language. Many female vendors, especially those who were soliciting a vending permit, claimed that they were *mujeres solas*, women without anyone to help them economically.<sup>109</sup> The term “lonely women” suggests that they could be single mothers, spinsters, widows, or simply women without an extended family network in which they could rely on. It did not necessarily mean that they did not have a legal or a common law husband or were widows. It was up to authorities to interpret it.

What is clear is that female –and male- vendors sought to communicate that they were the heads of households--and that they were very poor, and sometimes they highlighted that they were old.<sup>110</sup> They also claimed that they had to support their young

---

<sup>107</sup> Letter from La Victoria marketers to Municipality, August 21, 1921, libro 674, file 80, p. 303-304, AMP. In 1921, authorities canceled such fee. Libro 688, file 223, p. 773.

<sup>108</sup> Judith E. Marti, “Nineteenth-Century Views of Women’s Participation in Mexico’s Markets”: 29, 37.

<sup>109</sup> Letter from Bernarda Aguilar to municipality, December 17, 1913, libro 544, expediente 8, letra C, p. 86; letter from Aurelia López to municipality, August 18, 1947; letter from Sra. Socorro Torres Huerta to municipality, November 5, 1947, volumen 1160, expediente 98, p. 206, 239, AMP.

<sup>110</sup> Letter from Margarita Cortés to Mayor, May 4, 1955, box 42, file 286-I; letter from Francisco Rodríguez Pacheco to Presidente municipal, August 22, 1960, box 42, file 99, AMP. They all said they were *ancianos* or *ancianas*. In 1955, Margarita Cortes said that instead of begging on the streets, she sold candy outside the Templo de las Capuchinas. She asked authorities not to relocate her because it was hard

children and other close family members like their elderly parents.<sup>111</sup> In 1946, a Teresa Nava asked authorities not to remove her stall because it was the only means she had to support her mother and her children.<sup>112</sup> Some letters were quite dramatic. In 1945, a Rita Zarate wrote a number of times asking the Mayor to let her sell on the street. Ms. Zarate said that “my condition of *mujer sola* forces me to work to support my six children. People know how much I suffer...please [let me sell] in the name of your little caring mother (*hágalo por su linda mamacita de usted*). I beg you, I am poor, sick and I have such a large family [to support].”<sup>113</sup>

Men also presented themselves as helpless. While in most cases, women described themselves as *mujeres solas*, male vendors emphasized their extreme economic hardships. In 1946, a Gregorio García petitioned a commercial license to sell sodas and dulces as an itinerant seller. He identified as *comerciante en pequeño y de condición de pobre*.<sup>114</sup> Another vendor stated that he was very poor and that he needed to support his large family. He said that he wished to install a semi-fixed stall because he was “*de recursos muy cortos*” and supported a large family.<sup>115</sup> Another one claimed that he was a

---

for her to be under the direct sun light. At the beginning of the 1950s, authorities had banned vendors outside churches. Primer Informe de Gobierno, Mayor Nicolás Vázquez, February 14, 1952, AMP.

<sup>111</sup> Even if not all women began *juicios de amparos*, it was very common that in their letters to authorities they emphasized the fact that they were mothers and *mujeres solas*. Women did this throughout the twentieth century. In 1919, a woman wanted to sell food on the street because it was an honest activity appropriate to *mujeres solas y desvalidas*. Letter from four female vendors to municipality, libro 630, file 345, p. 550, January 29, 1919. In 1987, a woman asks permission to sell candy because she had four daughters and her husband was an “irresponsible man” (*un irresponsable*). Letter from Dolores Arévalo to Governor Mariano Piña Olaya, September 18, 1987, box 42, file 9, AMP.

<sup>112</sup> Letter from Teresa Nava Mendoza to Mayor, April 17, 1946, volumen, 1141, file 93, p. 106; Amparo promovido por Carmen Molina, volumen 1128, file 315, p. 141, AMP.

<sup>113</sup> Letter from Rita Zarate to Mayor, July 21, 1945, volumen 1114, file 107, p. 506, AMP.

<sup>114</sup> Letter from Gregorio García to Mayor, August 2 1946, volumen 1141, file 97, p. 256, AMP.

<sup>115</sup> Letter from Rubén Ramírez to Mayor, January 9, 1947, volumen 1141, file 97, p. 293, AMP.



*pobre de solemnidad* and wanted to sell candy and sodas.<sup>116</sup> In short, female and male vendors emphasized their alleged poverty and asked authorities to reduce the fees, give them extra time to pay them, wave them, and provide commercial licenses.<sup>117</sup> Male and female vendors appealed to authorities using a vocabulary that exalted their good parenthood, (they all had to support their children), and their economic hardships (hardly anyone was well-off).

Street vendors put together all the rhetorical elements that could help them continue selling. Some vendors even alluded to their Mexican nationality to convince authorities that they had rights. In 1947, a Maria Moreno wrote to the Municipality saying that: “I am a very old woman with a large family to support. In order to face my humble condition (*mi humilde condición*), as I have always been poor, I was granted a permit to sell *tortas compuestas* and coffee in the evenings. I have been selling for the past nine years and I have punctually paid my license and fees for the use of space. Today I am writing to you because my stall, that I have earned honorably, is in danger. A man of Polish or Russian nationality, feeling entitled because he is a foreigner wants to remove us. He doesn’t take into account that our nation has generously granted him asylum... He thinks he has the right to remove us but he is not the owner of the public

---

<sup>116</sup> Letter from Francisco Canaliso to Mayor, August 17, 1946, volumen, 1141, file 97, p. 263, AMP.

<sup>117</sup> In her study of Mexico and Guadalajara vendors, Judith Marti found that “good will, mercy, and compassion are standard endings to the requests for both men and women.” “Nineteenth-Century Views of Women’s Participation in Mexico’s Markets”: 39. This practice continued throughout the twentieth-century. For example a Rita Zarate who ended her letter “I beg you in the name of your caring mother.” In 1995 a man asked authorities not to remove his stall because he was sick and poor and he ended saying “pido ayuda para que no me lo quiten.” Letter from Luis Aguilar Vázquez to Mayor Rafael Cañedo Benítez, November 6, 1995, box 40, file 23-1, AMP.

space, which belongs to the heroic Ayuntamiento.”<sup>118</sup> A shared national identity, this woman believed, may have softened the authorities’ attitudes.

When petitioning local authorities failed, sellers used a federal legal mechanism to defend their right to sell in public spaces. Street vendors utilized the *amparo* suit (*juicio de amparo*). The *amparo* suit was a legal procedure that people used to protect their rights against authorities’ actions that negatively damage individual’s rights. The Supreme Court was the institution that made the final decision about whether or not local authorities violated people’s rights. The *amparo* had its modern origins in articles 101 and 102 of the Mexican Constitution of 1857 and later in article 107 of the 1917 Constitution.<sup>119</sup> Contrary to earlier perceptions of Mexican legal scholars, since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, people from all social classes, not only the wealthy, used *amparos* to solve diverse offenses carried out by the state.<sup>120</sup>

Indeed, street vendors and marketers made extensive use of this mechanism in order to keep their business going. Vendors’ illiteracy did not deter them from making use of the legal system. In 1913, a female vendor of meats initiated a *juicio de amparo* because city authorities removed her from one plaza to another site that attracted fewer customers. She stated that Puebla’s government violated her individual rights because

---

<sup>118</sup> Letter from María Moreno to Presidente Municipal (in response to Aron Stolar Poltolarek’s case). March 17, 1947, volumen 1160, file 94, p. 71, AMP. In 1950, a group of butchers also referred themselves as “Mexicanos en pleno ejercicio de nuestros derechos, podemos dedicarnos a la profesión que mejor convenga a nuestros intereses...” letter from Raquel Herrera, Filiberto Ramírez, Tamy González, to Presidente Municipal, March 8, 1950, volumen 1375, p. 372, AMP.

<sup>119</sup> María José Rhi Sausi Garavito, “Las primeras tres décadas del juicio de amparo: notas entorno a la percepción pública de un nuevo instrumento jurídico,” in Sacristán, Cristina y Pablo Piccato, eds. *Actores, espacios y debates en la esfera pública de la Cd. de México* (México: Instituto Mora, 2005): 123.

<sup>120</sup> The first group of common people who began using *amparos* were mothers who wanted to recover their children who had been drafted for the war and merchants. Sausi Garavito, “Las primeras tres décadas del juicio de amparo”: 138-39.

the removal was a violation of article 16 of the 1857 Federal Constitution. “My business is my only patrimony and being removed is the equivalent of losing my property in benefit of the Municipality.”<sup>121</sup> In 1948, a street vendor of fruit declared that for eighteen years she had a stall on the street but the mayor, and other city officials removed her from the street. Ms. Luz Andrade also stated that authorities violated her constitutional rights by impeding her from “working honestly and causing an economic disaster without any justification.” After all, her stall was the only means she could support her family and her children’s education.<sup>122</sup>

The *juicio de amparo* did not guarantee that vendors would be able to sell their products on the streets. The process could be long and, at the end, the Federal Supreme Court could deny vendors the protection of the federal justice against local authorities. A 1952 *amparo* suit exemplifies the intricacies and length of this legal mechanism. In March 1952, a group of three women and one man began an *amparo* suit against Puebla’s mayor and two other city officials. These vendors sought to sell *aguamiel*, the nutritious maguey sap, at a semi-fixed stall on a street near La Victoria market. The sellers asked the city government to give them a commercial license to do so. Authorities denied the license claiming that “the selling of *aguamiel* was a dangerous practice at work places, which resulted in pitiful accidents.”<sup>123</sup> Authorities considered that *aguamiel* was an alcoholic beverage.

---

<sup>121</sup> Letter from Faustina Cerón to the Municipality, June 22, 1913, Comisión de Mercados, expediente 8C, AMP.

<sup>122</sup> Letter from Luz Andrade to Municipal Authorities, June 25, 1948, Volumen 1377, file 7, p. 93, AMP.

<sup>123</sup> Juicio de Amparo No. 97/952, March 15, 1952, Juana Torres y Coagraviadas vs. Presidente Municipal Constitucional, Secretario General del Ayuntamiento, y Jefe de Impuestos y Reglamentos, Poder Judicial, Archivo Judicial de Puebla (hereafter, AJP).

In order to earn their living, in 1952, the aguamiel vendors decided to challenge authorities' denial of the commercial license through an amparo. At least two of the women, Josefa Avila, 65 years old, and Alfonsa Sastre, 40 years old, did not know how to write and sign their names. Despite their illiteracy, they delegated Juana Torres, the third female vendor, to represent them. Evidently this small group of vendors had a lawyer who took their case. The vendors claimed that city authorities were violating their right to make a living because the selling of aguamiel was legal (*licita*) and it did not violate any law or endangered the city's *buenas costumbres*. In fact, they added, in Puebla there were many shops and stalls that sold aguamiel, pulque, and other alcoholic beverages. They would not be the only ones or the first ones selling this product. The sellers also claimed that city officials violated articles, 4, 14, and 16 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution by not granting them the license. After all, Article 4 stated that nobody could be prevented from engaging in the profession, industrial or commercial pursuit, or occupation of his choice, provided it was lawful.<sup>124</sup> Vendors emphasized that their product was legal, was not an alcoholic beverage, and the stall was far away from a work place.<sup>125</sup>

In a more sophisticated fashion, the sellers' lawyer found additional arguments to prove that city officials violated street vendors' right. Although it seemed that street vendors were about to win the case, in June 1952, the Supreme Court of Justice denied vendors the protection of the federal justice. They ruled in favor of city authorities. After their engagement in legal matters during three months, the vendors could not sell

---

<sup>124</sup> Article 4, Chapter 1, Title 1, Mexican Constitution of 1917.

<sup>125</sup> Juicio de Amparo No. 97/952, March 15, 1952, AJP.

their product, at least legally. It is possible that the vendors sold aguamiel without the commercial license thereafter. Most importantly, this case shows that federal authorities defended local authorities, not the people they were supposed to defend.<sup>126</sup>

In June 1970 a number of street vendors sought the protection of the federal justice after municipal authorities, under the leadership of Mayor Carlos J. Arruti, decided to remove them the year before.<sup>127</sup> In March 1969, Mayor Arruti carried out the removal of vendors because they caused “a lot of traffic and were a risk to pedestrians.”<sup>128</sup> Although in the 1970 case, the Supreme Court granted *amparos* to some of the vendors and they returned to the streets, another campaign against vendors began immediately after, from August to September of 1970. Despite having the *amparos* in their hands, street vendors faced the harassment and threats of the police, fee collectors and the Agrupación de Locatarios libres del Estado de Puebla, one of the unions that represented marketers at La Victoria. These established marketers in this union had stated that they would collaborate with authorities to remove vendors from the streets.<sup>129</sup> Authorities arrested vendors, confiscated their merchandise, and sent police to guard the streets.

---

<sup>126</sup> In 1959, Mayor Rafael Artasánchez with the aid of the Cámara Nacional de Comercio de Puebla, “happily” removed street vendors from the downtown. Street vendors began *juicios de amparos* but the Federal Supreme Court denied the protection. Tercer Informe de Gobierno, Rafael Artasánchez, 1960, Sección “Administración General de Mercados,” AMP.

<sup>127</sup> Box 42, file 5, June 10, 1970, AMP.

<sup>128</sup> Letter from Secretario General del Ayuntamiento to Director General de Tránsito, March 4, 1969, box 42, file 319, AMP.

<sup>129</sup> Carta de la Agrupación de Locatarios Libres del Estado de Puebla, Benito Juárez, June 3, 1970, AMP.

## Conclusion

Despite established business owners' complaints and the pressure they exercised on municipal authorities, street vendors were defiant; they continued selling their products on the streets. On many occasions, officials tolerated vendors. After all, the Administrador de Mercados and fee collectors benefited from the fees that peddlers paid for the use of space and for the money to obtain vending permits. Street vendors also were able to secure a relatively loyal clientele that kept them doing businesses. On several occasions, authorities also denied vendors their right to sell in public areas. And many times, authorities temporarily removed them from the street and confiscated their merchandise. Street vendors, however, were active in defending their rights. Individually or in small groups, they petitioned authorities and sought the legal protection of the federal government. But street vendors did not have peace of mind. They did not have the assurance to continue vending for long periods of time. They constantly feared being removed and losing their only source of making a living. Tired and disillusioned, by the beginning of the 1970s, street vendors thought of getting together and organizing. The next two chapters explore how vendors organized an independent union.

## Chapter 2

### **Taking Children to Work: Vendors' Labors on the Streets.**

This chapter outlines the different kinds of paid and unpaid labor that female street vendors performed in the city of Puebla in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Female vendors simultaneously engaged in productive and reproductive labor on streets, plazas, and marketplaces in Puebla's downtown. Women represented a large percentage of the informal vendor population, and they carried out different kinds of work in public spaces. Working side by side and facing similar challenges, including various expressions of state repression, female vendors relied on each other for help and support. As a result of these types of labors and numerous street dangers that threatened their livelihood and their physical well being, female vendors created bonds of solidarity with one another while on the job.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Political scientist Walter K. Vanderbush, suggests that unlike factory workers, Puebla's street vendors were unsuccessful in developing bonds of solidarity, see his "Independent Organizing in Puebla, Mexico, 1961-1992: Social Movements, the Struggle for Autonomy, and Democratization" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1993): 227. In an impressive and classic work on street vendors in Lima, Peru, Ximena Bunster notes that female street vendors did not have the time to get involved in political activities or develop ties with coworkers due to the fact that they work in isolation. Ximena Bunster and Elsa M. Chaney, *Sellers and Servants: Working Women in Lima, Peru* (New York: Praeger, 1985): 117. More recently, Linda Seligmann has noted that it has been easier for marketers to organize and mobilize than it has been for itinerant vendors. Linda J. Seligmann, "Introduction: Mediating Identities and Marketing Wares," in *Women Traders in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed., Linda Seligmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001): 14. Puebla's female street vendors worked in the downtown area in close proximity to each other, even if they did not always have stalls in markets, sharing common problems that allowed them to organize. As Temma Kaplan noted "physical proximity –such as occurs in plazas, wash houses, markets, church entries, beauty parlors, and even female jails – contributes to the power of female community. These loose networks facilitate the tight bonds that exhibit their strength in times of collective action." Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918," *Signs* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1982): 547. Johanna Lessinger has argued that cooperation among traders is likely to happen because the build upon social ties (kinship, friendships) and because they work together "cheek by jowl" under difficult circumstances. J.Lessinger, "Nobody Here to Yell at Me": Political

Solidarity among female vendors was crucial, as it helped them form a militant vendor organization at the beginning of the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> The organization, the Unión Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes (UPVA), assisted them as vendors and mothers as the UPVA demanded safety for sellers and their offspring.<sup>3</sup> The UPVA remained strong throughout the 1980s and 1990s, becoming one of the most militant and independent street vendors' organizations in Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Female vendors were instrumental in the creation and maintenance of this combative 10,000-member organization.

Over the past two decades, labor historians of Latin America have paid considerable attention to women's labor force participation and gender roles. Most historians have explored industrial workers, miners, female and male textile workers, meat packers, and oil industry workers.<sup>5</sup> Few historians, however, have looked at the labor of street vendors, a sizable part of Mexico's economy. Unlike wage laborers, itinerant sellers had greater control over their lives and did not face demanding supervisors and rigid schedules. But it was hardly easy work. While they enjoyed greater independence than most other workers, they often faced considerable financial

---

Activism Among Petty Retail Traders in and Indian City, in *Markets and Marketing*, Stuart Plattner, ed. (Lanham, University Press of America, 1985):313-314, 322-323.

<sup>2</sup> The independent organization of vendors in the early 1970s coincided with the height of student political activism in the city of Puebla, allowing vendors and students to form alliances that strengthen their organizations.

<sup>3</sup> Friendships and mutual help were important for political activities and for moral and economic support when vendors faced accidents and tragedies. As chapter 5 will discuss, one of the female vendors in the downtown area relied on other women to try finding her 'lost' son.

<sup>4</sup> For a history of the UPVA to the mid-1980s see Jaime Castillo Palma, "El movimiento urbano popular en Puebla," in *Los Movimientos Sociales en Puebla*, ed. Jaime Castillo (Puebla: DIAU, ICAUP, 1986): 219-61.

<sup>5</sup> See among others John French and Daniel James, ed. *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: from Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Thomas M. Kublock, *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile's El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904-1951* (Durham: Duke University Press 1998); Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Ann Farnsworth, *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) and Elizabeth Hutchison, *Labors Appropriate to their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900-1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).



hardships. Unlike domestic or factory workers, street vendors did not benefit from the comfort of regular paychecks.

Although vendors did not face strict shop floor rules in factories, they nevertheless confronted other authority figures, many of whom wanted to remove vendors from the streets. Indeed, several historians have noted intense conflicts over space. We know much, for example, about the Porfirian elite's attempts to regulate what they believed was the proper use of public space. A number of scholars have challenged the idea that elites' projects of modernization and beautification went undisputed or totally rejected by the masses. For instance, Pablo Piccato has showed how street sellers and other poor urban dwellers subverted the ideal Porfirian city by using public spaces for their own economic interests.<sup>6</sup> Focusing on female vendors, anthropologist Judith E. Marti has shown how sellers manipulated language in their petitions to authorities as they presented themselves as vulnerable women in order to reduce the fees they paid to the city. In other cases, women demonstrated their shrewdness and knowledge to officials.<sup>7</sup> Placing gender at the center of her analysis, Susie S. Porter argues that female sellers challenged authorities' projects of removal by rejecting the elites' link between vendors' questionable sexual morality and their legal rights.<sup>8</sup> Moving away from an oppression/resistance dichotomy, Christina M. Jiménez argues that street vendors and

---

<sup>6</sup> Pablo Piccato, "Urbanistas, Ambulantes and Mendigos: The Dispute for Urban Space in Mexico City, 1890-1930," in *Reconstructing Criminality in Latin America*, eds. Carlos A. Aguirre and Robert Buffington (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Judith E. Marti, "Nineteenth-Century Views of Women's Participation in Mexico's Markets," in *Women Traders in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed., Linda Seligmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) and "Breadwinners and Decision Makers: Nineteenth Century Mexican Women Vendors," in *The Other Fifty Percent: Multicultural Perspectives on Gender Relations*, ed. Mari Womack and Judith E. Marti (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Susie S. Porter, *Working Women of Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003).

other sectors of Morelia's society negotiated with authorities' modernization projects and "made the city their own" based on nineteenth-century liberal ideas about citizenship. Vendors insisted that they could sell in public spaces based on their constitutional right to engage in free trade.<sup>9</sup> Focusing on the second half of the twentieth century John Cross and Gary I. Gordon have studied Mexico City's street vending organizations, stressing the ways in which the ruling party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), has co-opted these organizations. Both authors argue that street vendors were active political actors who were able to challenge state's policy toward the informal economy.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the large numbers of vendors and other informal workers, which include women and children, we know very little about their day-to-day labor, both commercial and reproductive. Inspired by historian Eileen Boris's definition of "women's labors," I look at the paid and unpaid work that female vendors completed on the streets, paying attention to both their productive and reproductive activities.<sup>11</sup> These public spaces became the workplace and the home for women and their children. Whereas male sellers treated the streets and markets as merely workplaces, women approached such spaces as the sites where they fed, entertained, trained, and cared for their children. In fact, there were no rules prohibiting women from bringing their children to work; this allowed mothers to take care of their children while vending. However, city authorities sought to

---

<sup>9</sup> Christina M. Jiménez, "Making the City Their Own: Popular Groups and Political Culture in Morelia, Mexico, 1880 to 1930" (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2001) and "Performing their right to the city: political uses of public space in a Mexican city, 1880-1910s," *Urban History* 33, no. 3 (2006).

<sup>10</sup> Gary I. Gordon, "Peddlers, Pesos, and Power: The Political Economy of Street Vending in Mexico City" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1997) and John C. Cross, *Informal Politics: Street Vendors and the State in Mexico City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). Retaking their interest in the informal economy, a group of scholars have recently stressed that informal economic actors are not apolitical. Fernández-Kelly, Patricia, ed., *Out of the Shadows: Political Action and Informal Economy in Latin America* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Eileen Boris has stressed the importance of looking at reproductive labor as a central part of women's different kinds of labor, "Editor's Note," *Journal of Women's History*, 15, no. 4 (2004): 6.

control public spaces and engaged in violent campaigns to eliminate vendors. For vendors and their children, the streets were dangerous places.

Vendors spent most of their days selling their merchandise in crowded street markets in the center of the city. They worked long hours under harsh conditions with little financial compensation, and many labored for hours under the sun, on busy streets, surrounded by passing cars and buses. Their success as vendors usually depended on the labor of family members, especially their children.

Most of Puebla's vendors were a mixture of unemployed people from the city and the countryside. In an effort to improve their economic conditions, thousands of rural Mexicans migrated to urban state capitals, including Puebla, in search of employment. This migration was part of a larger process occurring in Mexico in the 1960s. By the mid-1960s, people arrived from towns all over the state, especially from the economically depressed Mixteca Poblana in the southern part of the state.<sup>12</sup> Puebla also attracted financially-desperate people from the neighboring states of Tlaxcala, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Veracruz. Most were illiterate and poor and had few employment options. The vast majority of rural women found jobs as domestic servants, but for those with children,

---

<sup>12</sup> At the end of the 1960s, migrants from the Puebla-Oaxaca-Guerrero Mixteca ventured to the US-Mexican border to work as vendors. Carmen Martínez Novo, "The 'Culture' of Exclusion: Representations of Indigenous Women Street Vendors in Tijuana, Mexico," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 22, no. 3 (2003): 251.

securing this kind of job was difficult. Traditionally, employers preferred childless women.<sup>13</sup>

For women with children, street vending was one of the few employment options. The informal nature of this type of commercial activity had numerous advantages. First, lack of regulations for those laboring on the streets allowed women, who could not afford childcare, to take their offspring with them.<sup>14</sup> Even if itinerant vendors sold inside markets, in special areas assigned to temporary vendors, they faced no formal rules preventing this practice.<sup>15</sup> Second, entry costs were low because street vendors did not require large amounts of cash to begin their businesses. With a small amount of money, people could buy products, sell them, and immediately build up their trading capital (*puntero*). More importantly, many women, especially single mothers, had control over their modest earnings, which enabled them to cover the expenses associated with raising

---

<sup>13</sup> Lourdes Arizpe, "Women in the Informal Sector: The Case of Mexico City," *Signs* 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1977): 34-35. Ann S. Blum noted that employers preferred childless women to work as domestics, see "Cleaning the Revolutionary Household: Domestic Servants and Public Welfare in Mexico City, 1900-1935," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 70-73, 78. The same trend did not seem to have changed for the later part of the twentieth century.

<sup>14</sup> Some scholars and newspaper writers have suggested that women, especially indigenous women who migrated to urban areas, "preferred" to keep their children with them as they work to gain people's sympathy. Whether this is a preference or not, it is possible that these women did not have the means to leave their children under the care of someone else. Lourdes Arizpe, *Indígenas en la ciudad de México: el caso de las Marias* (México:SEP/Diana, 1979): 138. For a critique of writers who have made cultural claims to explain why women take their children to work see Carmen Martínez Novo, "The 'Culture' of Exclusion."

<sup>15</sup> Street vending was partially regulated by the city council through a series of *reglamentos*. The *reglamento* that authorities used until 1986 was the one of 4 Aug. 1936 and it had no provisions that prohibited child labor. *Reglamentos*, Tomo 40, foja 79, AMP. There were other occupations where women could also bring their children. Silvia Arrom, for example, has documented that some working-class women could take their children to their workplaces. She suggests that in the late eighteenth century, state paternalism decrease the conflict between reproductive and productive labor among tobacco workers. See Silvia Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1830* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985): 180.

their family. In some cases, they earned enough money to send their children to school. For women, street vending had both parental and economic advantages.<sup>16</sup>

Women made up a large percentage of the vendor population. A 1969 census taken by the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, showed that out of 228 street vendors listed in downtown Puebla, 117 were women, (51 percent).<sup>17</sup> While a 1979 city government report noted that more than 55 percent were males, photographic evidence in newspapers and archives illustrate the overwhelming presence of female vendors.<sup>18</sup> In oral interviews, women have stated that many female vendors did not register their stalls under their name, preferring to register them under their husbands' names, even if the husbands did no work.<sup>19</sup>

### Commercial Labor

Street vendors were a heterogeneous group. Vendors ranged from hawkers on streets and aisles of markets (aka *toreros*) to those who had semi-fixed stalls on sidewalks. There were some vendors who sold every day of the week; others sold certain

---

<sup>16</sup>Scholars have found that in other parts of Latin America women become vendors because the marketplace is one of the few places where they can also maintain their indigenous identity. Lynn Sikkink, "Traditional Medicines in the Marketplace: Identity and Ethnicity Among Female Vendors," in *Women Traders in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Linda Seligmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001): 216

<sup>17</sup>Census, 1969, Agrupación de Comerciantes en Pequeño Fijos, Semi-fijos y Ambulantes, FROC-CROC, box 42, file 319, AMP.

<sup>18</sup>Raúl Iragorri, *Diagnóstico del ambulantismo y sus posibles soluciones*, 55. For visual evidence see "Mercados" photographic collection (hemeroteca), AMP and newspapers, especially *El Sol de Puebla*, Hemeroteca Juan Nepomuceno (hereafter, HJN).

<sup>19</sup>Women leaders tried to convince female vendors to stop this practice and use their own name. Yolanda Gómez, a long-time vendor and leader of *ambulantes*, remembers telling other women, "If the police officers come and seize your merchandise and beat people, who are they going to beat, you or your husband? Who is going to end up in prison, you or your husband?" Eventually more and more women used their own names to register their stalls. Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, March 17, 2007, Puebla, México.

days, and a small number who only worked during major civic and religious holidays (*vendedores temporales*). They all worked long hours. They usually began at the break of dawn and ended at night.

All vendors, men and women, sold a variety of products: live animals, fruits and vegetables, flowers, prepared food, toys, notions, and clothes.<sup>20</sup> In the case of prepared food, women made up the majority of vendors.<sup>21</sup> Depending on their business skills and capital, vendors complemented their regular merchandise with seasonal manufactured products that they usually bought in Mexico City. For instance, during the Christmas season, vendors sold decorative items and toys; in September, they sold Mexican flags; prior to Days of the Dead, they sold *copal* (incense) and *sahumerios* (special braziers to burn the incense). Not all vendors bought merchandise from wholesalers and producers; some, especially those who traveled every day to Puebla from small towns in the countryside (*vendedores propios*), brought their own products to sell. Many women brought flowers, *nopales* (prickly pears), peaches, apples, figs, and fresh hand-made tortillas from their communities. They usually brought their merchandise in large baskets. Sometimes they wrapped them in their *rebozos* (shawls) around their backs. Others put their baskets on top of their heads. Women vendors of tortillas were the most common vendors who arrived to the city during the day, sold their tortillas, and went back to their towns.

---

<sup>20</sup> For a description of the wide variety of vendors since colonial times, see Gustavo Gutiérrez de Hoyos, “Comercio callejero en el centro histórico capitalino: el caso de la organización de artesanos y vendedores del centro, de lo formal a lo informal,” (Tesis de Licenciatura en Antropología, UAM-Iztapalapa: 1997): Chapter 2-3.

<sup>21</sup> In all lists of vendors that included the products they sold, women were the majority of those who sold prepared food such as tortillas, *chalupas*, tamales, atole, and tortas. Expedientes de Mercados, AMP.

Some vendors also produced their own merchandise. Gaudencia Martínez, a former janitor, and her husband have sold market bags (*bolsas de mandado*) for thirty years. In the mid-1970s, Mr. Martínez bought the bags from a wholesaler and sold them downtown. One day, his wife, Gaudencia, realized that it was more cost efficient to make them at home. They purchased a used industrial sewing machine, bought the plastic, handles, needles, and threads. Gaudencia learned to make the bags, which she then sold.<sup>22</sup> Two indigenous carpenters from the poverty stricken municipality of Soledad Atzompa, Veracruz wandered the streets of Puebla selling their homemade wooden chairs. They typically walked throughout the state and city carrying the chairs in dollies.<sup>23</sup> Others produced labor-intensive products. Women usually sewed and embroidered table and kitchen cloths. This was a hand-craft that they made during less busy commercial periods. Yolanda Gómez, a former street vendors' leader and vendor, always set aside money to buy fabric and threads to sew kitchen cloths. Once finished, she sold them and complemented her sales.<sup>24</sup> In order to survive and bring food to their tables, people used all their skills to make products to sell.

Most vendors bought merchandise in bulk from wholesalers or producers. In many instances, spoiled products got mixed with fresh produce, forcing vendors to sort them out before displaying them. A typical vendor was a multi-tasker, spending hours peeling dozens of onions or making bunches of radishes, beets, onions, cilantro, parsley, and other herbs while standing or sitting behind her stall waiting for customers.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Gaudencia Martínez, interview by author, August 20, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>23</sup> Box 42, file 12, letter to Municipal President from Fidencio Romero Tobón, June 6, 1995, AMP.

<sup>24</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, August 28, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>25</sup> Paula Maldonado, interview with author, notes, April 25, 2007, Puebla, Mexico. Anthropologist Florence Babb has correctly pointed out that market women's work should be considered as productive

Vendors unpeeled, sliced, and added chile powder, lime juice, and salt (*fruta con chile, limón y sal*) to them to attract customers' appetites. This was especially successful around primary and secondary schools where thirsty and hungry kids gathered at the end of the school day.<sup>26</sup> Street vendors also chopped and peeled various vegetables, such as carrots, peas, green beans and corn. They mixed them in equal quantities, and placed them in small plastic bags. This extra work added monetary value to their merchandise. Busy female customers preferred to buy this fresh and ready-to cook vegetables which saved them a considerable amount of time. Among fierce competition, sellers knew that cleaning vegetables and adding some value to them was a marketing strategy and a necessity.

In order to sell their merchandise, street vendors, like all savvy economic actors, looked for ideal selling locations where they would encounter the largest number of potential customers. Usually the best areas were the streets surrounding markets, bus stations, schools, churches, and government buildings. Until 1986, two large marketplaces, a number of bus stations, Puebla's State University, state offices, and specialty shops were all concentrated in downtown. Downtown was the most economically rewarding commercial space and it became the most contested space for

---

labor. On top of cleaning, sorting, preserving merchandise, they also add value to the goods they sell, especially prepared food. Florence Babb, *Between the Field and the Cooking Pot: The Political Economy of Marketwomen in Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998): 180

<sup>26</sup> Unlike the US system, in Mexico there is no in-school feeding. Children bring their own light lunch, snacks, and occasionally some money to buy from street vendors or established *tienditas*. For food habits in South East Asia and Africa see, Irene Tinker, *Street Foods: Urban Food and Employment in Developing Countries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).



vendors.<sup>27</sup> Street vendors also worked on major street intersections, near traffic lights, bus stops, and outside hospitals and factories.<sup>28</sup>

Laboring on the streets was not easy. Male and female street vendors often faced a number of obstacles that included bad weather and crowded places.<sup>29</sup> Certain times of the year were especially difficult. During the summer rainy season, for example, vendors brought plastics to cover themselves, their children, and their merchandise from the intense rain that in many instances included hail. In the winter months of December and January, vendors coped with cold days, which in Puebla City reached the lower 30s Fahrenheit. February and March were famous for their windy afternoons that forced vendors to tightly secure their stalls to electricity posts, lamp posts, traffic lights, or to large stones on the ground. During the rest of the year, penetrating sun rays forced vendors to find ways to keep themselves cool. Women wore their *rebozos* folded on top of their head and men wore sombreros to avoid intensive sun. Resourceful vendors set up temporary roofs or shades made out of recycled plastic or fabric. Those who slept on the streets to guard their selling spots were forced to endure cold nights. For mothers who brought their children, bad weather was even more vexing. For most, it was hard to make any money during bad-weather or stormy days.<sup>30</sup>

Lack of space on sidewalks made them sit in uncomfortable positions, kneel on the ground, stand behind their stalls, or walk for hours on the streets with heavy amounts of merchandise. But many made the best of their situation. Gaudencia Martínez, former

---

<sup>27</sup> Gareth Jones and Ann Varley, "The Contest for the City Centre: Street Traders versus Buildings," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 13, no. 1 (1994).

<sup>28</sup> Urban planner Irene Tinker calls "invisible vendors" to those who do not sell their products in visible stands, shops or carts Irene Tinker, *Street Foods*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> In a letter written to Director General de Tránsito, a group of vendors mentioned how they endured "las inclemencias del tiempo," box 42, file 286-1, 15 Sept. 1955, AMP.

<sup>30</sup> Anonymous vendor, interview by author, notes, August 25, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

janitor and bag vendor, worked for twenty years on the aisles of one of Puebla's markets. Lacking a fixed stall, she walked all day in search of customers. Like hundreds of others, she used her own body as her stand, placing all the bags' handles along her arms. She would energetically display her colorful self-made items to potential customers. At the end of the day, Gaudencia's feet were swollen and her arms' skin slightly irritated after carrying the bags.<sup>31</sup>

Besides natural obstacles, vendors worried about dangers on the streets, including unruly drivers, municipal inspectors, thieves, established business owners, and the police. In a city where the population reached over half a million in 1971,<sup>32</sup> and where the number of automobiles and buses increased rapidly, the possibility of getting hit by a car or bus increased.<sup>33</sup> While the government and urban planners worried about the safety of consumers,<sup>34</sup> street sellers worried about themselves, their merchandise, and especially their children. Some confronted drivers. The current president of the Ricardo Flores Magón Vendors Organization, a longtime vendor, and mother of five children, Paula Javier, engaged in many fights with bus drivers while she sold goods. She claimed that these unruly drivers broke stalls apart, and falling merchandise injured vendors'

---

<sup>31</sup> Gaudencia Martínez, interview by author, August 20, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>32</sup> In 1971, Puebla was the fourth largest city in Mexico with 532,774 people. In 1980, it had 835,759; in 1990, 1,815,095. Miguel Villa and Jorge Rodríguez, "Demographic Trends in Latin America's metropolises, 1950-1990," in *The Mega-City in Latin America*, ed. Gilbert Alan (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1996): 31.

<sup>33</sup> The presence of vendors preoccupied authorities and drivers since the early 1930s. See, for example, letter to the Mayor from Compañía de Choferes and Jefe del Departamento de Tránsito, volume 843, file 856 and 407, 1931-1932, AMP.

<sup>34</sup> *El Sol de Puebla*, March 7, 1971, HJN.

children.<sup>35</sup> She was right to get upset as accidents happened. On July 21, 1977, a vendor's son was hit by a truck carrying bottles of spring water; he ended up in the hospital.<sup>36</sup>

Vendors were especially troubled by city inspectors and fee collectors. On many occasions, inspectors prevented vendors from setting-up their stalls and often seized the merchandise of all of those who refused to abandon the streets. Street vendors regularly paid fees to market authorities (*administración de mercados*) to obtain vending permits. In addition, they paid a daily quota to municipal fee collectors. Fee collectors were known among sellers for their corrupt practices, often charging multiple fees. They usually charged vendors twice a day; once in the morning and once in the evening. They typically pocketed the extra money.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Paula Javier, interview by author, January 25, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>36</sup> Departamento Federal de Seguridad, Expediente 100-19-1-77, legajo 58, page 37 and 41, July 21 and 22, 1977, Archivo General de la Nación, (hereafter AGN).

<sup>37</sup> Letter to President Luis Echeverría Álvarez from vendors of Mercado Popular Emiliano Zapata, 7 May 1973, box 46, file 1, AMP.



Fee collector, Administración Cué Merlo 1975-1978, AMP.

Fee collectors and inspectors were especially insensitive and abusive with street vendors and marketers from the countryside. They often charged them extra fees for the products they brought to Puebla. Many vendors complained that these fees were similar to the outdated *alcabalas*.<sup>38</sup> If they refused to pay, however, inspectors typically seized their merchandise or any personal objects that they carried. These vendors were often stripped of their shawls, the coversheets that they used to sleep at night, their money, and their products. A female vendor complained that it was disgraceful that city authorities collected so many fees to *ambulantes*. In a 1962 letter, she stated that the government in

---

<sup>38</sup> Letter from La Victoria marketers to Municipality, August 21, 1921, libro 674, file 80, p. 303-304, AMP.

the city of Puebla was a shame to the Mexican Revolution and that authorities did not care about the *campesinos*' dignity.<sup>39</sup> Indeed municipal officials showed no compassion for this vulnerable and economically depressed population.

In order to maintain cordial relations with fee collectors and inspectors, vendors frequently gave authorities "gifts." For instance, union leader Yolanda Gómez gave bananas or oranges or whatever seasonal fruit she sold to the inspectors. By offering these "gifts," Gómez sought to maintain good relations with these often abusive officials. She hoped that they remembered her kind behavior when they decided to collect extra fees or when they received orders from city authorities to remove vendors from the streets. Yolanda, a working mother with her child, hoped that inspectors would be relatively gentle when they removed sellers.<sup>40</sup>

In crowded streets, it was common for petty thieves to victimize customers and vendors. The streets surrounding markets were paradise for pickpockets.<sup>41</sup> Vendors had to keep a vigilant eye on their products, money, and their customers' safety. While thieves negatively affected vendors' peace of mind, these petty criminals were a minor annoyance compared to inspectors and fee collectors.

Inspectors, unruly drivers, and thieves were not the only sources of anxiety. Shopkeepers and homeowners also posed a challenge to street vendors and their families. Established merchants perceived vendors as annoying competitors with little understanding of business, who often took customers away. They often sent letters to municipal authorities, bitterly complaining about the vendors' failure to pay taxes and

---

<sup>39</sup> Letter to the Mayor from vendor Antonia Mendoza, June 22, 1962, box 42, file 99, AMP.

<sup>40</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, March 17, 2007, Puebla, Mexico

<sup>41</sup> *El Sol de Puebla*, January 9, 1972, p. 3, HJN.

unfairly low prices. Other merchants protested against vendors who blocked their storefronts.

While established storeowners were frustrated by the economic competition, homeowners believed street vendors posed a moral threat. They grumbled that sellers dirtied the streets and the external walls of their properties. A blunt complaint came from a well-off widow, María del Carmen Teyssier, who was constantly bothered by vendors' presence. She claimed that their offspring defecated outside her house; she was also upset that vendors dumped peels of fruits and vegetables on the street. She was bitter because she could not open the windows of her home due to the stench.<sup>42</sup>

It was the police whom the vendors most feared. When authorities decided to remove vendors, police carried out the policies. Police beat and arrested vendors and seized their merchandise. In extreme cases, police officers killed vendors who resisted their removal.

### Reproductive labor

While female and male vendors faced some of the same obstacles on the streets and engaged in similar types of commercial activities, only women vendors completed reproductive labor and this resulted in unique challenges. Unlike their male counterparts, female vendors engaged in productive and reproductive labor simultaneously. Many single mothers lacking the sort of childcare that middle class Mexicans enjoyed had no

---

<sup>42</sup> Expedientes de Mercados, volumen 1141, file 93, p. 121, August 12, 1946, AMP.

other option but to bring their children, especially the very young ones, with them to work.

Female street vendors, like other working class women, labored hard at home and on the streets. While at home, they prepared food, washed clothes and dishes, and fed children. They regularly woke up at four in the morning to hand-wash clothes; they did not enjoy the comfort and convenience of domestic appliances. For financial reasons, stoves, refrigerators, and washing machines were out of reach. Household chores were labor intensive and time consuming. Hand-washing, as historian Katharine French-Fuller has pointed out, was a backbreaking form of labor and a multi-step process that required considerable amounts of time and physical energy.<sup>43</sup>

While some vendors lived in downtown tenements, others lived on the outskirts of the city and lacked all basic services. Many lived on dirt roads, without access to water and electricity. Several women talked about this difficulty. Some, like Gabina Reyes, a long-time street vendor and mother of six children, squatted on an unused lot of land that belonged to her well-off *comadre*. When Gabina and her family arrived at the lot, she began building a room, using a few bricks, recyclables, and plastics. Gabina also had to carry water from a long distance.<sup>44</sup> Domestic duties were very labor intensive. Among her modest belongings, she had an old stove to cook, which turned all her pots completely black. When she left to sell on the street, she hid the pots in holes on the ground as she had no furniture or shelves. Furthermore, her house was unsafe; anyone

---

<sup>43</sup> Katharine French-Fuller, "Gendered Invisibility, Respectable Cleanliness: The Impact of the Washing Machine on Daily Living in Post-1950 Santiago, Chile," *Journal of Women's History*, 18, no. 4 (2006): 79-82.

<sup>44</sup> For a study of water and gender see Vivienne Bennett, *Opposing Currents: The Politics of Water and Gender in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2005)

could get in, and in interviews she described feeling fearful that someone would steal her kitchen utensils while she was working.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike many middle and upper class women, street vendors could not afford to employ maids or nannies. Rather, they relied on family networks to help with their household duties. Mothers, older children, and occasionally their husbands or partners all assisted. But free labor from family members though essential was not always available.

<sup>46</sup> When immediate family members were absent, working class women sought help from extended family members, friends and neighbors. They did not pay money to *comadres*, cousins, and in-laws for their services. Child supporters realized that many returned favors. Indeed, beneficiaries reciprocated: they took care of other people's offspring when necessary.

Despite state rhetoric that emphasized the important role that mothers played in educating and creating healthy children,<sup>47</sup> street vendors received little institutional support from the government. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the city government built four day care centers for the children of marketers and municipal employees.<sup>48</sup> Although the day care centers were located at four city markets, few street vendors could

---

<sup>45</sup>Mario Bautista (pseudonym), interview by author, notes, December 25, 2006, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>46</sup> While Mexican women relied on their own mothers, Christian Zolniski mentions that in Mexican-American communities, husbands take over some of the domestic activities while women work as vendors. Christian Zolniski, *Janitors, Street Vendors, and Activists: The Lives of Mexican Immigrants in Silicon Valley* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006): 81.

<sup>47</sup> During the 1920s and 30s, social reformers, including newspaper writers and government officials suggested opening day care centers to help working-class families. See Sarah A. Buck, "Activists and Mothers: Feminist and Maternalist Politics in Mexico, 1923-1953" (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2002): 239-40. In Mexico City, as early as 1887, the privately funded *Casa Amiga de la Obrera* offered daycare services for working mothers; see Ann S. Blum, "Conspicuous Benevolence: Liberalism, Public Welfare, and Private Charity in Porfirian Mexico, 1877-1910," *The Americas* 58, no. 4 (2001): 23, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Segundo Informe de Gobierno de la Administración del Dr. Rafael Artasánchez Romero, February 14, 1959, p. 13, AMP.



register their children and pay the daily rate. At La Victoria market, one of the two busiest markets in the heart of the city, 25 percent of the registered children were the sons or daughters of street vendors, and at the Cinco de Mayo market, the other downtown market, 31 percent were children of street vendors. On a daily basis, however, only 50 percent to 60 percent of the enrolled children attended day care.<sup>49</sup>

Street vendors' routine was disrupted when children got very sick or severely hurt. In cases of severe illnesses, women were forced to stop vending; child care facilities did not care for sick children. Sickness meant waiting long hours in public hospitals, finding medicine, or looking for healers and herbs. Such situations created financial hardships. Under these circumstances, street vendors relied, once more, on their family members.

Once women completed domestic chores at home and helped their children prepare for school or work, vendors went to the streets where they worked long days, which included commercial and parenting activities. Getting to work was often a challenge, too. Most street vendors lacked their own cars or trucks. Vendors used public transportation, took a taxi, or hired someone with a truck to carry their merchandise. For mothers, buying merchandise at the wholesale market was a highly laborious and multi-step process, and many left their children at home. For example, Paula Maldonado, a vendor who, in the late 1960s, migrated from the Tlaxcalan countryside to Puebla with her children, owned a dolly that she used to transport her merchandise. Paula, like many

---

<sup>49</sup> Registration lists, Dirección General de Educación Pública and Report from Celia Quirós to Raúl González Medel, Regidor de Hacienda, February 23, 1963, Box 57, file 28, AMP.

women, left her abusive husband to become a vendor and to care for her children. Every morning, she walked to the bus stop, got her dolly in the bus, and bought her merchandise. In interviews, Paula remembers that when she began selling, she left her very young children back in her town under her mother's care.<sup>50</sup> It was extremely difficult for her to carry merchandise and her children at the same time. Once her children were a bit older, she brought them with her to Puebla.<sup>51</sup>

Some mothers decided to leave their children at home, which, in interviews women admitted created a lot of anxiety and, in many cases, fatal accidents for children. Laura Asunción (pseudonym), a vendor and activist, left her youngest son at home because it was difficult for her to sell with her child with her. While Laura's husband was in jail for his political activism with street vendors, she was forced to raise her children, take over some of the organization's activities, and sell goods. One day, she returned home to discover a gas leak had almost knocked her son out.<sup>52</sup> Gabina Reyes, the woman who squatted on a lot, lost one of her children in a fire while he was alone at home.

Older children required less supervision, and many even helped their mothers sell products. Children helped their mothers carry merchandise, set up stalls, and sell goods. Gabina Rodríguez, a single mother of four children and a vendor since the 1960s, was especially thankful for this help. Early in the morning, Gabina bought the produce from a

---

<sup>50</sup> Some rural migrants left their youngest children back in their towns under their mothers' care, sending them money, and seeing them once in a while until they were older and they did not need close adult care. Paula Javier and Paula Maldonado, interviews by author, January 25, 2007, and April 25, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>51</sup> Paula Maldonado, interview by author, notes, April 25, 2007 Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>52</sup> Laura Asunción, interview by author, notes, August 14, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

wholesaler and her eldest son helped purchase and carry the merchandise. Another son typically worked on the street, swept the floors, and set the plastic mats on the ground. When Gabina arrived, her son had the stall ready for his mother. At home, her daughter cared for the youngest child. All of Gabina's children attended school, but each of them worked with their mother after finishing classes. As Gabina, a proud vendor and mother, pointed out, "my children and their mom worked together."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, her children's labor was critical to the success of her business.<sup>54</sup>

"My Children's home was the Street"<sup>55</sup>

A number of pictures taken by municipal authorities captured women and their children sitting, playing, or vending next to their mothers. In an early 1970s photograph of a *tianguis*, there are two women vendors of *gorditas* (oval-shaped thick tortillas, slightly sautéed and covered with green or red hot sauce, chopped onions, and cheese). Between the two of them, there is a girl who is probably the daughter of one of the women. This picture leads the observer to think that food vendors had the advantage of taking care of their children at their workplace while at the same time feeding them. It is possible that women cooked or warmed children's food on the street, using the same heaters that they utilized to prepare the *gorditas*. Despite the difficulties of street vending, these pictures certainly indicate the development of strong familial bonds.

---

<sup>53</sup> Gabina Rodríguez, interview by author, January 20, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>54</sup> Newspaper photographs show the presence of children in charge of stalls. See *El Sol de Puebla*, 20 May 1974, HJN. For an excellent discussion of child labor in Peru see Bunster and Chaney, *Sellers and Servants*, Chapter 4.

<sup>55</sup> Gabina Rodríguez, interview by author, 20 Jan. 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.



Stall, Administración Cué Merlo, 1975-1978, AMP.

The public areas occupied by vendors were often unsafe and unfit for childrearing.<sup>56</sup> Garbage, rodents, and puddles were common on busy streets.<sup>57</sup> Even those with stalls in enclosed marketplaces, were constantly working to insure their children's safety. In an early 1970s picture that portrays Puebla's mayor visiting a market, the photographer, perhaps coincidentally, captured a child with a large knife in his hand. The picture shows the mother seeking to convince him to put the knife down. While this child seemed to be very active, other children can be seen in the same picture

<sup>56</sup> Recognizing these dangers, according to anthropologist Gracia Clark, Kumasi traders in Ghana prefer to leave their children with caretakers. This pattern is different to other female traders in other parts of the world. Gracia Clark, *Onions are my Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994): 357-58. Among Akan vendors, especially for the "nursing mothers," childrearing is an obstacle for successful businesses. Women prefer to leave their children under someone's care. Gracia Clark, "Nursing Mother Work in Ghana: Power and Frustration in Akan Market Women's Lives, in *Women Traders in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed., Linda Seligmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001):107.

<sup>57</sup> "Basura e Insalubridad en los Mercados," *El Sol de Puebla*, June 3, 1971, HJN.

quietly playing with balloons.<sup>58</sup> Needless to say, female vendors had to cope with childcare and the needs of customers.

Street vendors were forced to be extremely creative when engaging in childrearing, insuring that their children were safe and relatively comfortable while they haggled with customers, paid off inspectors, and kept account of their goods. They needed to protect their children from a number of threats, such as bad weather, careless drivers, thieves, and, in many instances, state repression.<sup>59</sup> In order to protect themselves and their offspring from the sunlight and rain, street vendors set up rudimentary umbrellas made out of fabric or plastic, which they tied up to wood or metal rods.<sup>60</sup> They demonstrated an impressive amount of resourcefulness. Lacking the financial resources needed to buy for portable cribs and Moses baskets, they used empty fruit boxes, believing that they were the best solution. Babies and toddlers took naps on them. Some mothers also used those boxes as baby play yards. Elena and her husband, vendors who worked in an itinerant market (*mercado ambulante*), set up a small hammock for their toddler inside their Volkswagen bus. They attached the hammock to a long cord that lead to their stall. When they were busy with customers and heard their child crying, they

---

<sup>58</sup> “Mercados” photographic collection, AMP.

<sup>59</sup> The newspaper *El Sol de Puebla* reported that the streets surrounding the La Victoria Market were “the paradise” for petty-thieves, *El Sol*, January 9, 1972, HJN.

<sup>60</sup> *El Sol de Puebla*, an enemy of street vendors, published dozens of pictures depicting vendors’ practices. For an example of a woman with her children under an umbrella see *El Sol de Puebla*, May 24 1974, p. 1. For vendors’ “anti-modern” practices see *El Sol de Puebla*, 12 Sept. 1973, June 1, 1974, p. 1 and 16 July 1974, HJN.

pulled the cord to rock the hammock. Rocking the hammock kept the child quiet, which allowed them to attend to their commercial work.<sup>61</sup>

Many vendors also worked hard to protect their children from kidnappers. In fact, kidnapping was a common occurrence in Puebla, and throughout Mexico. Parents placed dozens of ads in local newspapers searching for their *niños perdidos* ('lost children').<sup>62</sup> Mothers working on public areas feared that their children "got lost." When children were young, female vendors wrapped them with their *rebozos* and tied them up across their backs or chests.<sup>63</sup> Keeping babies and toddlers attached to their bodies assured mothers that the child was safe. It also allowed them to breast feed while working.

Women found other creative ways to keep toddlers safe, but they were not always successful. Those who could afford baby walkers tied them to the stalls with a cord. The child could take a few steps without going too far.<sup>64</sup> This rudimentary "lock" did not always guarantee the child's safety. For example, one day in the late seventies, Elena, the itinerant market seller who placed the hammock in the VW bus, was attending to customers when she realized that her little girl was not in the baby walker. Customers and a couple of Elena's fellow vendors started running in different directions, searching for the child. A few blocks away, a customer caught the kidnapper with Elena's child.

---

<sup>61</sup> Elena, interview by author, January 10, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>62</sup> See *El Sol de Puebla*, HJN.

<sup>63</sup> A number of photographs in newspapers and at the Municipal archive's photographic collection (*fototeca*) show women working with their children. According to anthropologist Judith E. Marti, nineteenth-century travelers' accounts depicted the women vendors carrying their children strapped across their backs, especially "Indian" women. Judith E. Marti, "Breadwinners and Decision Makers," 220.

<sup>64</sup> Paula Maldonado, interview by author, January 25, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

Elena and her child were reunited, and several street vendors gave the kidnapper several punches to the head.<sup>65</sup>

Bad weather, thieves, careless drivers were not the only concerns of street vendors. In the early 1970s, women and men had to protect themselves and their children from municipal officials' violent acts during campaigns meant to remove vendors from the streets.<sup>66</sup> Not only did those campaigns negatively affect their economic survival, but they also threatened their physical well-being. During the first half of the twentieth century, authorities tolerated street vendors, allowing them to sell their products on the streets and peddle their merchandise inside markets as long as they followed the market and municipal regulations. They "simply" needed a permit, maintain good health, stay clean, and pay their fees.<sup>67</sup> The municipal Markets Manager (*administrador de mercados*) was especially "benevolent" toward vendors. Despite hundreds of complaints from established marketers and small-sized business owners, market officials were sympathetic to vendors. In 1923, the Mayor responded to a letter written by members of an employers' and businessmen's association, the *Cámara Nacional de Comercio* (CANACO), who demanded the removal of street vendors. The Mayor replied that if authorities under his command removed vendors, these authorities violated street vendors' freedom of commerce. After all, the Mayor added, everybody in the city had a

---

<sup>65</sup>Elena, interview by author, January 10, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>66</sup> One of the worst campaigns against vendors and marketers occurred in 1986. In that year, the UNESCO recognized Puebla as a World Heritage City and city boosters hurried up to clean the downtown area and expelled street vendors and marketers. See Gareth Jones and Ann Varley, "The Contest for the City Centre," 31.

<sup>67</sup> *Reglamentos*, Tomo 34, file 112-113, July 29, 1929, articles 2-3 and volumen 975, file 325, August 4, 1936, AMP. Municipal authorities used the 1929 and then the 1936 *reglamento* until the mid 1980s.

right to exercise the freedom to sell.<sup>68</sup> Officials even claimed that street vendors were modest people (*gente humilde*) who did not pose a major threat to the economic interests of others. In addition, officials argued that if they removed street vendors, they had fewer employment options.<sup>69</sup> Some had reasons to defend vendors; market officials benefited financially from the fees they collected from them.<sup>70</sup>

Yet the fees were not enough to protect Puebla's vendors. During part of the second half of the twentieth century, authorities began to expel vendors violently. In 1971, for example, city authorities decided to remove vendors from the downtown. To complete the task, city authorities unleashed a group of inspectors who seized vendors' merchandise. Established marketers, angered by the growing presence of informal vendors, went on strike. At the beginning of March 1971, over 1,000 marketers stopped paying the city government commercial licenses and other market fees. Marketers declared a *huelga de pagos*.<sup>71</sup> Six thousand other marketers threatened to do the same if the city government did not remove vendors from the streets surrounding markets. This was a serious threat as the city received 2.5 million pesos from marketers' licenses and fees.<sup>72</sup> Fearing an empty treasury, authorities decided to take action against street vendors. Practically every day during March and April 1971, municipal inspectors confiscated street merchandise, including small amounts of fruits, vegetables, chickens,

---

<sup>68</sup> Letter to CANACO from Presidente Municipal, volumen 708, file 436, p. 268, October 17, 1923, AMP.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from Administrador de Mercados to Municipal President, March 19, 1945, volumen 1114, file 202, p. 278, AMP.

<sup>70</sup> Reports and letters in the 1940s show the flexibility of authorities toward vendors. Expedientes de Mercados, AMP. For the relation between authorities and vendors at the turn of the twentieth century, see Judith Marti, "Subsistence and the State: The Case of Porfirian Mexico," in *The Economic Anthropology of the State*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brumfiel (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994): 320-322.

<sup>71</sup> "Huelga de Pagos de Locatarios," *El Sol de Puebla*, March 19, 1971, HJN.

<sup>72</sup> Segundo Informe de Gobierno del Licenciado Carlos Arrutti, February, 1971, Biblioteca, AMP.



flowers, prepared food, clothes, hats, pots, toys, scales, and dozens of other items.<sup>73</sup> City officials kept this merchandise. According to Gabina Reyes, the woman who squatted on a lot and lost one of her children, municipal inspectors always kept the best or most expensive merchandise for themselves. A disgruntled Reyes noted that “officials’ wives always had fruits and vegetables in their kitchens because their husbands stole them from us, the vendors!”<sup>74</sup>

Street vendors resisted police officers’ and inspectors’ raids. Women defended their merchandise and engaged in fights with authorities. Vendor Yolanda Gómez remembers that she used a long stick to hit officials and defend herself.<sup>75</sup> Officials, however, were better armed and trained, and typically won their battle against vendors. Teresa Rosales remembers that on several occasions, inspectors seized her merchandise and arrested her.<sup>76</sup> One time, she was pregnant; on a second occasion, she was imprisoned with two of her children.<sup>77</sup> Authorities showed little mercy for these mothers. As a vendor bluntly stated, “police treated us as if we were criminals.”<sup>78</sup>

In addition to losing merchandise and getting arrested, vendors faced the authorities’ use of “public force.” The use of “public force” entailed spraying tear gas, as well as beating and dragging vendors from their work stations. Women and children were not immune, and vendors were appalled by their treatment. In a 1970 letter to Carlos

---

<sup>73</sup> Lists of products seized by inspectors, March 22, April, 21-23, 1971, box 46, AMP.

<sup>74</sup> Gabina Reyes, interview by author, 28 Jan. 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>75</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, March 17, 2007, Puebla, México

<sup>76</sup> A number of vendors who were removed by authorities from the streets defended themselves legally through *amparos*. Unfortunately it was common that vendors lost their cases against authorities. “Niegan más amparos a ambulantes,” *El Sol de Puebla*, February 2, 1971.

<sup>77</sup> Teresa Rosales, interview by author, March 8, 2007, notes, Puebla, México.

<sup>78</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, March 17, 2007, Puebla, México

Arruti, Puebla's mayor, a group of vendors explained that police beat women vendors "whose only crime is working to bring food for their children."<sup>79</sup> City authorities were publicly clear about the use of violence against vendors. Not only did municipal officials' internal correspondence reveal the use of violence, but newspapers often published the mayor's declarations about removing vendors with the help of the police and bluntly stated that if vendors insisted upon vending on the streets, then "the problem must be repressed."<sup>80</sup>

While male and female vendors were beaten, only women faced sexual harassment and abuse. Several women vendors were physically assaulted and detained by inspectors, even when they were pregnant.<sup>81</sup> Yolanda Gómez, a long-time street vendor who in 1972 began peddling her products, remembers police and inspector's mistreatment. One day, in 1973, inspectors tried to confiscate Yolanda's sugar cane and oranges. The then 22-year old Yolanda refused to give away her merchandise, prompting four inspectors to force her into a truck. Inside the truck, police and inspectors ruthlessly kicked her on her back and chest. She feared that she would be raped on the way to the police station; many female vendors were molested in trucks by inspectors and police. Fortunately, a child realized that she was in police custody. The boy asked for help from other vendors shouting: "*Se llevan a la señorita Yolanda! Se llevan a la señorita Yolanda!*" A group of vendors immediately reacted to the call forcing the driver to stop

---

<sup>79</sup> Letter to Carlos Arruti from Comisión de Vendedores Ambulantes, June 8 1970, box 42, file 5, AMP.

<sup>80</sup> "Operan agitadores," *El Sol de Puebla*, February 28, 1971, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> *La Opinión*, October 3, 1977, HJN.

the truck, which freed Yolanda. She ended up in the hospital to treat the injuries inflicted on her chest by the police.<sup>82</sup> Other women vendors were sexually assaulted in prison. Graciela Carmona (pseudonym), a fourteen year old vendor, spent one night in jail after authorities confiscated her merchandise. Officials placed her in a rat-infested cell with prostitutes at Puebla's Inspección General de Policía. She was very scared. Graciela's fears were not unreasonable because policemen sexually assaulted the women, but we gather from interviews that it was fairly common.<sup>83</sup>

### Child labor

Graciela Carmona, the girl who spent a tragic night at the police station, learned how to sell on the streets at an early age when her parents were vendors.<sup>84</sup> Graciela's case is not unique. Many children and teenagers whose parents were vendors learned to work and sell on the streets. After all, they spent their formative years in stalls with their parents. Older children were not passive observers of their parents' work. Most of them helped their parents' and learned the trade. Most of these children, however, did not receive any payment. Unpaid child labor was common among street vendors but central to the success of a family business.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, March 17, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>83</sup> "Tomar la calle para Sobrevivir," *Cuadernos de Red Mujer Siglo XXI*, Año 1, no. 1, September 2002, p. 7. I thank Arturo Garmendia for this material from his personal collection.

<sup>84</sup> Graciela Carmona (14 years old) and her brother (16 years old) are listed in the 1969 Agrupación de Comerciantes en Pequeño Fijos, semi-fijos y Ambulantes, FROC-CROC, Box 42, file 319. Graciela's mother, age 88, still sells combs and handkerchiefs on the streets of Puebla.

<sup>85</sup> All the people interviewed had at least one child who continues working as a street vendor.

Many children were in charge of stalls. In a 1969 census of small merchants and street vendors, 24 out of 228 vendors (10.5%) who had their own stalls were under the age of eighteen years old and 15 out of those 24 (62.5%) were female. The youngest ones were two sisters, Cristina and Marcela Guzmán, 12 and 13 years old respectively.<sup>86</sup> Others did not own stalls but took care of the ones that belong to their parents. So common was child labor that some officials felt alarmed. The Chief Municipal Inspector, Lieutenant Manuel Bravo Martínez wrote a letter to the Municipal General Secretary expressing his allegedly frustration at a large number of children selling merchandise right outside La Victoria Market. Lt. Bravo claimed that he and his inspectors could not seize their merchandise because the vendors were only children. Lt. Bravo was not bothered by child labor as much as he was frustrated of not being able or allowed to use violence against children. He was even more bothered by a couple of women who defended the kids throwing stones at the police.<sup>87</sup>

Child labor on the streets was not new. Existing documents reveal the presence of child vendors. For instance in 1946, the wealthy entrepreneur Ernesto Espinosa Yglesias, wrote about the *muchachos de poca edad* selling candy right in front of the entrance to his Coliseo and Variedades movie theaters. Addressing municipal authorities, Espinosa Yglesias added that those kids were annoying and used an “indecent vocabulary” when they talked. He demanded that those kids be removed from the movies’ entrance to the

---

<sup>86</sup> Census, Secretaria del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Depto. de Registro de Asociaciones, box 42, file 319, 1969, AMP.

<sup>87</sup> Letter to Secretario General del Ayuntamiento from Jefe de Inspectores Municipales, Coronel Manuel Bravo Martínez, November 24, 1969, box 42, file 319.

other side of the street.<sup>88</sup> Ernesto Espinosa was not concerned about child labor per se. He was just worried about vendors' invasion of spaces where middle class shoppers gathered.

Regardless of what the wealthy thought or said, children worked with their parents completing different tasks, including productive and reproductive labor. It was common for children clean the areas surrounding their parents' stalls. Children swept the floors, placed plastics on the ground, carried fruit and vegetable boxes, pushed dollies loaded with merchandise, emptied garbage cans, and set up rudimentary roofs. Older children commonly took care of their younger siblings as their parents worked. An example was Gabina's children who scrubbed the floor, set up the stall, and carried merchandise. Other children were employed by the municipality to work as *recogedores de canastas* in markets.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Letter to Municipal authorities from Ernesto Espinosa Yglesias, June 10, 1946, vol. 1141, file 93, pg. 133, AMP

<sup>89</sup> Photograph 163, file Mercado La Victoria, 1957-1978. The photograph reads: Niños recoge-canastas, uniformados por el H. Ayuntamiento para trabajar en el Mercado La Victoria, March 11, 1972, AMP.



Recogedores de Canastas, Administración Cué Merlo, 1975-1978, AMP.

When mothers were away from their stalls, children took care of the work and began selling. This practice was also common among female marketers with fixed stalls in markets. For example, female vendor at La Victoria Market, Emilia Yitani, instructed her eight and ten year-old daughters to care for her business. In a letter that she wrote to the mayor, she explained that she was sometimes unable to oversee her stall because her little son was sick. Caring for him took a lot of her time and she could not afford closing the stall.<sup>90</sup> Her young daughters were capable of running the business temporarily and caring for customers.

Just like their mothers, children also engaged in both reproductive and productive labor on the streets. Older children also took care of their siblings on the streets as their

---

<sup>90</sup> Expedientes, volume 684, file 105, p. 885-887, May 16, 1922, AMP.

mothers were busy with customers. Children often fed, entertained, and helped their younger siblings. Paula's daughter regularly took care of her mother's baby when she went to purchase merchandise from wholesalers.

Most street vendors, especially women, wanted their children to receive formal education, which most parents never received. Almost all of the vendors' children attended elementary school. Education did not take the place of work. Vendors also hoped that their children could also learn their trade. Some mother vendors worked very hard to get a stall in a market as they perceived the stall as a property for their children's future.<sup>91</sup> Most vendors' children learned the trade as they spent many hours vending next to their mothers.<sup>92</sup>

Female vendors of prepared food were a good example of those who learned their trade at an early age from mothers and grandmothers. In addition, this learning process made women proud of their work and business. Vendors of *chalupas*, one of Puebla's most famous dishes, (small tortillas covered with green or red hot pepper sauce and shredded meat) claimed that their trade was passed on to them for generations. A *chalupera* (female maker and vendor of *chalupas*) proudly claimed that her grandmother, and her mother and her had prepared *chalupas* for over fifty years.<sup>93</sup> Evidently she learned the trade as a child.

---

<sup>91</sup> Paula Javier, interview by author, January 25, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico

<sup>92</sup> According to oral histories, some of the vendors' children became vendors themselves.

<sup>93</sup> Letter to Municipal President from Rosario Parra, July 23, 1946, volume 1114, file 100, p. 389, AMP.

Some of the young vendors did not come from families of vendors. Some children were homeless and turned to vending as well as carrying bags for customers, looking after cars, shinning shoes, and working in domestic service.<sup>94</sup> Usually street children sold items that were not perishable, small in size, easy to obtain and cheap, such as candy, peanuts, and tissues. Possibly these children were employees of adults who managed networks of street-children.<sup>95</sup>

Children of working class, poor, and unemployed often sold home-made sweets, newspapers and magazines. Mothers prepared cheap sweets and the children sold them. Gabina Reyes, who came from a poor family, began her long life as a street vendor when she was a little girl in the early 1950s. Having few alternatives to survive in the countryside, Gabina's mother sent her to Puebla. In the city, Gabina's grandmother had promised her a better life and access to education. Those promises, however, were not fulfilled, and Gabina started working with her grandmother. She sold sweets, cakes, and corn on the cob. Gabina did not sell alone; she and her cousin arrived in Puebla as children and remained for their whole lives as sellers. Gabina sold all sorts of products and worked in different streets throughout her life. As an adult, she sometimes carried her children as she worked, other times, she left them home.

---

<sup>94</sup> The literature on street children is increasing and emphasizing the gender and sexual differences among street children. Two examples are Alejandra Torres, "Visibilizar, acompañar, crear lazos en el libro fotográfico *El Niño: Niños de la calle*, Ciudad de México," in *Entre la familia, la sociedad y el Estado: Niños y jóvenes en América Latina (siglos XIX-XX)*, ed. Barbara Potthast and Sandra Carreras, (Frankfurt am Main: Bibliotheca Ibero-Americana, Vervuert, 2005 ) and Bruna Veríssimo, "August," in *Minor Omissions: Children in Latin American History and Society*, Tobias Hecht, ed. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002): 232-240. Both pieces contain graphic descriptions of sexual assaults and harassment that children and teenagers experienced while living on the streets.

<sup>95</sup> From the 1980s on homeless vendor children became members of the Popular Union of Street Vendors, as their membership in this organization made them less vulnerable to state repression. Walter K. Vanderbush, "Independent Organizing in Puebla, Mexico, 1961-1992: Social movements, the struggle for autonomy, and democratization," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1993), p. 223.



Many female vendors had at least one son or daughter who died, and many others who were badly injured in accidents at home or on public spaces. Children were the victims of the poor women's lack of financial and medical resources. Burns were the most common accidents, especially for those who worked with food. A female vendor of chalupas and her daughter suffered burns after a drunken man stumbled into the *anafre* filled with boiling oil that split into their bodies. The little girl was next to her mother and the *anafre* when the accident happened. One of Gabina Reyes's children got burned at home. One day, as Gabina left for work and left her offspring behind, one of the little ones died in a fire as he could not escape from his home. Perhaps fearing that people would label her as a "bad mother," Gabina refuses to talk about the accident that took the life of her child.<sup>96</sup>

Street children also faced dangerous conditions. Police brutality was the main type. Police often took little ones to the police station along with their mothers. When police raided the streets, kids experienced the effects of the tear gas; just as their mothers did. Blanca Pastrana, a psychologist who left her profession to sell on the streets, remembers that the most difficult experience she had was tear gas when she was a little girl. Her mother was an *ambulante* and after school Blanca went selling with her mom (just like Blanca's 11 year-old daughter does now). One day on her way to the stall, she

---

<sup>96</sup> Gabina Reyes, interview by author, 28 Jan. 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico

saw police everywhere; she felt something strange and fell down as the tear gas knocked her out.<sup>97</sup>

Children experienced emotional problems from such repression. Too young to understand that their mothers were the targets of state abuses, some children blamed their parents. Blanca Pastrana, the little girl who was sprayed with tear gas, grew up fearful of the police. She also grew up resentful of her mother's vending and political activities. At the beginning of the 1960s, Blanca's mother, Esperanza Pastrana, was the lead organizer of a group of vendors who wanted city authorities to build a market for them. Esperanza spent most of her time out home and many hours away from her stall organizing and meeting with authorities. Little Blanca felt neglected by her mother who "was never there for her." She remembers feeling angry, especially when Ms. Pastrana spent days hiding from the police as a result of her activism. "Days and days passed and I couldn't see my mother. I thought she didn't care about my sister and I." Looking back, Blanca now understands that her mother was doing "the right thing." Blanca proudly keeps a picture of her mother in a vendors' march. After endless negotiations with the mayor and market administrator, Ms. Pastrana achieved a market, the Mercado Emiliano Zapata, for her fellow vendors. The market continues to exist today and Blanca works at what used to be her mother's stall. In the late 1960s, Blanca's mother, like many other vendors, thought that having a stall in a market was the solution to their problems; more than forty years later, as the working class' wages are not enough to cover basic needs, many marketers and all sort of people set out to the streets in the search of customers who can

---

<sup>97</sup> Blanca Pastrana, interview by author, April 12, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

buy their products. Securing a stall in a market is not enough anymore, vendors still access to places on the street when they can make a living.<sup>98</sup>

Blanca's early resentment toward her mother is not exceptional. Yolanda Gómez's son still remains resentful about his mother's work and activism. Yolanda was a high-rank leader in the UPVA; she worked for the organization for 19 years at the same time that she was an *ambulante*. Yolanda's son thinks that his mother wasted time organizing poor and marginalized vendors. The implicit message is that Yolanda could have spent more time with him rather than in her organizational and commercial activities.<sup>99</sup>

### Comradeship

When mothers were away from their stalls, they relied on fellow vendors, typically other women, for help with their childcare needs. Street vendors momentarily left their stalls for many reasons. Many women took care of family affairs, school meetings, and their sick children. Women relied on other female fellow vendors. According to Paula Javier, the leader of the Ricardo Flores Magón Street Vendors Organization, even though their fellow vendors were busy tending their own stalls, it was better to have their stall open than closed and lose money.<sup>100</sup> In many cases, women kept a watchful eye on each others' offspring while mothers were away from stands. At the

---

<sup>98</sup> Blanca sells at the Mercado Emiliano Zapata three days a week while the remaining days she is an *ambulante* on downtown streets. "It is impossible to make a living just tending the stall in the market. Sales are low and one needs to find customers on the streets. We need to eat and even if my children, my husband and I all work, we can barely make ends meet." Blanca Pastrana, interview by author, April 12, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico

<sup>99</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, March 17, 2007, Puebla, México

<sup>100</sup> Paula Javier, interview by author, January 25, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

beginning of the 1970s, female vendors in downtown created an informal nursery in a lot of land that the Major granted them to build a market.<sup>101</sup> Women kept their children inside the lot while they were busy in marches or negotiations with authorities. The women who stayed were in charge of keeping an eye on the children. This daycare facility kept them relatively safe. Childcare was organized informally and women did not receive any monetary compensation for their work.

Friendships and comradeship were very important to vending women. Indeed, women vendors learned the trade from one another; most began working without any previous experience. A number of street vendors explained that they had little knowledge about the basics on their first day; they had no idea how much to buy, how to weigh, how to accommodate their products on their stands, and how much money they should charge customers. They learned from other vendors who were more experienced, and who were willing to share their expertise.

Street vendors also benefited from ties with other working-class women. Some helped them with storage because most vendors did not own warehouses; they had to find ways to keep their merchandise safe. Some rented warehouse space from wholesalers; others carried their merchandise home, and a few left their merchandise with people they knew. A long-time vendor became friends with a woman who worked in the nearby train station. That friend allowed her and other female vendors to leave their produce and flowers inside the train station facility.<sup>102</sup> Women built personal bonds with one another

---

<sup>101</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, March 17, 2007, Puebla, Mexico and Lorenzo Hernández, interview by author, notes, February 1, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>102</sup> Paula Maldonado, interview by author, January 19, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

as a result of working together. These bonds of solidarity were important later when street vendors decided to formally organize to protect themselves from the authorities' anti-vendor campaigns in 1973. They organized into the Popular Union of Street Vendors (UPVA), which eventually became a militant, ten thousand-member organization.<sup>103</sup> The UPVA protected vendors' interests especially their right to work on the streets or in well-located and well-built enclosed markets. The organization also allowed them to continue their alliances with broader sections of Puebla's population, such as students, land petitioners, and blue-collar workers. What made the UPVA a complex case is that, unlike other Mexican associations, it remained politically independent of the ruling PRI.

### Conclusion

Unlike factory workers or domestics who labored in enclosed spaces, informal vendors worked and sold on streets and other public spaces. Laboring on the streets was not easy. While men and women experienced the same problems and completed similar types of commercial work, women simultaneously engaged in both productive and reproductive labor. Lacking the money and the facilities to send their children to daycares, female street vendors brought their children to work. Mother-vendors cared for their children while they sold goods. In order to complete these tasks, female street vendors relied on the labor of their own family, especially older children and fellow female vendors. Children learned their mothers' trade as they spent long hours vending with their

---

<sup>103</sup> See Jaime Castillo, ed. *Los Movimientos Sociales en Puebla*; Gareth Jones, "The Contest for the City Centre," and Walter Vanderbush, "Independent Organizing in Puebla, Mexico, 1961-1992."

mothers. Older siblings also engaged in reproductive labor as they cared for their younger siblings. Mothers developed informal arrangements with other vendors to mind their children. While working side by side, facing similar problems, and caring for their children, women developed bonds of solidarity that helped them to organize in a militant vendor organization, the UPVA after the killings of vendors and a child on October 23, 1978.

### Chapter 3

#### **The Emergence of a long-lasting Alliance: Street Vendors and Students, 1964-1973**

At 1 am on October 28, 1973, dozens of trucks filled with riot police arrived at one of Puebla's makeshift markets. Angry that vendors had failed to pay their fees to city authorities, the police sought to destroy hundreds of stands. Over the course of a few hours, they destroyed merchandise and beat vendors, forcing countless numbers of men, women, and children to run for their lives. The police killed several people during this raid, including a young child. From the street vendors' perspective, the timing of the raid could not have been worse. Day of the Dead, one of Mexico's most sacred holidays, was approaching, and vendors anticipated many busy days of selling flowers, incense, bread, fruits, and candles. Yet authorities did not care about their economic well-being. Many sellers, *vendedores ambulantes*, eager to greet the largest number of potential consumers, slept on the streets to secure the best spots. City authorities were well aware that at night they could catch vendors off guard.

While some vendors were badly injured and ended up in emergency rooms, others ran to Puebla's Autonomous State University's *Casas de Estudiantes* (Students' Houses) and the Popular School of Art, *Escuela Popular de Arte* (EPA) seeking refuge and support from students. Such places were the headquarters and homes of high-school and university students who maintained close links to the vendors. Students and a small

number of teachers immediately took care of the injured, and went out to the streets to help others. At the break of dawn, vendors and students agreed that *ambulantes* had to occupy downtown streets in retaliation for police violence.

Expressions of state repression, such as the one of October 1973, did not deter vendors from working on the streets for the next thirteen years. This action defied authorities' old effort to get rid of vendors in order to beautify the city's downtown and to support the established commercial elite who perceived itinerant vendors as an obstacle to their business. More importantly, immediately after the anti-vendors' campaign of October 1973 and with students' help, vendors began organizing into an independent union, the *Unión Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes* (UPVA).

This chapter explores the relationship and alliances between Puebla's street vendors, students, and teachers from the 1960s to the early 1970s. It also highlights the political climate in Puebla that facilitated such an alliance. Since the early 1960s, students were involved in grass roots movements. Aware of students' commitment to social justice, informal workers approached students for legal and organizational advice. By creating connections with students and their teachers, street vendors became part of a larger political environment that allowed them to form an organization whose demands went beyond immediate economic goals.

Despite the October 2, 1968 student massacre of Tlatelolco, young people did not give up their ideals. This tragic episode when the state killed and disappeared hundreds



of people, actually radicalized students who continued fighting against police brutality, violations of the federal constitution, and the rule of one single party, the PRI. While some students continued their intellectual careers, sang protest songs, and defied their families' patriarchal values,<sup>1</sup> others set out to the dusty roads of the Mexican countryside and city streets to organize the urban and rural poor and, in some cases, to join guerillas. Young people fought for the organization of independent unions, the support for dispossessed agricultural workers, and the education of working class children. As this chapter will show, other students became involved with the plights of informal workers. In the case of Puebla, young teachers, high-school and university students, many of whom identified themselves as Maoists, became the intellectual ideologues and architects of the street vendors' union.

Complementing the work of scholars of Mexican history who have studied the second half of the twentieth-century, this chapter contends that students' activism in Puebla in the early 1970s was connected to the militancy of the early 1960s, which became fueled by the events of 1968. A wide range of students became politically conscious after the disappearance, murder, exile, torture, and rape of hundreds of students in 1968.<sup>2</sup> Their activism spread widely to cities and towns beyond Mexico City.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> For a study of the youth culture during these convoluted years see Eric Zolov *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999). A number of artists and singers composed protest songs and participated in marches, meetings, and celebrations in cities and towns around the country. José de Molina and Judith Reyes are examples of young artists dedicated to *música de protesta* and organized groups such as Arte Colectivo en Acción. Some lyrics went like this: "En la fábrica y en la iglesia/campo y universidad/la semilla del rebelde ha empezado a germinar/." See Rosalío Wences Reza, *El movimiento estudiantil y los problemas nacionales* (Mexico: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1971): 95. Wences Reza was a professor at the UNAM in 1971 and in 1972 he became, for the first time, the president of the Autonomous University of Guerrero. For a short biography of Rosalío Wences Reza see *La Jornada*, December 7, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> See students' testimonies on torture and rape in Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992):97 and 106.

Students were aware that, for a movement to succeed, they needed the support of a wide range of people, especially the marginalized poor.

Students, however, were not the only ones who thought that alliances were important; groups of vendors, peasants, and workers also believed they needed to unite. Urban organizations formed alliances, and these alliances were instrumental in the survival of independent organizations of peasants, teachers, construction workers (*albañiles*), tenants (*inquilinos*), and street vendors. In some instances, these groups united under umbrella organizations that challenged the Mexican authoritarian state in a number of ways, maintaining their independence from PRI's clientelistic *Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares* (CNOP). While most members of these groups did not take up arms, join guerrilla organizations, or stop production through strikes, these groups used other strategies to fight the state. They occupied lands, took over streets, and refused to pay rents and fees to city authorities. To the chagrin of the PRI-state, most of them never became *priistas*, that is, members of the PRI.

Indeed, street vendors were well aware that they needed non-compromised (non-PRI) allies in order to fight against city authorities who threatened their ability to earn a living. Authorities were always trying to remove vendors from the streets. Both male and female vendors needed organizational advice, material support, and legal help. No other group was more eager than students and their teachers to provide them with such aid.

---

<sup>3</sup> O'Neill Blacker-Hanson, "La lucha sigue! (The struggle continues!): Teacher Activism in the continuum on Democratic struggle in Mexico," (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 2005).

Market people had organized unions since the 1930s. These unions, usually affiliated with the PRI, and their leaders were more interested in members' fees than in representing and defending sellers' rights. In the 1950s, and 60s, working closely with city authorities, official union representatives gave no protection to vendors; authorities constantly removed them from the streets despite vendors' daily monetary contributions to their unions. Dissatisfied, disillusioned, and unable to pay more fees, many street vendors abandoned their unions and decided to sell independently of any union. Throughout the years, more and more vendors remained unaffiliated but willing to organize into an authentic union that protected their interests.

\*\*

In the late 1960s, street vendor Juana Sánchez had difficulty falling asleep. She was born poor in 1918 in the town of San Lucas Tecopilco, Tlaxcala. At a young age, she migrated to the city of Puebla and began her life as a street vendor. Illiterate and with few resources, she sold small amounts of diverse merchandise on the streets where she met her husband Rafael Corona. They had twelve children, two of whom died as young infants. Rafael was a tailor, but made his living as a street vendor selling newspapers, used books, and the Chinese magazine, *El Pekín Informa*. Rafael was a drunk who often beat Juana. Tired of his abuses, Juana went to a civil case court and divorced him. She then became a single mother in charge of her ten children. In the late 1960s, after her divorce, she woke up many times during the night thinking about how to support her children, among them her youngest and bright daughter, Olga Corona. Many thoughts stole her sleep. Juana worried that her meager income was not enough to feed her

children. Her ex-husband did not pay a cent to support his children. In addition, Juana could not afford to buy shoes or the uniforms for her children to go to school.<sup>4</sup> Although each of her children sold goods on the streets, their small sales were not enough to get by. In addition, they were constantly losing their merchandise during police raids.<sup>5</sup>

Juana, like many other vendors, desperately needed help to organize and defend herself against city authorities' attacks on vendors. One morning in the late 1960s, Juana, encouraged by her daughter, the twelve-year Olga Corona, went to the state university to talk with students. In the early 1970s, a friend of Juana, a peasant from the Independent Peasants' Organization, the *Central Campesina Independiente*, (CCI) from the town of Zumiátla, Puebla, had told her that students at the State University of Puebla (UAP) helped people's struggles.<sup>6</sup> She was afraid to enter the university's imposing colonial-era doors, which had welcomed hundreds of students for centuries, but finally talked to a couple of them and was clear and pointed: "I'm a street vendor, I'm illiterate and I know that you help the poor. Inspectors constantly take away our merchandise and we lose everything. We need help."<sup>7</sup> The students agreed to help and told her to bring as many fellow vendors as she could to the university to meet later that day. And she did. Juana sent four of her children to the downtown streets to gather vendors. Her children

---

<sup>4</sup> Award-winning writer Luis Alberto Urrea correctly notes that "in Mexico, the bare foot is not a symbol of comfort—it is often a symbol of shame." While Urrea has observed social inequalities in border towns, many of the same problems apply in most cities of modern Mexico. See *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1993): 61.

<sup>5</sup> Juana Sánchez Maldonado, interview by author, notes, August 30, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>6</sup> The CCI was founded on January 6, 1963. It was an independent union composed by agricultural workers and landless peasants. See Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992): 227-228. The CCI had strong links with students since the mid-1960s. It was also part of the *Frente Obrero Campesino Estudiantil Popular* (FOCEP), see Wil Pansters, *Politics and Power in Puebla: The Political History of a Mexican State, 1937-1987* (Amsterdam: Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation, 1990): 126 and 139.

<sup>7</sup> Juana Sánchez Maldonado, interview by author, notes, August 30, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

Olga, Adolfo, and Miguel knew all the vendors. At three in the afternoon, dozens of vendors entered the university to meet with the students.

Students and street vendors held meetings for the next three days. After getting to know each other and discussing their problems, street vendors and students began to take the first steps to defend vendors' right to make a living. One of the first actions was to recover, by force if necessary, the thousands of products that authorities seized from vendors. Juana still remembers the success of organizing her fellow vendors and getting their products back from the authorities whom she used to fear.<sup>8</sup> Vendors realized that organizing (*and having stronger allies*) were instrumental steps to defend their interests and resist authorities. The episode also made them realize that cross-group organization was effective.

Juana and her daughter Olga helped create an alliance between students and vendors that proved to be long-lasting and successful. The alliance worked to the advantage of both students and vendors. Students supported vendors in their constant fight against city authorities. They offered organizational techniques, legal advice, moral, and political support. Students joined vendors in their marches to downtown, demanding that authorities build well located markets and halt police abuses and raids of merchandise. At the same time, vendors supported students in their fight against university authorities and right-wing students. Vendors provided food, members, and organizational labor to the student movement. As a former student put it, "vendors were

---

<sup>8</sup> Juana Sánchez Maldonado, interview by author, notes, August 30, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

one of the pillars in our struggle to reform the university. They basically fed us. Female vendors brought food to the university and cooked for us.”<sup>9</sup> The help was always mutual.

The relationship between groups of vendors and students was not all that new. In 1964, high-school and university students had worked together for the removal of Puebla’s governor, General Antonio Nava Castillo. The governor had close connections to the *avilacamachistas*, a strong political group in Puebla since the early 1940s.<sup>10</sup> These political connections led Nava Castillo to believe that he was entitled to do whatever he wanted. Nava Castillo, who had been the chief of Mexico City’s police department and a right-wing politician, planned to monopolize the distribution of milk in the city. He tried to open a modern, mega-pasteurization facility and sell the more expensive bottled-product to *poblanos*. This facility would benefit himself and some members of the *Grupo Puebla*, which included the politician Eduardo Cué Merlo and businessman Rodolfo Budib. The pasteurization plant would displace 2,000 independent milkmen sellers (*boteros*) and producers (*lecheros*) who, on a daily basis, distributed 100,000 liters of raw milk to approximately 20,000 families.<sup>11</sup> The governor and his supporters argued that the plant was a modern facility that had the goal to improve health conditions of Puebla’s citizens through the introduction of pasteurized milk.

On August 25, 1964, Puebla’s congress, many of whom were the governor’s cronies, passed the *ley sobre producción, introducción, transporte, pasteurización y comercio de la leche* that gave the governor the green light to monopolize the milk

---

<sup>9</sup> Maria Luisa, interview by author, notes, August 2, 2007, Puebla, México.

<sup>10</sup> Wil Pansters, *Politics and Power in Puebla: the Political History of a Mexican State, 1937-1987* (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1990): 117.

<sup>11</sup> Manuel Lara y Parra, *La lucha universitaria en Puebla: 1923-1965* (Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2000): 234-235.

industry. Threatened with the loss of their livelihood, on October 13, 1964, milkmen organized a peaceful march protesting the governor's plans and to pressure the state to provide the *lecheros* with a loan to open a pausterization-cooperative.<sup>12</sup> During the march, all the milk sellers rode their bikes because they were symbolic to their trade and to their identity.<sup>13</sup> During the event, everybody knew that they were the milkmen, precisely because of their bikes.

The governor responded violently. He sent the regular police to take care of the *lecheros*. Nava Castillo also sent the transit police (*agentes de tránsito*) on their motorcycles. Again, this order was highly symbolic; the motorcycle was the transit police tool. In short, what happened on that day was a war of the motorcycles against the bicycles. Without a doubt, the governor wanted to show who had more power. With their machines, the police destroyed many bikes and severely injured their riders.

A medical student who witnessed the violence even wrote a poem for those who were injured. One of the verses precisely refers to the police and their motorcycles and to the power imbalance:<sup>14</sup>

Silbaban en rededor las balas, sin cuenta,  
Motociclistas embestían con furia,  
Quería acallar la gobiernista injuria  
el grito de esa Puebla descontenta.

Nunca hubo así tan desigual batalla,  
Se cambiaron las piedras por las balas,  
Y al desplegar las juveniles alas,  
Recibieron en los pechos la metralla

Iban sin armas al encuentro enhiesto

<sup>12</sup> Manuel Lara y Parra, *La lucha universitaria*, 236.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Salazar, interview with author, August 2007, Puebla, México.

<sup>14</sup> Marco Tulio Orduna, "A los estudiantes universitarios" in Manuel Lara y Parra, *La lucha universitaria*, 335.

De las balas mortales que silbaban  
 Más...al caer, de corazón gritaban:  
 a morir por el pueblo estamos prestos.

On top of it, the police used tear gas, sticks (*macanas*) and arrested approximately 60 members of the *Unión Regional de Pequeños Productores y Introdutores de Leche*, students, and leaders of the CCI.<sup>15</sup> Puebla's residents, especially the university community were outraged by the governors' use of violence against a peaceful protest march. The next day, on October 14, 1968 the police attacked students around the university campus for their participation in the milk sellers' march. The governor, Nava Castillo, wanted to teach a lesson to the milkmen's young supporters. However, the use of force only stimulated that alliance.

After this episode, students and milk sellers became strong allies and together organized more demonstrations against the governor. Even the UAP's president, Manuel Lara y Parra, led one of those rallies and, on a number of occasions, confronted the governor.<sup>16</sup> Not only did the students support the sellers participating in marches, they also organized *brigadas*, that is, small groups of students in charge of painting slogans all over the city. Their *pintas*, as students called them, said "Fuera el Gobierno!," "Nava Castillo Out!"<sup>17</sup>

On October 28, 1964, the police rounded up, chased and beat a brigade of high-school students while they painted slogans against the government. Police surrounded

---

<sup>15</sup> Humberto Sotelo, "Movimiento Universitario": 132-133. Among the prisoners were Ramón Danzós Palomino from the CCI; and from the milkmen organization: Bruno Martínez, Vicente López, Raúl Márquez Parra and Enrique Cabrera Barroso, see Manuel Lara y Parra, *La lucha universitaria*, 212, 236.

<sup>16</sup> See his semi-autobiographical account *La lucha universitaria*.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Salazar, interview with author, notes, August 2007, Puebla, México



them and beat them with their sticks. Young students ended in the hospital due to the injuries. Samuel Salazar, a first year university student, was beaten in the head by one official. He fainted and woke up on the middle of one of Puebla's streets, after being thrown to the ground from a police truck. It was not uncommon for police to dump people near rivers or in landfields after beating or killing them.<sup>18</sup> In this case, Samuel was lucky as the police dumped him on the middle of a street. While some cars passed next to his injured body, drivers were unwilling to pick him up, fearing that authorities would punish them for assisting the student. After all, many people have witnessed the repression against milkmen and they avoided trouble with authorities. Finally, a friend of Samuel's found him bleeding and drove him to a public hospital where he recovered.<sup>19</sup> Doctors at the hospital, who were also university professors, recognized the students and called the press to cover another repressive act completed under the governor's orders. A number of journalists covered the story and pictured the very young, boyish-looking Samuel lying on a hospital bed.<sup>20</sup>

Federal authorities objected these violent acts against the milkmen and students since they already had disagreements with General Nava Castillo. In addition, university

---

<sup>18</sup> Police and the military often made people "disappeared." As a journalist bluntly put it: "In Mexico, there are two possibilities: they [the police] let you go and you can thank God, or they kill you and nobody will ever find your body. That's what happens in Mexico." Mexican journalist to Fernand Choisel in Fernand Choisel, "Los del guante blanco nos encerraron en un departamento inundado," *Proceso*, October 1, 1998: 37.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Salazar, interview with author, notes, August, 2007, Puebla, México.

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, the doctors at the hospital were so outraged by police violent acts against the students and encouraged the journalist to take a rather dramatic shot of the Salazar lying in bed. Doctors asked Salazar to close his eyes while he took the picture. Indeed, doctors were trying to emphasize and even exaggerate Salazar's injuries. This tactic has sometimes been used by victims of violence. Louis P. Masur, "The Photograph that Shocked America: the Cultural Politics of Race and Photography" (lecture, Center for Race and Ethnicity, Rutgers, New Brunswick, NJ, February 15, 2008). Salazar was lucky. Years later, police was brutal against students painting slogans on walls. They even killed them. See *Excelsior*, November 18, 1968 in Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992):32.

students gained the support from a number of public schools in the region and from universities across the country. They stopped working and organized a *paro* to force authorities to end the repression against students and milkmen in Puebla. Finally, on October 29, 1964, facing pressure from milkmen, students, and the federal government, Nava Castillo stepped down. Without a doubt, students were instrumental in supporting the milkmen in their fight to protect their livelihood, recognizing that the governor stood in the way.<sup>21</sup>

After the milkmen episode, high-school and university students gained a lot of popularity among Puebla's popular classes for helping the milk sellers. Students continued helping all sorts of people. Such was their activism and reputation that, years after the *lecheros* episode, street vendor Juana Sánchez Maldonado and her daughter Olga Corona approached them to obtain their support. But what pushed certain students to support the urban poor? What was the context that led students to become involved in Puebla's politics? Who were these students? How was it possible for students and vendors to form alliances?

The 1960s was a period of political effervescence throughout the country. According to the US Embassy in Mexico City, between 1963 and 1968, there were 53 student revolts, all of which were heavily repressed by the police.<sup>22</sup> While scholars have focused attention on the student movement in Mexico City's working class National

---

<sup>21</sup> Humberto Sotelo, "Movimiento Universitario: La Reforma Universitaria y el Movimiento Popular de 1973," in *Los Movimientos Sociales en Puebla*, ed. Jaime Castillo, (Puebla: DIAU, ICAUP, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México* (México: Grijalbo, 2001):119.

Polytechnical Institute, (Instituto Politécnico Nacional, IPN) and the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM),<sup>23</sup> few historians have looked at the political activism in urban areas in Mexico's *provincia* before and after the 1968 tragic episode in Tlatelolco.<sup>24</sup> Students, however, continued their activism after 1968 in a number of cities and helped create alliances with diverse groups of people.

The city of Puebla was not immune from student activism. Students, teachers, and some professors were dissatisfied with the increasing numbers of obstacles that limited young people's access to higher education. The Autonomous State University of Puebla (UAP), an institution that praised itself for offering education to the people, failed to increase the number of students accepted to enter high school and the university.

According to students, the UAP had a structural problem. The university had an elitist and conservative management. Administrators, deans, and most professors belonged to the middle and upper class sectors of Puebla's society. Politically conservative and blindly devoted to the Catholic Church, the state university's higher

---

<sup>23</sup> Orlando Ortiz, *Jueves de Corpus* (Mexico City: Editorial Diogenes, sixth edition 1979); Donald J. Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State: Student Conflicts, 1910-1971* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982); Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen, "Mexico '68: Defining the Space of the Movement, Heroic Masculinity in the Prison, and "Women" in the Streets," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 83:4, November 2003; Dolores Trevizo, "Between Zapata and Che: A Comparison of Social Movement Success and Failure in Mexico," *Social Science History*, 30:2, summer 2006; Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); José René Rivas Ontiveros, *La Izquierda estudiantil en la UNAM: organizaciones, movilizaciones y liderazgos, 1958-1972* (México: UNAM-Miguel Angel Porrúa, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Tanalís Padilla, "From Agraristas to Guerrilleros and the Myth of the Pax Priista," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2001); Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México* (Mexico: Grijalbo, 2001):96; O'Neill Blacker-Hanson, "La lucha sigue ("The Struggle continues!"): Teacher activism in Guerrero and the continuum struggle in Mexico," (PhD diss., University of Washington: 2005); Alexander Saviña "Y no les vamos a jugar otra vez pacíficamente": Lucio Cabañas, El Partido de los Pobres, and the Guerilla Challenge to the Postrevolutionary Mexican State, 1960-96," (PhD dissertation in progress, Southern California).

circles traditionally excluded from admission students from rural areas and from working-class backgrounds. The university curriculum was old-fashioned and conservative. Hundreds of students questioned the authentic role of the university in promoting knowledge and the access to it to the majority of the population. While university officials always highlighted the public nature of this institution, students protested that even college fees were prohibitive for the “popular classes.” For a number of years they criticized the absence of scholarships and financial aid for poor students.<sup>25</sup>

In order to force university authorities to listen to their demands, students took over buildings, high-jacked buses, and organized meetings and marches. These activities did not go unchallenged. University administrators and conservative students accused protestors of being communists who sought to destroy Mexican society. Puebla’s governors sent the police to the university to “calm down” students. Usually this resulted in violence. Police forces disrupted marches and students’ protests with tear-gas, bullets, and beatings. It was not until the mid-1970s that the university was transformed by a number of presidents (*rectores*) who were more liberal and, in some cases, affiliated to the Mexican Communist Party (PCM). Whatever their political affiliation these presidents, responding to pressure, tried to make the university available to the popular classes.

Most of the students who were involved with street vendors in the late 1960s and beginning of the 1970s were a mixture of university and high-school students of working

---

<sup>25</sup> *El Sol de Puebla*, February 13, 1971, p. 3

class background. Like many vendors, these students struggled to get by. They were the first ones in their families to attend higher education institutions. Their parents were factory workers, service sector employees, and recent migrants from small towns in Mexico's *provincia* who earned their living from agricultural activities. These students had attended public elementary schools and junior high schools such as the Escuela Flores Magón, a night school for workers' children and working children. Then students continued their education at the so-called popular high-schools, such as the *Preparatoria Popular Emiliano Zapata*. In a public meeting, a student from this high-school described himself and his peers as "workers' children belonging to the popular class."<sup>26</sup>

The Emiliano Zapata Popular High-School, created in 1970, was the most marginalized of the public schools in the city of Puebla. It lacked classrooms, and the few that existed did not have enough seats and blackboards. Students struggled to improve their school's conditions. High-school students ventured to the streets to ask for monetary and material assistance from people to build their own classrooms. Students organized informal fundraising campaigns in public places such as buses, street corners, and markets. Students went to wood stores and tried to convince carpenters to donate wood and to lend them tools to build their own benches and desks. Fortunately students received enormous support from the community.<sup>27</sup> Ironically, the urban poor were the one group that always shared their scant resources with students. In interviews, former

---

<sup>26</sup> Box 1510 A/1, 405-43, February 14, 1975, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (hereafter DGIPS) Galería 2, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter, AGN). "Nosotros queremos aclarar que somos hijos de obreros... [y] los obreros somos los más jodidos."

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Berguiss, Marucha, Omar et. al., notes, August 2007, Puebla, México.

students remember receiving small but constant contributions from street vendors. Vendors always put money in students' collection boxes.<sup>28</sup>

It was precisely on the street where many of those students realized the problems of other marginalized people. In their fundraising efforts, students got to know the street vendors' concerns, especially their struggles against city authorities to secure selling spots in public spaces. In this way, the relationship between students and vendors continued to flourish.

A number of young teachers at the popular high-schools were instrumental in supporting their students improve their schools and the larger society. Many of the teachers at the *preparatorias* were former students who survived the 1968 student massacre of the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Tlateloloco, Mexico City. The creation of the *Preparatoria Popular Emiliano Zapata* was the result of the work of the '68 generation students that included Marcos Sánchez Daza, Alberto Montero, Arturo Villareal and Enrique Cabrera.<sup>29</sup>

Other teachers at the *prepas* and other public schools were particularly influential on students and *ambulantes*. Lorenzo Hernández and Bulmaro Vega León were physics students at the Facultad de Ciencias in the UNAM by the time the army shot students in Tlatelolco. Bulmaro Vega, who later married street vendor Teresa Rosales, survived the shooting because he covered himself with the dead body of another student. Before the

---

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Berguiss, Marucha, Omar et. al., notes, August 2007, Puebla, México

<sup>29</sup> María Luisa, interview with author, notes, August 2, 2007, Puebla, México.

Tlatelolco episode, on September 18, 1968, the military arrested Bulmaro and again he was taken prisoner on October 2. He achieved his freedom but he was imprisoned again in 1970; the government accused him of holding and distributing “communist propaganda from the Cuban embassy” in Mexico City.<sup>30</sup>

After gaining his freedom, Bulmaro Vega, like thousands of students, left Mexico City and went to provincial cities, such as Puebla, to continue their studies.<sup>31</sup> Lorenzo Hernández went first to Tlaxcala to work as a teacher in the Escuela Normal Vespertina, where working class students took evening courses to become teachers. Years later, he moved to Puebla and taught in the *prepas populares*.<sup>32</sup>

Historians have questioned whether or not world-wide events in 1968 marked a turning point. Arif Dirlik has pointed out that for the so-called Third World, 1968 is not exactly a turning point because there is history of student activism, in many instances quite radical, before and after 1968.<sup>33</sup> On October 2, 1968 between 8,000 and 10,000 students, workers, housewives, neighbors, journalists, and bystanders gathered in Tlatelolco’s impressive *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* to protest, among others, police and military violence against students in July 1968. President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz ordered the deployment of 8,000 to 10,000 police and troops to put an end to the gathering. Most of them had explicit orders to arrest and kill the “subversives.” The President also sent a group of snipers who had orders to shoot at civilians, police, and the military to begin

---

<sup>30</sup> “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre,” Expediente 100-19-1-79, legajo 71, Departamento Federal de Seguridad, November 19, 1979, pp. 18-27. Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>31</sup> After 1977, Bulmaro Vega became one of Puebla’s representatives of the National Front against Repression, Box 1510-A-4, DGIPS folio 405, no. 48, August 28, 1981, Galería 2, AGN.

<sup>32</sup> Lorenzo Hernández, interview by author, notes, February 1, 2007, Puebla, México.

<sup>33</sup> Arif Dirlik, “The World in 1968,” in *1968: The World Transformed*, Carol Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 296

chaos.<sup>34</sup> In a few hours authorities killed more than 300 hundred students and other civilians. In the aftermath authorities arrested, imprisoned, tortured and disappeared thousands.

While Dirlik's assertion that students had a prior history of activism, it is also true that the amount of violence that the state exercised on students in 1968 modified students' behavior and ideology. Without a doubt the 1968 student massacre marked the rest of their lives especially those who lost friends, family members, or those who were tortured.<sup>35</sup> Students became more militant and even those who were not so interested in politics became more politically aware. Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska gathered dozens of students' testimonies in which young people reported the significance of October 1968. According to one student, "All of us were reborn on October 2. And on that day, we also decided how we are all going to die: fighting for genuine justice and democracy."<sup>36</sup> Another student claimed that even the upper-middle class students at the Jesuit private university, the Universidad Iberoamericana, were politicized by the UNAM students: "...[they] also painted slogans, distributed handbills, and attended demonstrations, despite the clubbing. I think the Student Movement did us all lots of good."<sup>37</sup> Other students stated their total disillusion about the state and its institutions. After 1968, many students stopped believing that the State could allow an independent

---

<sup>34</sup> See Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México* (México: Grijalbo, 2001):136-137

<sup>35</sup> The torture included electric shocks in students' testicles and rectum. Authorities raped women, and burned their breasts with lighted cigarettes. See for example, a member of the National Strike Committee, Luis Tomás Cervantes Cabeza de Vaca's and Roberta Avendano Martínez's accounts in Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992):107-108, 116-117, 147-50.

<sup>36</sup> Student Raúl Alvarez Garín, in Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992):316.

<sup>37</sup> Carolina Pérez Cicero, student at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, UNAM, in Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992):93



democratic movement. As a high school student observed, “the PRI doesn’t go in for dialogues, just monologues.”<sup>38</sup> And in 1971, a participant in the student movement claimed that:

Con Tlatelolco los estudiantes aprendimos crudamente el verdadero carácter del Estado Mexicano, rompimos obligadamente con su apariencia democrática, comprendimos que el Estado no podía absorber dentro de sus marcos políticos institucionales, un movimiento democrático independiente de toda manipulación oficial, en la medida en que funda su hegemonía política en el control “desde arriba” de las clases subordinadas.<sup>39</sup>

Some of those disillusioned students, who in many occasions were the victims of repression, knew that change could only occur outside state institutions, by organizing workers and teaching students. Young college students of the 1968 generation decided to actively engage in the education of the children of the working class and the marginalized poor. Bulmaro and Lorenzo, for example supported the Preparatorias Populares. These popular high-schools were part of the UAP system and were supposed to educate those students who were not accepted or could not afford to attend more prestigious public schools. Some teachers in the *prepas populares* firmly believed that all students had the right to study. For them education was not exclusive for elite children; it should be available for everyone. With these ideas in mind, they set out to sustain the Prepas Populares. In fact, some of these teachers taught without receiving compensation.

---

<sup>38</sup> Jan Poniatowski Amor, student at the Antonio Caso Preparatory School, in Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992):86

<sup>39</sup> Rubén Venadero, *Perspectiva, órgano del movimiento estudiantil independiente*, no. 1, del 15 al 30 de octubre de 1971, quoted in Rosalio Wences Reza, *El Movimiento Estudiantil y los Problemas Nacionales* (Mexico: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1971): 151

Where did the students get their ideas? At Puebla's *Preparatoria Popular Emiliano Zapata*, teachers exposed their students to revolutionary ideas, introducing their class to Karl Marx, Frederick Engels and Mao Tse-Tung's theories. One of these teachers was Bulmaro Vega. An avid intellectual, Bulmaro Vega studied not only physics, but he also read political science, theory, and history texts.<sup>40</sup> Always surrounded by books and pamphlets, Bulmaro explained to his students that Maoist theory best fit the Mexican situation. Like many people in his generation, Bulmaro did not think that blue-collar workers were the only group who could eventually start a revolution. With an increasing number of informal workers, such as street vendors, he believed that an alliance between formal and informal workers and peasants could achieve radical change. Bulmaro Vega thought that Marxism and Maoism needed to be flexibly applied to the Mexican case.<sup>41</sup>

It is worth considering the history of Maoism in Mexico. It had its beginnings with a group of former Mexican Communist Party members, which included Camilo Chávez and Edelmiro Maldonado. Their group was the result of the split between the Soviet Union and China in the early 1960s. In Mexico, some supported Stalin and others backed Mao. The latter group embraced the Maoist tenets of "go to the people, learn from the people."<sup>42</sup> In many parts of the globe, including Mexico, Maoism was very influential in the late 1960s. Maoism provided leaders and intellectuals with an "organizational model" and with set of alternative revolutionary ideas that were different

---

<sup>40</sup> His children remember that he did not sleep during many nights; he preferred reading and studying. He went on for days without eating properly as he was immersed in his studies.

<sup>41</sup> José Luis Díaz, interview by author, January 16, 2007, notes, Puebla, México.

<sup>42</sup> Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992): 234

from Soviet communism or the capitalist economies of the US and Western Europe.<sup>43</sup> According to historian Barry Carr, who has studied the Mexican left extensively, Maoism and Maoist populism had a major influence in the new left organizations throughout the 1960s and 1970s, especially on the *frentes*, broad coalitions of tenants, workers and the “poor.”<sup>44</sup>

The larger university setting at the Autonomous University of Puebla provided space where students questioned and developed ideas about social change. Liberal sectors of the university, among them those people who were affiliated with the Mexican Communist Party (PCM), hosted a number of activities that facilitated the exchange of left-wing ideas. Some of the most radical minds of the time presented talks at the university and were welcomed by cheerful crowds. For example, a leading Mexican liberation theologian Sergio Méndez Arceo, the so-called “Red Bishop” of the Cuernavaca diocese in the state of Morelos from 1952 to 1983, visited Puebla’s Autonomous University several times. Not only did he visit universities, but he also

---

<sup>43</sup> Arif Dirlik, “The World in 1968,” in *1968: The World Transformed*, Carol Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 296

<sup>44</sup> Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992): 234-237. As this chapter will later explain, street vendors’ leaders were also influenced by Maoist thought. In fact, the *Unión Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes* based its original ideology on Maoist ideas. After all, Bulmaro Vega and his students were heavily involved in the organization of the UPVA at the beginning of the 1970s, and, by the mid-1970s, Vega became one of the top leaders of the street vendors’ organization. He also taught street vendors Marxist and Mao Tse Tung’s ideas, creating study groups (*cuadros de estudios*) to make them more politically conscious and to make them more active in their organization. Some vendors also attended a course on Marxism-Leninism at Mexico’s Preparatoria Popular Emiliano Zapata. Moreover, street vendors and students also participated in a front composed by teachers, students, peasants, and molders the Frente de Activistas Revolucionarios (FAR). See Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Box 1510, A3, 405-157-158, April 29, 1976, Galería 2, AGN

visited political prisoners at Mexico City's Lecumberri or the "Black Palace" where the government held political and labor activists from the 1950s to the 1970s.<sup>45</sup> In 1970, he delivered a speech in front of thousands of students and general public at the main university plaza in Puebla. Immediately after his passionate speech, the floor was opened for questions and answers. The speech and the questions lasted for over three hours. One of Méndez Arceo's main messages was that, unlike Capitalism, Socialism was more similar to Christianity. Socialism, he argued, was more akin to the Christian principles of true fraternity, peace, and justice.<sup>46</sup> Even with his religious overtones and his early history of friendship with Mexican businessmen, Méndez Arceo was a radical in comparison to Puebla's priests, such as archbishop Octaviano Márquez y Toriz, who were conservative, status-quo crusaders. Márquez y Toriz often stated: "Yes to Christianity, No to Communism."<sup>47</sup>

On different occasions, former priests, who were forced by the conservative hierarchy to leave the Catholic Church for their political views, also visited the university. In June, 1971, Felipe Pardiñas, a former Jesuit priest, gave a talk to students in which he discussed Mao's ideas on the people's revolution.<sup>48</sup> Other visitors to the

---

<sup>45</sup> In 1982, Lecumberri became the Archivo General de la Nación. Since June 2002, researchers can access documents of Mexico's dirty war. Kate Doyle, "'Forgetting is not Justice:' Mexico Bares Its Secret Past," *World Policy Journal*, 20, no. 2 (Summer 2003):1. Due to the horrors that prisoners experienced at Lecumberri, people began calling it "el palacio negro." Many students who survived the 1968 massacre spent years in Lecumberri. Heberto Castillo, a former student leader, once fainted after the prison dentist pulled out one of his teeth without pain killer. Castillo refused to have the pain killer injected because the doctor was using the same needle for all the prisoners. See Julio Scherer García, *Cárceles* (México DF: Aguilar, Altea, Taurus Alfaguara, 1998): 43.

<sup>46</sup> *La Opinión*, August 18, 1970. Archivo Histórico de la Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, (hereafter, AHBUP).

<sup>47</sup> Humberto Sotelo, "Movimiento Universitario," 130.

<sup>48</sup> *El Sol de Puebla*, June 12, 1971, AHBUP.

university included the Belgian monk Gregorio Lemerrier who was also based out of Cuernavaca and had close connections with Méndez Arceo.<sup>49</sup>

Radical ideas were not exclusive to liberation theologians or rebel monks; people of all venues delivered speeches urging students to take a stand in the face of the deteriorating living standard in Mexico. The economics department, for instance, hosted speakers who were highly politicized. In 1970, at a graduation speech, newly trained economists listened to their undergraduate director, Professor López Gallo, state that the youth should identify itself with the working class. In a provocative and passionate speech, López Gallo urged students to emancipate workers and peasants.<sup>50</sup>

College students were not the only ones engaging in left-wing activities. At the *Prepa Popular Emiliano Zapata* which was affiliated to the state university, a number of events of the early 1970s what students in Puebla were thinking. For example, they commemorated the third anniversary of Ernesto Ché Guevara's death and wrote poems celebrating his revolutionary deeds.<sup>51</sup> On September 11, 1974, exactly a year after the military coup in Chile put an end to the democratically-elected socialist government of Salvador Allende, 3,000 students marched on the streets in solidarity with the Chilean people and against the military.<sup>52</sup> Not only were the members of the university's community concerned with recent historical events, but they were also actively engaged

---

<sup>49</sup> Robert Sean Mackin, "Becoming the Red Bishop of Cuernavaca: Rethinking Gill's Religious Competition Model," *Sociology of Religion*, Winter 2003, 64(4): 504-505.

<sup>50</sup> *Novedades*, February 2, 1970, AHBUP. High-rank univeristy administrators shared some of the same values and encourage solidarity among workers and students. In 1975, in his anual speech, the State University's President, Sergio Flores stated that "students, professors and workers must firmly and combatively defend university's autonomy." February 28, 1975, *La Opinión*, HJN.

<sup>51</sup> *El Sol de Puebla*, October 9, 1970, AHBUP.

<sup>52</sup> *El Sol de Puebla*, September 11, 1974, Hemeroteca Juan Nepomuceno, (hereafter HJN).

in local problems. Teachers at the *Prepa*, for example, encouraged their students to join to protest the rising costs of living and transportation.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, different activities at the Autonomous University and *Prepas Populares* and the difficult economic situation of *poblanos*, encouraged an active and radical environment that transformed the minds and actions of many young people.

Even middle-class students, whose socio-economic background was comfortable, sympathized with poor people's multiple problems. María Luisa was one of these students. María Luisa's single mother was the owner of a beauty saloon in downtown Puebla, which allowed them to live rather comfortably. Outside her mother's beauty parlor, on the sidewalk, dozens of street vendors sold their wares, and María Luisa and her mother witnessed police attacks on the vendors, mostly women. María Luisa and her mother sympathized with the familiar women who sold outside their businesses. They could not stand police mistreating the elderly. In addition, María Luisa's mother did not consider the street vendors as competitors. They clearly offered different services to customers. In many occasions, María Luisa's mother set out to the streets to defend vendors from abusive authorities.<sup>54</sup>

Besides these events, María Luisa's political turning point came in the aftermath of 1968 when her cousin disappeared. The young woman was a conservative student in Mexico City. On October 2, 1968, walking relatively close to the Plaza de las Tres

---

<sup>53</sup> *La Opinión*, January 28, 1971, AHBUP.

<sup>54</sup> María Luisa, interview with author, notes, August 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

Culturas, she was taken prisoner and raped by state thugs.<sup>55</sup> These tragic events that occurred to her cousin radicalized María Luisa. Never again did she believe in state institutions and their representatives. Although raised in a Catholic family, María Luisa also became increasingly wary of the Church. By the late 1960s, María Luisa attended a women's Catholic school. Soon after 1968, she was expelled because she told her classmates that state authorities had raped her cousin while in prison. María Luisa then entered the *Prepa Popular*. From then on, María Luisa got involved in street vendors', construction workers', university students', and bus drivers' struggles for fair treatment through unionization. She first got involved in Puebla's student movement and immediately after she worked closely with the female vendors' organizing their union.

Influenced by their surroundings and encouraged by their teachers, María Luisa and her peers at the *Preparatoria Popular Emiliano Zapata* worked closely with formal and informal workers. This interaction occurred on different levels. While some students challenged Puebla's government with individual acts of resistance, others helped organized vendors and taught them techniques to defend themselves against abusive police officers and inspectors. One example of individual help occurred in the summer of 1971 when high-school student Serafín López was arrested and taken to Puebla's police station. According to a newspaper report, street vendor Cristina Pérez was selling her merchandise on a busy downtown street when a policeman cowardly began beating her. The seventeen-year old Serafín intervened to defend her. Enraged by this act, two

---

<sup>55</sup> Rape was very common inside and outside prisons. See for example testimony by Ana Ignacia Rodríguez (aka Nacha), of the Action Committee UNAM, in Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992):97

policemen violently beat Serafín and later detained him.<sup>56</sup> While Serafín courageously fought two policemen to defend the vendor, other students pursued different strategies. They believed that isolated acts like this one led nowhere and that vendors needed to continue their organizing and build larger protests against the police. Moreover, some students wanted vendors to know how to best react in face of police abuses.

Students thought that violence was not always the best response. Street vendors learned defensive techniques from the students. One of the first lessons instructed street vendors to avoid provoking police officers or municipal authorities while they were negotiating to secure spaces in public spaces or markets. They needed to be calm. Authorities in connivance with the conservative and widely-read newspaper *El Sol de Puebla* did not miss an opportunity to damage street vendors' image in newspaper editorials. They portrayed vendors as vicious people. Students believed that vendors' should avoid any kind of violence against authorities when the circumstances did not merit it.

Students, however, agreed with vendors that they had to resort to violence when they were attacked by the police.<sup>57</sup> It was simply a matter of self-defense. Radical students taught vendors how to make Molotov bombs. After all, students had a long experience using them against the police and the military. Students also advised vendors how to use marbles in face of attacks. In case of police raids, vendors were supposed to

---

<sup>56</sup> *La Opinión*, June 6, 1971, AHBUP.

<sup>57</sup> On a number of occasions students advised vendors to use force only when they had to defend themselves against police. Students tried to avoid further violence. See *La Opinión*, March 25, 1975, 2.



throw as many marbles as they could to the ground so that the police would trip, fall down, and become essentially neutralized.

While working on the streets was not an easy task, street vendors had certain advantages over factory workers who were closely supervised by managers. Working in public places, owning their own stands, and laboring without bosses allowed them the freedom to carry self-defense tools. Female vendors, for example, used to put the marbles in their aprons' pockets and have them handy in case of police raids and attacks. Although their aprons were heavy to wear, it was worth the effort if they could repel authorities. Others stored bottles, sticks, oil, rags, and vinegar in their stands. Vendors learned that rags soaked in vinegar around their faces were a good way to decrease the effects of pepper spray.<sup>58</sup> Together they could also gather and fabricate Molotov cocktails, which were successful. In the late 1970s, the state governor, Alfredo Toxqui de Lara was concerned and annoyed that street vendors hid the material to fabricate the Molotov cocktails in their stands.<sup>59</sup>

Students advised vendors to disrupt public order as a means to gain attention from city authorities and Puebla's citizens. One of the most effective techniques was to high-jack public buses, especially when vendors needed rides to go to marches or meetings. In 1976, for example, vendors high-jacked three buses to attend a meeting at the zócalo in

---

<sup>58</sup> Rita Amador, interview with author, notes, August 15, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>59</sup> Departamento Federal de Seguridad, November 19, 1979, 8-27, AGN.

support of land petitioners from northern Puebla, from the town of Tecamachalco.<sup>60</sup> Students advised vendors that they first had to ask passengers to get off the bus and then demand the driver to take them to their specific destination. According to vendors, people in the 1970s were pretty cooperative and were used to evacuating the buses. High-jacking buses was a common technique among students. On a number of occasions, vendors and students painted slogans on the sides of buses. It was a successful way to communicate their messages throughout the city without the need of pamphleteering. Their succinct messages included: “stop repression,” “freedom to political prisoners,” “death to the PRI,” and “long live street vendors.”<sup>61</sup> Later on, in the late 1980s, this technique became an important way for vendors to protest the lack of attention that city planners paid to providing transportation to the newly built markets. By the 1980s, city authorities built a number of markets at the outskirts of the city with hardly any services or public transportation.

Vendors had many opportunities to practice the new lessons learned from the students. In interviews, female vendors proudly remembered the effectiveness of these techniques in forcing authorities to comply with vendors’ demands. More importantly, the police knew that vendors were no longer easy targets; vendors defended themselves with more sophisticated techniques and confidence.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre,” Dirección Federal de Seguridad, Expediente 100-19-1-76, H346-L47, February 21, 1976, p. 347-348, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>61</sup> “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre,” Dirección Federal de Seguridad, Expediente 100-19-1-77, H234, L56, May 5, 1977, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>62</sup> The police, however, became more violent against vendors.

Students and vendors did not focus exclusively on the use of self-defense.<sup>63</sup> Both groups also engaged in a number of peaceful cultural activities. Students played an important role in introducing street vendors to new ways of communicating their struggle and daily experiences to a larger audience. Since the late 1960s students were involved in theater groups. Influenced by Chicano theater, they wrote short theater pieces in which they represented the problems of the urban and rural poor. Students enacted land seizures or the founding of the *prepa popular*. With scant resources, students played their shows to the university and high school audiences.

It did not take a lot of effort for a couple of high-school students to convince some street vendors, especially a group of women, to create their own play in which they could express their daily struggles, emphasizing their confrontations with city inspectors and the police.<sup>64</sup> The young Olga Corona and her sister-in-law, Paula Javier, were especially enthusiastic about staging a play. Together, students and vendors staged *Vendedores Ambulantes*, which represented vendors' problems on the streets. The cultural group or their *grupo cultural* was formed by vendors and a couple of high school students. Women always played the vendors and the men and the students played the police and union organizers. Although, female vendors were also organizers and leaders, the play only portrayed them as sellers and victims of repression.

The theater group showed their play at public high-schools, streets, and markets. They even represented a short act at traffic stops where motorists were forced to watch

---

<sup>63</sup> Years later, in response of police violence against vendors, vendors' leaders began planning karate classes and self defense and even create a "grupo de choque" to defend themselves. Expediente 100-19-1-79, H114-L72, April 23, 1979, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>64</sup> José Luis Díaz Miñón, interview by author, notes, January 16, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

the scene.<sup>65</sup> None of the members of the theater group followed a plan script. Street vendors created the play as they went along, most of the times improvising, adding, and cutting off parts. No written transcript existed; they played it by ear.

Encouraged and guided by students, vendors presented their play to small audiences in neighboring town churches and to large audiences in Mexico City. Most times, the group theater informally fundraised in the streets to pay for the short trips; the recipient communities provided with board and food. Some street vendors and students graciously remember the many times when they only had money to pay for one way of their trip, but did not have a single cent to pay for the return.<sup>66</sup>

Liberation theologians and other liberal priests welcomed the play in their parishes, especially in towns where people were petitioning for land or fighting against the local authorities or their cacique. Vendors liked these priests tremendously and some times they made public their sympathy by painting slogans on walls that read, “vivan curas guerrilleros.”<sup>67</sup> At any rate, these priests thought that *Vendedores Ambulantes* was an encouraging piece where common people expressed their daily battles against authorities.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the lack of financial resources, the street vendors’ cultural group won the recognition of several national and international institutions. One of their biggest success occurred in Mexico City’s *Instituto Politécnico Nacional* where vendors won the first

---

<sup>65</sup> José Luis Díaz Miñón, interview by author, notes, January 16, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>66</sup> Paula Javier, interview by author, notes, January 25, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>67</sup> Expediente 100-19-1-76, H367-L47, February 23, 1976. In 1981, street vendors organized an event in support of the revolutionaries in El Salvador and remembered the actions of the late Salvadorian archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Report, November 28, 1981Galería, 1, AGN.

<sup>68</sup> José Luis Díaz Minon, interview by author, January 16, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

place in a theater competition. Students from all over the country presented plays that depicted the daily lives of workers. Most of the actors were high school or university students, except for the street vendors who played their own piece. Paula Javier, one of the vendors, thought that they won the prize precisely because they were “authentic workers; we were real vendors.” The Mexico City jurors realized that the street vendors had a message to communicate and fairly recognized vendors’ efforts despite their meager resources. Although they did not any have special clothes, make up, lights, writers, or directors, they did have their own authentic presence. Indeed, their characters looked so real that theater employees, who were biased because of these actors’ physical appearance, prevented them from getting into the theater.<sup>69</sup>

Vendors also gained international attention on two occasions. In June, 1974, they participated in a Chicano and Latin American Theater Festival entitled “One Continent, One Culture for a Free Theatre and for Liberation,” in Mexico City. During the festival, which included more than 700 participants and over 60 plays, street vendors gained the attention of professor and theater director Theodore Shank, who described part of the play in detail in an article published in *The Drama Review: TDR*.<sup>70</sup>

While Shank only mentioned in passing that one of the vendors had a baby and one of the pictures that he took captured the child, vendors included the child in the play purposely. One of the vendors, Paula Javier, brought one of her children wherever they played and to the rehearsals because no one was available to take care of the little boy

---

<sup>69</sup> Paula Javier, interview by author, January 25, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>70</sup> Theodore Shank, “A Return to Aztec and Mayan Roots: At the Chicano and Latin American Festival,” *The Drama Review: TDR*, 18(4), Indigenous Theater Issue, 1974, 67-69.

while she acted. In one of the acts, vendors acted-out police attacks. Three vendors acted the scene as they sat on the ground vending their merchandise. Then a hostile inspector arrived to charge them a fee for the use of public space. The vendor refused to pay, and the inspector called the police. The police responded by beating the women.<sup>71</sup> After presenting the play a few times, Paula Javier noticed that one of her children cried every time the actors depicted the police attack. The reason: it reflected reality. The theater group members decided to include the little boy in the play and added a scene where the boy is scared by the police's attacks.<sup>72</sup>

The second international recognition to the vendors' cultural work occurred in 1974 in Germany. In 1973 some of these theatrical acts were captured in a low-budget short film (*cortometraje*) by Arturo Garmendia. At that time, Garmendia was a photography and film professor at the *Escuela Popular de Artes* of the Autonomous University of Puebla (UAP). Since the early 1970s, the UAP was a center for left-wing professors and students.<sup>73</sup> Garmendia believed that vendors' message could reach a broader audience if vendors allowed him to make a short film. After all, Garmendia produced short documentaries about the 1971 repression of students in Mexico City and about peasants in Chiapas. Vendors agreed and Arturo Garmendia made the film. What Garmendia did was to shoot some acts of the play and combined them with shots of

---

<sup>71</sup> *Los Vendedores Ambulantes*, short film, Filmoteca de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

<sup>72</sup> Paula Javier, interview by author, notes, January 25, 2007Puebla, Mexico. Four years later, when authorities imprisoned a number of street vendors, some of the vendors' leaders wanted to create another play in which they showed the conditions in which prisoners lived. They wanted to make people conscious of prisoners' suffering in jail. See expediente 100-19-1-78, H125-L64, May 4, 1978, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>73</sup> Wil Pansters, "Building a *Cacicazgo* in a Neoliberal University," in *Caciquismo in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, ed. Alan Knight and Wil Pansters (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2005): 306. In 1937, the governor Maximino Ávila Camacho founded the State University and terminated the Colegio del Estado. The Colegio del Estado was founded in 1826. The State University formally obtained its autonomy on May 22, 1956.

Puebla's street vendors and inhabitants of a *colonia popular*.<sup>74</sup> The camera, films, and editing process were subsidized by the UAP.<sup>75</sup> Interestingly, while the play represented women exclusively as vendors, in the short documentary, the main character was the outspoken self-made organizer and vendor Olga Corona.<sup>76</sup>



*Los Vendedores Ambulantes*, documentary scene.

The following year, in 1974, the black and white short film *Los Vendedores Ambulantes* made its way to Germany. In Mexico, Garmendia met the representative of

---

<sup>74</sup> The *colonia popular Emiliano Zapata* was a popular neighborhood on the city's outskirts that was built on land taken by a coalition of urban and rural organizations.

<sup>75</sup> Arturo Garmendia, interview by author, notes, March 20, 2007, Mexico City, Mexico.

<sup>76</sup> Years later, Olga Corona and Arturo Garmendia got married. Arturo Garmendia, interview with author, notes, March 20, 2007, Mexico City.

the Goethe Institute, who was interested in showing documentaries in Germany that represented people's struggles and who sent the film to Europe. The short film was awarded the first prize for best political and educational film by the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs of North Rhine-Westphalia at the renowned International Short Film Festival Oberhausen. The selection committee commended the value of visual media to communicate vendors' message and acknowledged their fight for social justice. The film was awarded 5,000 DM, but vendors did not profit.<sup>77</sup> What happened to the money remains a mystery.<sup>78</sup>

Despite receiving no compensation, vendors felt extremely proud about their cultural performances. Moreover, they found a practical use for the film. Paula Javier, who later became a leader of the Flores Magón Street Vendors organization, showed the film to street vendors and marketers. She believed the film had the potential to politicize other vendors since it had a clear intention to promote the vendors' fight against state repression and for economic justice.<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately someone lost the film and for many years nobody could find it. Luckily, the *filmoteca* at the National Autonomous University (UNAM) kept one copy that the vendors were able to retrieve. To this day, Paula Javier and the UPVA continue to show the film to a new generation of street vendors.

---

<sup>77</sup> *Los Vendedores Ambulantes*, ficha técnica, Filmografía Mexicana, Filmoteca de la UNAM and electronic correspondence with Sandy Norwing, Archiv der Internationalen Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, Germany February, 2007.

<sup>78</sup> In 1975, a group of street vendors accused Paula Javier and her in-laws, of stealing the money. Others accused the State University of Puebla of having kept the prize; others blamed the producer. Letter to Ciudadano Procurador General de Justicia del Estado, Dr. Alfredo Toxqui Fernández de Lara from several street vendors, April 2, 1975, box 58, file 10, Archivo Municipal de Puebla.

<sup>79</sup> Paula Javier, interview by author, January 25, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.



Vendors found other ways to express their hardships and their political views. On top of producing the play and the documentary, they also composed a “street vendors’ hymn.” In a similar way to the play, the song was not written down and many vendors and some students contributed to the lyrics. The melody was taken from a popular Mexican song entitled “La Llorona.” Vendors sang this hymn at marches, meetings, and special occasions.

Los ambulantes de Puebla Llorona  
No nos la sabemos rajar

The street vendors of Puebla, Llorona  
We don’t sell out

Los ambulantes de Puebla Llorona  
No nos la sabemos rajar

The street vendors of Puebla, Llorona  
We don’t sell out

Ya desde el 63 Llorona comenzamos a luchar  
Al surgir el movimiento Llorona fue el ambulante  
de Puebla

Since 63, Llorona, we began to fight  
When our movement started, it was the street vendor  
of Puebla

Y el primero fue el estudiante Llorona  
Que nos respondió como hermano

And the first to respond to us was the student  
Llorona,  
Who is like a brother

Porque exigimos mercados Llorona se nos llama  
comunistas

And when we demanded markets, some people  
called us  
Communists

Pero un orgullo tenemos de no haber sido PRIstas

But we are proud of never being part of the PRI

Ay de ti Llorona tan gobiernista

Y al pueblo Llorona le tocará quitarte lo reformista

You Llorona did sell out to the government

Ay de ti Llorona tan reformista [por la reforma  
electoral]

The people will fight against you Llorona because  
you are just reformist  
Poor of you Llorona who are so reformist.

All these activities that students and vendors carried out together strengthen their

links. While students actively engaged in street vendors’ struggles, vendors also participated in the student activism taking place at the UAP throughout the early 1970s.<sup>80</sup>

As mentioned earlier, students and their teachers sought to convert the UAP into a truly

<sup>80</sup> This close connection survived over the years, and for a long time students and vendors helped each other. In 1984, for example, 50 students from Puebla’s countryside who attended the UAP approached street vendors asking for economic support so that they could continue their studies. Vendors collected money and gave it to the students. Expediente 021-05-002, January 12, 1984, DGIPS, Galeria 1, AGN.

public institution that educated not only middle class students, but also working class folks. In the process, students felt prey to the state's use of violence against those who sought change. State repression furthered united students and street vendors.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the state was tremendously repressive against the students who had participated in the 1968 movement and who continued their activism. While some students fled the country, moved to different cities or went underground,<sup>81</sup> others were incarcerated by the police and military in Mexico City. Some of these students achieved their freedom during President Luis Echeverría's (1970-1976) *apertura democrática* or the "democratic opening." The so called "opening" was a policy by the Mexican federal government which tried to clean up the image of the presidency after the 1968 students' massacre. This goal was extremely important for Luis Echeverría because he had been secretary of the interior, *Secretario de Gobernación*, from 1964 to 1970 and was involved in ordering the killing of students and other civilians on October 2, 1968.<sup>82</sup>

Students did not believe in the *apertura*, especially after the 1971 state-sponsored killing and beating of students in Mexico City.<sup>83</sup> On June 10, 1971 a paramilitary group, "Los Halcones," savagely beat and killed a group of students protesting in the streets of Mexico City. In connivance with Mexico City's police department, the *halcones* or the hawks were equipped with sticks, and knives, and the military trained them in boxing and

---

<sup>81</sup> Students like Eduardo del Valle Espinosa, aka "El Búho" hid in Santiago de Chile, see Orlando Ortiz, *Jueves de Corpus*, 1.

<sup>82</sup> Barry Carr, *Mexican Communism, 1968-1983: Eurocommunism in the Americas?* (Center for US-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1985):96.

<sup>83</sup> In a meeting in Puebla, a UAP student openly declared that nobody believed in Echeverría's *aperturismo*. The opening, according to this student was a Echeverría's demagogic tool. "Información de Cholula, Estado de Puebla," Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, February 13, 1975, box 1510-A, file 2, p. 32, Galería 2, AGN.

martial arts such as karate and judo. According to witnesses, these young thugs behaved so aggressively that it seemed that they were drugged or sleep deprived. The *halcones* not only beat and killed students, but they also injured journalists.<sup>84</sup> The university students who demonstrated peacefully demanded the nationalization of foreign companies in Mexico and the expropriation of the Monterrey group's holdings. They stated their support to peasants' demands for lands and for workers' control of factories.<sup>85</sup> This repression, which was later known as the *masacre del Jueves de Corpus*, accelerated the opposition of the *Comités de Lucha* to Echeverría's initiatives.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to killing students, the state tried to deradicalize students without using violence. During the "democratic opening" the government offered political and administrative positions to students. For example, Pablo González Casanova, a former student in the UNAM, became the president (rector) of that institution.<sup>87</sup> The government also offered less prestigious but attractive jobs to other students. Arturo Garmendia, a student of Architecture at the UNAM who wrote about film criticism, received an invitation from the President's brother, Rodolfo Echeverría, to work at the Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía. While some accepted those positions, Garmendia refused to "work for students' assassins."<sup>88</sup> The democratic opening also introduced a

---

<sup>84</sup> This paramilitary group was created in 1968 by General Alfonso Corona del Rosal. The military instructed them with "deformed" civics and history classes. The Halcones were composed of very poor, uneducated, and unemployed young people. See Orlando Ortiz, *Jueves de Corpus* (Mexico City: Editorial Diogenes, sixth edition 1979):82-83 and 277.

<sup>85</sup> Brigada 10 de junio, "Por qué fue reprimida la manifestación?" p.5 quoted in Rosalio Wences Reza, , *El movimiento estudiantil y lo problemas nacionales*, (Mexico: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1971), p.81

<sup>86</sup> Rosalio Wences Reza, *El movimiento estudiantil y lo problemas nacionales*, (Mexico: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1971), p. 61.

<sup>87</sup> Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices*, 157.

<sup>88</sup> Arturo Garmendia, interview with author, notes, March 20, 2007, Mexico City, Mexico.

new federal electoral law and the repeal of Article 145 of the Federal Penal Code that allowed for the imprisonment of political activists.<sup>89</sup>

In reality, however, the democratic opening was merely the President's rhetorical policy. Many students faced death and torture shortly after achieving freedom. Years later, many of these political activists faced death in the hands of the military or paramilitary groups. Without a doubt, Luis Echeverría's administration engaged in the so called Dirty War or *la guerra sucia* (ca. 1972-1977) against those who did not sell out and against those who engaged in urban resistance, such as those in Guadalajara's Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre<sup>90</sup> or those who joined Lucio Cabañas in the south western state of Guerrero.<sup>91</sup>

Some of the students who were liberated and went to Puebla, left their cells just to find out that the state had not forgiven their politics. For them, the Dirty War was about to begin. The state worked relentlessly against political activists and killed a number of them. Joel Arriaga suffered such repression. In 1968, Arriaga was a student who survived the Tlatelolco massacre but was later imprisoned at Lecumberri in Mexico City.

---

<sup>89</sup> Wil Pansters, *Politics and Power in Puebla: The Political History of a Mexican State, 1937-1987* (Amsterdam: Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation, 1990): 144. For a succinct account of the democratic opening that includes gender, see Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005). Chapter five is especially important.

<sup>90</sup> Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices*, 154. For the account of the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre see Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México*, (Mexico: Grijalbo, 2001): chapter 7. According to Sergio Aguayo the government engaged in the disappearance of those who were involved in guerrilla since 1969 in the state of Guerrero. The increase in the number of people disappeared took place from 1973 and then again under President José López Portillo in 1977. In 1977, Javier García Paniagua became the director of the DFS and the "Brigada Blanca", which became relentless against urban "subversives." Aguayo does not mention that this was part of the dirty war, p. 189 and 232.

<sup>91</sup> The literature on the Mexican Dirty War is not extensive. For a personal narrative of a survivor see Alberto Ulloa Bornemann and Aurora Camacho de Schimdt, *Surviving Mexico's Dirty War: A Political Prisoner's Memoir* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007).

Arriaga was also an active member of the Mexican Communist Party and founder of Puebla's *juventud comunista*.<sup>92</sup> He was released in 1972 by the federal authorities, went to Puebla and became the director of the night High School Benito Juárez. This high-school had recently been built to educate working class students. Joel Arriaga was committed not only to the education of the urban popular classes, but also to educate students from the countryside. Unfortunately, the state, especially the governor Gonzalo Bautista O'Farril, the archbishop Octaviano Márquez y Tóriz, and the right in Puebla despised members or former members of the PCM. On July 21 1972, unidentified subjects killed him in cold blood in Puebla, while he and his wife stopped at a traffic light.<sup>93</sup> Some people linked his assassination to the state, the archbishop, or to right-wing students from the Frente Universitario-Anti-comunista (FUA).<sup>94</sup> All of them, however, claimed that they had nothing to do with Arriaga's murder. Months later two other people from the university community were also killed. On December 20, 1972 thugs killed the young professor, Enrique Cabrera. On Labor Day, May 1, 1973, Alfonso Calderón, Ignacio González Román and Victor M. Medina were shot to death. Two days later, police and paramilitary groups killed another five students. One of them, the 18 year-old high-school student Gilberto Chávez Ávila, was savagely beaten on the street.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> See a summary of Joel Arriaga's activities in Alberto Domingo, "La Muerte llegó como Heraldo de traición y de terror: Joel Arriaga, la víctima seleccionada por quienes anhelan devolvernos a las épocas del fascio, de la intolerancia y del culto a la violencia desatada," *Revista Siempre!*, no. 998, August 9, 1972, pg. 18-19; See also Heberto Castillo, "Sin hablar de culpable no podrá detenerse la violencia," *Revista Siempre!*, no. 998, August 8, 1972, p. 22-23 and Wil Pansters, *Politics and Power in Puebla: The Political History of a Mexican State, 1937-1987*, (Amsterdam: Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation, 1990): 130.

<sup>93</sup> For Joel Arriaga's murder see *Novedades, Diario de la Tarde*, July 21, 1972.

<sup>94</sup> In "Escalada de la violencia: Márquez y Toriz y el clima de la violencia en Puebla," *Vida Pública, Revista Siempre!* no. 997, August 2, 1972, pg. 8.

<sup>95</sup> Puebla's governor, Gonzalo Bautista O'Farril, declared that the dead of these students must be a lesson for other students who protest. See Humberto Sotelo, "Movimiento Universitario: La reforma universitaria y el movimiento popular de 1973," in Jaime Castillo, Elsa Patiño and Severino Cortés, *Los movimientos*

According to Puebla's governor, "the police had order to kill anyone who threatens public peace or who attempts to kidnap police officers."<sup>96</sup>

Facing authorities' violence, students organized a series of protests that included marches and speeches in which they demanded the investigation of Arriaga's assassination. Street vendors joined those activities. On July 26, 1972, at one of those marches 15,000 people gathered. Vendors, peasants, taxi drivers, electrical and railroad workers joined the students in these marches to protest Arriaga's murder. During these events, the political environment was inviting for all, allowing many to air their own specific demands. For example, street vendors demanded that authorities decrease the amount of fees for the use of public space that they paid to the city government.<sup>97</sup>

Students not only protested the assassination of their fellow *compañeros*. Students were committed to transforming their university into a truly public institution that educated those with scant economic resources. Students were certain that they could count on street vendors. After all, students and vendors had already built a close connection. Vendors helped students take buildings, highjack buses, and attend marches, meetings, and sit-ins. At the beginning of 1971, when students of Economics and high-school students of the *Prepa Popular* took El Carolino, the main university building, they were helped by street vendors.<sup>98</sup> They were especially helpful fighting police officers who were in charge of beating students. A former high-school student, María Luisa,

---

*sociales en Puebla*, (Puebla: Departamento de Investigaciones Arquitectónicas y urbanísticas, Instituto de Ciencias, UAP, 1986): 128 and Luis González de Alba, "La comisión investigadora," in *Sucesos universitarios (1970-1980) en la revista Siempre!*, 140.

<sup>96</sup> Arnaldo Córdova, "Gobierno a la Mexicana: Matar de un tiro," in *Sucesos universitarios*, 134-136.

<sup>97</sup> *La Opinión*, August 30, 1972, HJN.

<sup>98</sup> "Grave División en la UAP," *El Sol de Puebla*, February 11, 1971, p.1 and 3 (roja 7-8), HJN.

remembers that women vendors taught her how to attack police officers when they were close to her. A good technique was to grab their hair from the back of their head and pull it really hard down until they could not move.<sup>99</sup>

Vendors contributed not only by helping students take buildings, buses, or fighting against the police. Vendors, especially women also carried out reproductive labor for the student movement. Many women vendors provided students with raw and prepared food. Precisely, when students took university buildings and nobody could get in or out, food was scarce. It was at that point that female vendors thought of bringing provisions for the empty-stomach students. According to students, vendors were able to sneak in small boxes of fruits and women prepared sandwiches (*tortas*) and tacos.<sup>100</sup> One vendor recalls how her mother, who was also a seller, used to give students cigarettes and coffee to cheer and warm them up. She was such a thoughtful and caring older woman that students and activists nicknamed her *la abuelita*, the affectionate Spanish term for grandmother. Everyone knew not only *la abuelita*, but also *la casa de la abuelita* because she also gave shelter to those students who were persecuted by the police and who sought hiding in a safe place.<sup>101</sup>

Indeed students relied on vendors to complete some of their political activities. More importantly, students who were part of the *Comités de Lucha* discussed the urgency of a formal alliance between students and the popular classes. Vendors who were

---

<sup>99</sup> María Luisa, interview with author, notes, August 2007, Puebla, México.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Berguiss, Marucha, Omar et.al., notes, August 2007, Puebla, México.

<sup>101</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview with author, August, 2007, Puebla, México. When vendors were chased by the police, they also hid in the university.

constantly fighting against authorities were committed to help build that alliance.<sup>102</sup> For example, in a meeting that protested the murder of another student, Guillermo Ramírez Alvarado, one street vendor stated that all vendors were eager to do whatever it took to solve the student's assassination. Publicly and representing her fellow vendors, this *ambulante* emphasized their solidarity with students.<sup>103</sup>

The most important aspect of street vendors' participation in students' activities is the fact that they became politically active and their demands broadened to include the plights of other sectors of society. Their claims included not only their ability to work on the streets to earn a living or that the police returned their merchandise, but also the clarification of students' murders or the electoral process of the state of Puebla.<sup>104</sup> For both male and female vendors their political participation with students was illuminating. During some of these events women vendors even took the microphones and addressed hundreds of peasants, workers, and students. In their speeches it is clear that they went beyond immediate economic demands. For example, in a 1974 meeting that protested the election of a PRI cacique in the neighboring town of Cholula, a female vendor addressed about 400 people. Pointedly, the female *ambulante* noted that all the people in the meeting, which included police, were all brothers and should not be fighting against each other. She said that they all should be united because they were all exploited by the PRI and their allies.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> "Asamblea en el Carolino," *El Sol de Puebla*, February 11, 1971.

<sup>103</sup> Box 1510, A1, files 405-96 and 405-102, November 7, 1974, Galería 2, AGN

<sup>104</sup> On a number of occasions, vendors accompanied students to towns to observe elections.

<sup>105</sup> Box 1510, A2, file 405-30, DGIPS, February 13, 1975, Galería 2, AGN



From the early 1960s on, students and vendors became allies in a struggle against authoritarian policies in Puebla. Vendors and students shared experiences of state violence. Students and *ambulantes* had struggled together on the streets and supported each other against authorities. Students helped vendors in their organizing efforts and vendors supported students in their fight to democratize their university. Both groups realized the importance of uniting forces against the state –and Puebla’s elite-. This connection with students, allowed vendors to participate in larger political struggles in Puebla. This participation provided vendors with the elements to make their union a flexible –and relatively democratic- organization that addressed broader social and political issues that challenged the Mexican state.

## Chapter 4

### “Unidos, Organizados y Luchando Venceremos”: The Street Vendors’ Union

After the October 28, 1973 raid, when riot police injured street vendors and killed a vendor’s baby, *ambulantes* formally organized an independent union that defended their economic interests and protected their safety. At the beginning of November 1973, street vendors formed the *Unión Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes-28 de Octubre* (hereafter UPVA).<sup>1</sup> In 1973, the membership consisted of about 400 street vendors who peddled their wares in Puebla’s downtown. Six years later, the membership had increased to 1,200 people.<sup>2</sup> The main leaders of the organization were young vendors who built a close relationship with university students. These young vendors were members of a long-time family of sellers, the Corona family, which was composed of Olga Corona, who played the main role in the documentary, *Vendedores Ambulantes*; her two elder brothers, Enrique and Adolfo; and Paula Javier, Adolfo’s wife. The Coronas, as they were known among the vendor population, were enthusiastic organizers who knew most of the vendors. Their youth, connections with students, and energetic personalities allowed them to recruit members and form the vendors’ union.<sup>3</sup> In close proximity to the Coronas were members of the university community, especially the teachers at the

---

<sup>1</sup> The first name they had for their union was the *Unión de Vendedores Ambulantes Emiliano Zapata* or simply the *Unión de Vendedores Ambulantes*. Years later it became the UPVA-28 de Octubre.

<sup>2</sup> “Investigación,” Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-79, legajo 71, p. 19, Galería 1, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter, AGN).

<sup>3</sup> “Investigación,” Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-79, legajo 71, p. 19, Galería 1, AGN

Popular High-schools, Lorenzo Hernández Becerra and Bulmaro Vega.<sup>4</sup> This group of leaders was in charge of the organization up to the late 1970s, when another group of vendors took over the organization.

This chapter explores the UPVA's goals, structure, leadership, and the rules that vendors set to maintain their organization. While the alliance with students was instrumental in organizing and maintaining an independent and relatively democratic union, it was precisely this connection with university students that displaced women vendors from the UPVA's top leadership. Almost immediately after the UPVA's creation in 1973, students became the main leaders of the union. Whereas students and their teachers held notions of social justice and union democracy, they were far less committed to questions of gender equality. Women, however, continued participating in a number of union activities. Despite this shortcoming, the UPVA became a militant union of informal workers that posed a serious challenge to the PRI. The union remained outside the corporatist structure of the PRI by not joining the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP), and then by creating alliances with other sectors of the population that included landless peasants, teachers, and members of other independent unions that included other vendors.

The PRI-state constantly sought to destroy the UPVA. Authorities disliked vendors' independence from the CNOP and, for that matter, any attempt by any union to create broader alliances. While some times authorities used violence against militant

---

<sup>4</sup> Expedientes de Mercados, Caja 2590, Expediente 1158, n/d, Archivo Municipal de Puebla, (hereafter AMP).

workers, on other occasions, they made fun of those who attempted to form an independent organized labor movement. For example, on May Day 1978, Fidel Velázquez, the main leader of the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos' (CTM), claimed that an independent organized labor movement would not succeed in Mexico until the year of 2500.<sup>5</sup> Whereas this comment only sought to devalue workers' attempts to break away from the PRI, the state engaged in less subtle kinds of attacks against independent unions or organizations. As chapter 5 will discuss, authorities infiltrated, divided, and attacked unions and coalitions which tried to gain independence and fought for union democracy. In this context, the UPVA is significant because it survived state attempts to destroy it and the UPVA did not affiliate with the PRI or any other political party. Moreover, this was a union of informal workers that, on top of seeking short-term economic demands, became immersed in the realm of the Mexican left, which challenged the corporatist structure of the PRI.

The UPVA forms part of a larger struggle of independent organizing in Mexico that began in the 1930s, when Vicente Lombardo Toledano created the "new Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM)" or the *CROM depurada*, then in 1948, he formed the Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México (UGOCM), two umbrella organizations that tried, at least in theory, to sever their ties with the old CROM and the CTM. In the late 1950s, the railroad workers formed the Central Sindical Independiente (CSI).<sup>6</sup> While these attempts were tremendously significant, leaders did not attempt to organize other sectors of the working class. Instead, the UPVA was

---

<sup>5</sup> Fidel Velázquez's declaration in the newspaper *Uno más Uno*, May 2, 1978 quoted in Arnaldo Córdova, *La política de masas y el futuro de la izquierda en México* (México D.F: Editorial Era, 1979): 50.

<sup>6</sup> Arnaldo Córdova, *La política de masas*, 55.

composed of informal workers, and unlike traditional trade unions, the UPVA leadership did not distinguish between blue-collar workers, informal laborers, and peasants. The student-vendor leadership encouraged a broad coalition of people.<sup>7</sup>

### UPVA structure

The organization of the UPVA did not change vendors' business practices; they continued peddling their same wares in their same spots, which were the streets surrounding the two large downtown enclosed markets, La Victoria and the Cinco de Mayo. What changed after the creation of the UPVA was vendors' refusal to leave the streets. Vendors seemed to be confident that their union and alliance with students made them more powerful and able to bargain collectively. Unlike other workers, they did not negotiate with an employer; they did so with city officials who represented the main obstacle to their earning a living.

The organized vendors felt proud of their union and perceived it as an opportunity to put an end to old official union practices. The first step they took was breaking with the PRI's labor and popular organizations. Thus the UPVA did not become part of the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP). By 1973, most UPVA members had experience with official *uniones* and *sindicatos* affiliated to the PRI. At one point or another, vendors were members of the CROM or the Federación Regional Obrera Campesina (FROC) unions. For years, vendors belonged to the *Unión de*

---

<sup>7</sup> In 1974-1975, the electrical workers were the only ones who also thought that workers, regardless of the kind of labor they completed, should unite and proposed the creation of the Movimiento Sindical Revolucionario (MSR). Arnaldo Córdova, *La política de masas*, 85-87.

*Comerciantes e Industriales en pequeño de la Cd. de Puebla*, which represented small merchants and street vendors and which was affiliated with the CNOP.<sup>8</sup> By 1964 the FROC-Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos (CROC) was able to recruit 300 street peddlers into their unions.<sup>9</sup> Also, when authorities granted street vendors stalls in markets, they forced vendors to become part of the CNOP and if they refused to join, then authorities forbade them to sell their merchandise and expelled them from the markets.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the years, a profound sense of disillusionment and resentment grew among sellers toward official union leaders. Leaders were usually not vendors and blindly cooperated with authorities and failed to defend members' interests. In that sense, PRI-affiliated unions were not dissimilar to blue collar workers' unions. Both *uniones* and *sindicatos* had *charro* leaders who were more preoccupied collecting members' fees and securing support for politicians' campaigns than actually defending workers' rights.<sup>11</sup> In short, vendors were tired of official unions that failed to defend street sellers' main demands: the ability to work safely on the streets and to have access to markets.

---

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Mayor Francisco Pacheco from Unión de Comerciantes e Industriales en pequeño de la cd. de Puebla, May 31, 1960, box 42, file 3, AMP.

<sup>9</sup> Jaime Castillo, "El movimiento urbano popular en Puebla," in *Los Movimientos Sociales en Puebla*, Jaime Castillo and Marta García, eds. Vol. 2 (Puebla: DIAU-UAP):228.

<sup>10</sup> Jaime Castillo, "El movimiento urbano popular en Puebla," 231.

<sup>11</sup> A *charro* is a state appointed union leader who does not represent his membership and who is violent and corrupt. The term is used after authorities appointed Jesús Díaz de León as the General Secretary of the rail workers' union, the Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la República Mexicana (STFRM) in 1948. Dan La Botz, *Mask of Democracy: Labor Suppression in Mexico Today* (Boston: South End Press, 1992): 66-67. For a similar definition on *charrismo* and *sindicalismo charro* see Enrique de la Garza Toledo, "Independent Trade Unionism in Mexico: Past Developments and Future Perspectives," in *Union, Workers and the State in Mexico*, ed. Kevin J. Middlebrook, (San Diego: University of California, San Diego): 153.

Vendors were upset and tired of official leaders who were often abusive and engaged in corrupt practices. Corruption, broadly defined was a problem for many unions. On many occasions, leaders charged vendors high fees and threatened those vendors who refused to pay. This was the case at one of Puebla's makeshift markets, the Emiliano Zapata. In 1974 a group of women protested that three male leaders extorted vendors, making them pay daily fees for their stall. They were furious when they learned that the leaders also stole construction materials which were meant for building the markets.<sup>12</sup> Other street vendors in the same makeshift market argued that the leaders expelled vendors who did not or could not pay the union and vending fees.<sup>13</sup>

Cooperation between authorities and official *charro* leaders was common in Mexican labor history, and street vendors' were not the exception. For example, in 1969 internal correspondence between leaders of the FROC-CROC and Puebla's mayor, the *charro* leaders reassured their commitment to authorities. They stated that "the FROC will not intervene in defense of vendors, because [vendors] need to be disciplined, obey, and pay their fees to the government that you [mayor] represent."<sup>14</sup> Needless to say, official leaders did little or nothing for vendors. Their removal from the streets was a constant and very realistic threat. The most leaders did for the rank-and-file was to negotiate with authorities in order to extend the periods of time that vendors could sell on the streets.<sup>15</sup> *Charro* leaders never challenged authorities and did not help its members.

---

<sup>12</sup> Letter to governor from vendors, January 26, 1974, box 46, file 1, AMP.

<sup>13</sup> "Denuncian expulsiones arbitrarias de un Mercado," *La Opinion*, August 29, 1977.

<sup>14</sup> Letter to Mayor from FROC-CROC representatives, box 42, file 319, December 5, 1969, AMP.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Director de Tránsito from Unión of vendors, September 15, 1955, box 42, file 286-1, AMP.

Membership in official unions through the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM), Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC) and the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP) meant that the leaders expected that the rank and file show their loyalty and support for all of the PRI candidates, including those on the local, state, and federal levels. In other words, the rank and file was forced by PRI leaders to vote for the official party's candidates. Not only did members feel the pressure to vote for the PRI, but they also had to show up at political rallies where politicians campaigned. If they did not perform their duty, then they faced punishment, including expulsion from their unions. Some leaders literally "dragged" workers to these events, and for that reason people began calling them *acarreados* or the dragged-ones. During these mandatory events, the rank-and-file carried official banners, applauded and shouted "vivas" to PRI candidates.<sup>16</sup> Also, during political acts of Mayors, governors, and Mexico's presidents, PRI-affiliated members had to be present showing –or at least faking- their support.

---

<sup>16</sup> See for example, picture in *El Sol de Puebla*, October 22, 1973. (See illustration above).





*Acarreados, El Sol de Puebla, October 22, 1973.*

Since the 1970s, vendors' attendance at these political events was a condition for maintaining union membership.<sup>17</sup> Whereas factory workers treated these events as well-deserved breaks from work, for street vendors these events represented a financial burden; they were unable to sell their goods.

*Charro* leaders of all organized Mexican labor negotiated and cooperated with authorities for decades.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Mexican presidents and rank-high politicians only

<sup>17</sup> Gary I. Gordon, "Peddlers, Pesos, and Power: The Political Economy of Street Vending in Mexico City" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1997): 127.

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey Bortz, "Authority Reseated: Control Struggles in the Textile Industry during the Mexican Revolution," *Labor History*, 44, no. 2 (2003): 171-188.

negotiated with union leaders and the rank-and-file had little to say.<sup>19</sup> Street vendors' unions affiliated to the CNOP were not the exception.<sup>20</sup> For example, in Mexico City, Guillermina Rico González (aka *La Jefa*), a female *charro* leader of a street vendors' organization, always made sure that the members of her organization, the *Unión de Comerciantes de la Antigua Merced*, went to PRI events. This female vendor, who spent all her life peddling her wares, became a member of the PRI in 1946. She also provided the PRI with a list of 9,000 or 10,000 vendors who would vote for PRI candidates.<sup>21</sup> In 1977, a PRI-leader in Puebla, Luz María Lara, openly admitted that the members of her organization always had to vote for PRI candidates.<sup>22</sup> And many vendors really disliked Ms. Lara and called her the bourgeoisie's lap dog and a traitor.<sup>23</sup>

For vendors, an independent and democratic union was an attractive solution to solve their problems. Street vendors believed that if official unions could not do anything for them, an independent union might do. Vendors agreed that they needed to avoid fake leaders in order to guarantee their permanency on the streets and access to markets.

Encouraged by students' advice, street vendors were committed to build a union free of

---

<sup>19</sup> Arnaldo Córdova, *La política de masas*, 33-34.

<sup>20</sup> Gary I. Gordon, "Peddlers, Pesos, and Power: The Political Economy of Street Vending in Mexico City," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1997) and John C. Cross, *Informal Politics: Street Vendors and the State in Mexico City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) and "Co-optation, Competition and Resistance: State and Street vendors in Mexico City," *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 2 (1998).

<sup>21</sup> The life of *La Jefa* or *La Emperatriz del Ambulantaje* has attracted the attention of popular writers and scholars alike. She peddled her wares for over forty years and, in 1946, joined the PRI. She went from peddling limes and avocados to her successful career as a powerful leader who was both feared and loved by vendors and politicians. See Armando Ramírez, *Me llaman la Chata Aguayo*, (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1994); Sam Dillon, "Guillermina Rico: Boss of Mexico's Vendors, 63," *New York Times*, September 6, 1996 [access April 29, 2008]; Gustavo Gutiérrez de Hoyos, "Comercio callejero en el centro histórico capitalino: el caso de la organización de artesanos y vendedores del centro, de lo formal a lo informal" (Tesis de Licenciatura, Departamento de Antropología, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Iztapalapa, 1997) and Gary Gordon, "Peddlers, Pesos, and Power: The Political Economy of Street Vending in Mexico City," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1997): Chapter 4.

<sup>22</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 59, page 268, October 28, 1977, AGN.

<sup>23</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 60, page 277, December 21, 1977, AGN.

*charros* and free of caciques, or better “petty-caciques” as Alan Knight calls them.<sup>24</sup> What this independence meant was that street vendors were not affiliated with any PRI’s workers’ confederation or any popular organization under PRI’s control and thus independent from the state.<sup>25</sup>

### The UPVA’s structure

In 1973, street vendors’ leaders and their student allies envisioned a grass-roots democratic union. They wanted to create an organization different from traditional unions, where all decisions came from the top and where the rank-and-file had minimal, if any, say in decision making. The UPVA’s first step to achieving this goal was to design a system in which nobody held a powerful position for a very long time. In light of this, organized vendors figured out a mechanism that rotated leadership positions every six months. They also sought to encourage participation of all street vendors and divided up the union’s labor. In their view, all street vendors should commit to the union by assuming some responsibilities.<sup>26</sup>

Leaders and students created a number of commissions where the rank and file participated and completed very specific goals and functions: the political commission, the propaganda commission, the negotiating commission, the cultural commission, the finance commission and in the 1990s, they created the “media” commission.<sup>27</sup> In 1977,

---

<sup>24</sup> Alan Knight and Wil Pansters, eds. *Caciquismo in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2005): 17.

<sup>25</sup> Dan La Botz, *Mask of Democracy*, 42

<sup>26</sup> Luis Díaz Miñon, interview by author, notes, January 16, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>27</sup> In his history of the UPVA, Jaime Castillo just mentions some of the commissions and provides no explanation about them. He is more interested in providing a chronology of the street vendors’ movement from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. Jaime Castillo, “El movimiento urbano popular en Puebla”: 236.

one of the UPVA leaders decided to create a *grupo de choque* as a result of city authorities' decision to definitely remove vendors from downtown streets. The *grupo de choque* was a group of vendors who were supposed to learn martial arts to fight against the police and defend UPVA members.<sup>28</sup> All vendors had to participate in the commissions. In theory, every six months, men and women participated in a different group. Members' fees covered the commissions' expenses.

All commissions had specific functions. The political commission was in charge of designing the union's political activities and their policies. It was meant to be the UPVA's brain. The negotiation commission negotiated with authorities, other unions, and settled internal conflicts. The propaganda commission printed and distributed fliers and documents to be handed in to the public and to UPVA's members. The UPVA acquired its own press and vendors learned how to print their fliers.<sup>29</sup>

The cultural commission, in very close connection with students, continued to present the 1973 theater play, *Vendedores Ambulantes*, in diverse places. In this commission students set out to create one of the most significant and ideologically-charged activities: the study circles. In these circles or groups students played what they considered their most valuable role: they guided and taught vendors about politics. It was in these circles, which usually took place at night, where students and their teachers read aloud and explained Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Mao's theories to the vendors, most of

---

<sup>28</sup> Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre, Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 58, p. 110, August 5, 1977; Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>29</sup> Teresa Rosales, interview by author, notes, March 8, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

whom were illiterate and had no formal schooling.<sup>30</sup> By the mid-1970s, there were around 70 study circles, led by 120 students.<sup>31</sup> At study circles, students and literate vendors read to other members, discussed newspaper articles and debated local, regional, and national politics. UPVA leaders sought to find charismatic vendors with leadership skills to serve on the political commissions. In other words, the leadership was looking to build the cadre. In 1979, one of the leaders wanted to form the “cuadro de estudios” and gave vendors Mao’s red book.<sup>32</sup> The study groups were not new in Mexican society or unique to Mexico.<sup>33</sup> They were instituted among vendors by Bulmaro Vega and Lorenzo Hernández who drew on the political skills that they learned while studying at the UNAM.<sup>34</sup>

UPVA’s leaders also organized assemblies where vendors could air their problems and demands. They divided up vendors into streets and each street had a representative, called the coordinator, who organized street assemblies. The street leader or coordinator was in charge of gathering information about the rank and file’s welfare. In turn, these street representatives were part of the Directive Council and had to attend

---

<sup>30</sup> José Luis Díaz Miñón, interview by author, notes, January 16, 2007, Puebla, Mexico. Ten years later, in 1983, when the UPVA was organizing groups of colonos, leaders insisted that people should know and understand Mao’s ideology and Marxist-Leninist thought in order for people to understand that colonos and other marginalized people should always engage in revolutionary activities. “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre,” DFS, file 021-056-002, September 21, 1983, AGN.

<sup>31</sup> Jaime Castillo Palma, “El movimiento urbano popular en Puebla”: 236.

<sup>32</sup> “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre,” DFS, file 021-056-002, legajo 1, September 13, 1979, AGN.

<sup>33</sup> Mexicans were not the only ones using Mao’s text among illiterate populations. In the early and mid 1970s, in New York City, members of the Young Lords Party taught NYC Puerto Ricans how to read using Mao’s red book. Iris Morales “¡Pa'lante, Siempre Pa'lante!: The Young Lords,” April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 (speech, Graduate Lounge, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, April 3, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Lorenzo Hernández Becerra, interview by author, February 1, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico. Jaime Castillo, who has written a chronology of UPVA events, says that the UPVA ended the study circles in 1977 and then reorganized them again in 1982. Jaime Castillo, “El movimiento popular en Puebla,”

the General Assembly, where they summarized the problems of each street.<sup>35</sup> They met with other representatives and leaders and together found solutions. All participants could vote and pass resolutions or suggest discussion items for the assembly. In the next street assembly, representatives informed vendors about the results and policies that were agreed upon at the General Assemblies. By 1977, a typical General Assembly gathered about 20 street coordinators; in 1979 there were around 50 and in 1980, there were 70 coordinators.<sup>36</sup>

Street vendors also designed rules to achieve discipline and responsibility among members. All vendors agreed to maintain hygienic conditions in the public spaces where they worked. City authorities, and those who constantly opposed street vending, accused sellers of dirtying the streets, creating disorder, and damaging public spaces. Street vendors wanted to demonstrate that they were not the disorderly people that their opponents portrayed. While keeping the streets clean was relatively easy, there were other tasks that vendors found more difficulties in organizing such as union democracy and vendors' active participation in the UPVA.

Sellers and students sought to create union democracy. Vendors elected their representatives at all levels. Whereas it is difficult to assess how democratic the election of the top leaders was, it is clear that vendors selected their street representatives and leaders in each commission. Another way to build union democracy was through the

---

<sup>35</sup> By 1975, vendors also had an Executive Committee composed of six members, two of whom were women. One was a vegetable seller and acted as the treasurer. Letter to Mayor Eduardo Cué Merlo from street vendors, October 37, 1975, box 58, file 10, AMP-32. The UPVA had also a General Council.

<sup>36</sup> Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre, Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 58, p. 110, August 5, 1977; legajo 53, p. 73, June 22, 1976, legajo 72, page 114, April 23, 1979, and September 5, 1980. Galería 1, AGN.

development of a new vocabulary and ways to communicate. Male and female vendors called themselves *compañeros* or *compañeras* (comrades) when referring to each other or when addressing each other. Even the leaders were addressed by other members in this way. Sometimes, they even called themselves an even more informal name, “*el compa*” or “*la compa*.” Using the word *compañeros* made them feel equal and nobody, at least in theory, used a name that denoted superiority.

Vendors also used nicknames to identify certain comrades. In Mexico, using a nickname is very common and requires some creativity. Usually nicknames emphasize one person’s physical or intellectual characteristics. Nicknames were self-explanatory, and everyone was supposed to recognize the person. Among the most colorful nicknames were “*el Huarache*” to refer the comrade who always used sandals, regardless of the time of the year. “*El Idiomias*” was one of the students who supposedly spoke several languages. Another person was “*El Grillo*.”<sup>37</sup> Nicknames also had the goal of hiding the real name of vendors, and students in case the police infiltrated the union and their meetings. In other words, vendors and students thought that using these nicknames protected their identity. In interviews, many people still used the nicknames to refer to others.<sup>38</sup>

While designing and using nicknames was a creative and enjoyable activity, leaders of the UPVA faced the problem of how to make vendors show up in meetings and other UPVA-related events. According to street vendors, the meetings sometimes took

---

<sup>37</sup> “Información sobre Puebla,” Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, box 1510-A-1, file 405-102, November 7, 1974, Galería 1, AGN and “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre,” DFS, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 60, page 222, December 10, 1977, AGN.

<sup>38</sup> José Luis Díaz Miñón, interview by author, notes, January 16, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

place during the day, when vendors were working. Participating in union activities was hard if vendors wanted to bring money home. Many vendors left their children, other family members or other comrades in charge of their stalls. Family networks and friendships were important not only to succeed in their business, but also to participate in union activities. If members did not show up to meetings or to their commissions, leaders punished them by not allowing them to sell for a determined number of days.<sup>39</sup> The punishment varied, depending on the importance of the event members missed. Participation in union activities became a double-edge sword for the rank-and-file. On the one hand, they knew that it was important to attend meetings, but on the other, they risked their daily sales. Leaders were well aware of this problem and put street coordinators in charge of encouraging people to join activities.<sup>40</sup>

Regardless of attendance rates, the UPVA was able to organize mechanisms to encourage and maintain their members to be active in union activities. These mechanisms were precisely the commissions where participants had a specific job, a responsibility, and felt part of a larger community. Even if vendors could lose money in the short term because they could not take care of their stalls and had to find someone to do it, they felt proud of their union activities.

On many occasions, these activities taught them skills. Teresa Rosales, one of the vendors, enjoyed her work at the propaganda commission. According to Teresa, this was one of her favorite commissions because she learned how to use the press. She fondly

---

<sup>39</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-78, legajo 62, page 245, March 30, 1978, AGN and *La Opinión*, October 18, 1977, p.1.

<sup>40</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-78, legajo 64, page 125, April 5, 1978, AGN.



remembers how her fingers had spots of ink. Participating in this commission, however, was not always fun. Teresa Rosales also remembers the frustration of getting arrested by the police for distributing pamphlets and fliers on the streets. At that time, the police harassed and arrested people who distributed any political and left-leaning propaganda.<sup>41</sup> Another female vendor, who joined street vendors' marches in Mexico City, learned how to get her way around in Mexico City. She learned the subway system and even how to use an escalator. Rosa Martínez (pseudonym), who was born and raised in a small town next to Cholula, Puebla, had never seen or used an escalator. In interviews, she laughs about her ingenuousness in a big city like Mexico City. She noted how she first observed people taking the escalator. Once she overcame her fear of falling down, she tried it. Rosa participated in most of the UPVA's commissions and reflected upon her work in the organization: she stated that the UPVA taught her how talk in public and how to negotiate with authorities.<sup>42</sup>

Gender played an important role in the division of political labor in the UPVA. While all members were supposed to participate in all activities and in all of the commissions, the top leadership, composed exclusively of men, tended to assign female vendors activities that they deemed "feminine." The clearest example of this was the temporary "food commissions." In the late 1980s and early 1990s, UPVA street vendors organized a number of marches to Mexico City to demand the freedom of one of their members who had been jailed in the summer of 1989. Thousands of male and female vendors joined the marches to Mexico City and, for days, sat down in the capital's

---

<sup>41</sup> Teresa Rosales, interview with author, notes, March 8, 2007, Puebla, México.

<sup>42</sup> Rosa Martínez, interview with author, notes, January 14, 2007, Puebla, México.

downtown main square. Lacking abundant financial resources, the participants were unable to buy prepared food from local merchants for a prolonged period of time. It was an expensive enterprise. For that reason, the UPVA leadership decided to create the “food commissions” to feed the participants. The leaders only assigned women to this activity. Female members brought large amounts of unprepared food to Mexico City’s *zócalo* and cooked breakfasts, lunches, snacks, and dinners for the hungry participants. Vendors brought dozens of kilograms of tortillas, big cans of food, water, coffee and then cooked on-site. One of the vendors who participated in the food commission remembers how much work it was to prepare three meals for comrades who attended the meetings and marches. Work never ended for them.<sup>43</sup>

Whereas these female vendors in the food commissions were not engaged in marching or meeting with authorities, they completed an important role (reproductive labor) for the organization. They fed others so that they could go on and engage in formal political work. The food preparation was very similar to what women did when students were fighting for university reform in the early 1970s. In different past instances, women kept *compañeros* in prison well fed. Vendors brought food to street vending leaders at the San Juan prison in Puebla.<sup>44</sup> According to a former San Juan prison gatekeeper, when some street vendors’ leaders were in jail (1977-1978), dozens of women brought boxes of fruit. Around Christmas, they even brought *piñatas* for

---

<sup>43</sup> Paula Maldonado, interview by author, January 23, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>44</sup> Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen noted how female students provided food for their male counterparts during the 1968 student movement in Mexico City. “Defining the Space of Mexico ’68: Heroic Masculinity in the Prison and “Women” in the Streets,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 83, no. 4 (2003): 640, 649.

prisoners to enjoy.<sup>45</sup> In any case, women who prepared food were instrumental in the maintenance of the UPVA's political activities. Moreover, women's work saved a lot of money to the UPVA's membership.

Whereas some of the activities were only undertaken by women, the UPVA created the mechanisms for their members to participate in all sorts of activities, which made the UPVA a relatively democratic union. Again, union democracy was an oddity in Mexico's organized labor. Also, despite its gender shortcomings, the UPVA tried to discourage the existence of one powerful leader. In 1977, for example, UPVA members created the Coordinating Council. In their own words, "this council was a more democratic group", which substituted for the Directive Council. The Coordinating Council was formed by 30 street representatives that vendors elected. According to them, this new representative body was a step forward in the organization's democratic process.<sup>46</sup>

### UPVA's First Demands

Street vendors most immediate and material demands were that authorities allow them to sell on the streets and that police, collectors, and inspectors stopped harassing them and seizing their merchandise.<sup>47</sup> In short, vendors wanted to secure their right to work, make a living, and have peace of mind.

---

<sup>45</sup> Prison gatekeeper, interview by author, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>46</sup> "Se niegan vendedores del 28 a ser distribuidos en mercados," *La Opinión*, January 30, 1977.

<sup>47</sup> Vendors also asked authorities an increase of wages for the working class. "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," file 100-19-1-76, legajo 47, page 372, February 24, 1976, AGN.

For decades, market inspectors, city police, federal police, and even the janitors who were employed to clean markets seized and stole *ambulantes*' merchandise.<sup>48</sup> These city employees obeyed the orders of the Mayor or Puebla's governor who relentlessly tried to get rid of vendors and sent these officials to do the dirty work. Peddlers were tired of this long history of abuse, which affected not only, their economic well-being, but also their safety and dignity. Every time authorities engaged in campaigns to remove vendors from the streets, vendors resisted and officials got more violent. It was a common scene that police and vendors engaged in fights. And when women and children were beaten by police officers or by inspectors, this aggression infuriated most vendors. Vendors thought that their rights as citizens were violated. As a group of them stated, "we are Mexicans, this is our land and our personal integrity is in danger when the police beats women."<sup>49</sup>

For female vendors security was extremely important as they brought their children with them to work and were worried about their physical safety. Their fears were not unjustified; many children were the victims of police excesses. The clearest example was the baby who was killed on October 28, 1973 during the burning of stalls. Other children were physically and emotionally affected by the police. Blanca Pastrana, a vendor's daughter, remembers that her worst experience on the streets was when she was at her mother's stall and she felt nauseous and fainted as a result of breathing the tear

---

<sup>48</sup> Letter to President Luis Echeverría from Mercado Popular Emiliano Zapata's locatarios, May 7, 1973, box 46, file 1, AMP. They stated that they faced this problem since the early 1960s.

<sup>49</sup> Letter to the Mayor from street vendors, June 8, 1970, box 42, file 5, AMP.

gas that the police sprayed during a raid. In an interview, she stated how she grew fearful and resentful of the police.<sup>50</sup>

Vendors stated that they needed well-located markets to earn a living and take care of their families. But in their absence, they declared that they were forced by authorities to stay on the streets. Authorities promptly replied that there were many available stalls in existing markets where vendors could relocate. Moreover, city planners wanted to construct new markets. Despite city authorities' rhetoric, in the early 1970s, vendors pointed out that the existing markets were far away from the city center, which endangered their ability to maintain their already modest sales. As in real estate, location was everything.

Street vendors' second demand was that the municipality constructed well-located and functional markets.<sup>51</sup> Not all street vendors were opposed to selling their wares in fixed stalls in markets. They knew well that working on open spaces had many disadvantages. Women with children were especially sensitive to the needs of their offspring and having enclosed marketplaces was better for them. Vendors were inclined to get stalls in markets for security reasons exclusively. Most of them, perceived having a stall in an enclosed facility as a form of property, and thus as a *patrimonio*, an inheritance for their children.<sup>52</sup> Having a stall meant that they could have peace of mind, buy more merchandise without fear of losing it during police raids. It also meant that

---

<sup>50</sup> Blanca Pastrana, interview by author, April 12, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>51</sup> In addition to street vendors' demands, UPVA members also demanded the firing of some city officials, find a solution to Tecamachalco's campesinos and to the Haro and Tamariz Hospital's nurses and to end the repression against students. "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre", Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 54, p. 356, February 2, 1977, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>52</sup> Paula Javier, interview by author, January 25, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

they could leave their wares in the market without having to transport it with them. Vendors wanted well-located markets that were in the downtown area nearby the commercial area. Vendors were clear that they did not want markets that were located in the outskirts or far away from downtown where they could not sell. First and foremost, they wanted a place where they could be able to make a living.

During the first half of 1974, the municipality responded to organized vendors' demands and granted them two markets.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, the so-called "markets" were two empty lots. One of them was right in the heart of downtown, only three blocks away from the La Victoria Market in an empty space that was once a junk yard. Vendors called their new market "el corralón" because of its previous use. Unfortunately, the market infrastructure consisted of four walls around the lot, one of which was in terrible shape and was collapsing. The second "market" was a plain lot approximately ten blocks away from downtown. Both lots could only house a small number of the total street vendor population.<sup>54</sup>

Whereas vendors were relatively satisfied about authorities' response, they were not fooled by the authorities and continue pressing them to build basic services in the lots.<sup>55</sup> In a picture published in one of the major and widely read newspapers in the city, *El Sol de Puebla*, there is a picture of one of the markets. The municipal officials only painted the walls, and hung a cheap publicity placard that read: "Mercado Popular: Invitamos al público en general pase a hacer sus compras en [este Mercado]." (Popular

---

<sup>53</sup> "600 ambulantes serán acomodados en el corralón de Santa Rosa," *El Sol de Puebla*, May 3, 1974.

<sup>54</sup> "Los del 28 de Octubre proponen lugar para dar acomodo a todos los vendedores ambulantes," *La Opinión*, January 24, 1977.

<sup>55</sup> "Los del 28 de Octubre proponen un lugar para dar acomodo a todos los vendedores ambulantes," *La Opinión*, January 24, 1977.

Market: We encourage people to buy in this market.”) “The market,” however, did not have any floors or roofs. Only a few vendors sold in the lot, and there are many children sitting on the dirt floors, with small amounts of merchandise.<sup>56</sup> Another picture shows how the lack of roofs and the penetrating sun rays forced vendors to use their creativity and scant resources to make their own roofs.<sup>57</sup> These views suggest that most vendors were out on the streets vending and left their children in the “markets” to make sure that authorities would not take back the lots from them. At least, authorities could not claim that vendors did not have any intention of using these facilities.



Stalls in El Corralón, *El Sol de Puebla*, May 23, 1974.

<sup>56</sup> Photograph “Predios se destinarán a ambulantes,” *El Sol de Puebla*, May 20, 1974.

<sup>57</sup> *El Sol de Puebla*, May 23, 1974.

Vendors demanded that authorities finish the construction of markets. Street vendors made sure that these facilities had all basic services, which included bathrooms, ceilings, entrance doors, floors, and water.<sup>58</sup> Vendors wanted not only basic services, but also wanted office space for their union.<sup>59</sup> Whereas vendors demanded markets with all the services that allowed them to peacefully sell and take care of their children, authorities demonstrated how little they cared about vendors. City officials thought that all vendors needed was some sort of space to sell. Authorities did not care about bathrooms, running water, and floors. Authorities simply underestimated vendors.<sup>60</sup> In March 1975, Mayor Eduardo Cué Merlo publically and proudly announced that the municipality was about to begin the construction of all basic services necessary for the proper use of the market. He even announced that the market would be finished within three months and that the municipality would invest 750,000 pesos, a significant amount of money that, according to him, was worth spending because it was beneficial to the needy classes, *las clases necesitadas*.<sup>61</sup> But the construction took years, and facilities were of low quality.

### Tactics

Tired of the government's empty rhetoric, organized vendors understood that collective action was important in order to convey their demands to authorities. The

---

<sup>58</sup> "Información de Puebla," Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, October 17, 1974, box 1510-A, file 1, p. 3, Galería 2, AGN.

<sup>59</sup> "Información de Puebla," Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, October 17, 1974 and February 20, 1975, box 1510-A, file 1 and 2, p. 190 and 82-84, Galería 2, AGN.

<sup>60</sup> In the late 1960s, a female customer argued that vendors could be satisfied with very little. In a contemptuous tone, she stated that vendors could sit and sell on the *tierrita* (on dirty floors), after all they were used to it and she saw no need for authorities to build well designed markets. Letter to Mayor from Gloria Camacho, April 25, 1969, box 42, file 319, AMP.

<sup>61</sup> "Mañana inician obras en el mercado de la 14 Pte." *El Sol de Puebla*, March 2, 1975.



question became how to transmit their message successfully. Vendors knew that writing letters was not always effective. In addition, they needed mechanisms to make their plight public and visible. They decided to exploit the lessons learned from participating with students. Not only did vendors write letters, but they also engaged in various tactics such as marches, parades and *pintas* (the painting of slogans on walls).<sup>62</sup>

Marches became one of the most important tactics that sellers used. Whereas most vendors did not have employers and could not engage in strikes, stoppages, or wild-cat strikes, they knew that they could disrupt some activities in the city. Marches became their most important and effective mechanism to spread their message to a larger section of Puebla's society and to make their presence and demands quite visible. In addition, they had the goal of disrupting traffic and thus the commercial and other activities of Puebla's inhabitants, especially of the people who work in or near the downtown. In their hey-day the UPVA could gather enough supporters to block about 30 streets.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the marches were quite visible and more people began to know the UPVA or "los 28s."

Vendors also learned from their experience with the students that some streets and some buildings were more symbolic than others. All vendors' started marching in one of Puebla's largest street intersections, went by the two downtown enclosed markets (La

---

<sup>62</sup> Vendors had a long tradition of writing letters to authorities especially during the nineteenth century and first part of the twentieth century. Archivos Municipales hold these letters and scholars have used them intensively, see for example Judith Marti, "Breadwinners and Decision Makers: Nineteenth Century Mexican Women Vendors," in *The Other Fifty Percent: Multicultural Perspectives on Gender Relations*, ed. Mari Womack and Judith E. Marti (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1993) and Christina Jiménez, "Making the City Their Own: Popular Groups and Political Culture in Morelia, Mexico, 1880 to 1930," (PhD Diss., University of California, San Diego, 2001).

<sup>63</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, March 17, 2007, Puebla, México

Victoria and Cinco de Mayo), crossed through street-markets, continued to the state university, crossed through the main downtown streets, and ended in front of the City Hall, right in the heart of downtown on the *zócalo*.<sup>64</sup> On other occasions, the marches and meetings started or ended in front of Puebla's state university, in the so-called *Plaza de la democracia*. The fact that vendors used the public spaces at the state university also demonstrated the strong connection that existed between the two groups. It also highlights the support of university authorities, which up to the early 1990s supported a variety of different working class concerns.<sup>65</sup> At the end of each march, at the City Hall, vendors sought to meet with or at least to be heard by the Mayor. It was there where vendors took their microphones and began their speeches and addressed the authorities. In one of these marches Ms. Esperanza Pastrana, a vendor, took the microphone and asked the mayor to build markets and finish the ones that authorities had already started.<sup>66</sup>

UPVA's demands in these marches did not focus exclusively on commercial interests. In addition to asking for better markets and the freedom of imprisoned comrades, street vendors also had broader demands. At the beginning of 1978, for example, they protested the 6.5% increase in the price of electricity and in the same march they ask Puebla's citizens to support the Nicaraguan population in need<sup>67</sup> and they

---

<sup>64</sup> "Información de Puebla," Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, June 27, 1973, box 1216-A, file 2, page 126

<sup>65</sup> Wil Pansters, "Building a Cacicazgo in a Neoliberal University" in *Caciquismo in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 306-307.

<sup>66</sup> "Información de Puebla," Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, October 17, 1974, box 1510-A, file 1, p. 3, Galería 2, AGN.

<sup>67</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-78, legajo 61, page 288, February 9, 1978, AGN.

also collected clothes, medicine and non-perishable food for the poor in El Salvador.<sup>68</sup> In marches and meetings, vendors also demanded that the government stopped repressing *campesinos* in the northern part of the state of Puebla. On many occasions, they also protested the increase prices of basic services and foodstuffs.<sup>69</sup>

Vendors did not march alone. Students, landless peasants, and other workers paraded with them in solidarity. During their passage through these places additional dozens of people joined them. The success of these marches also depended on the participation of all street vendors: women, men, and their children. Moreover, if they could get the support of their allies, the better it was. During the 1970s, peasants of the Confederación Campesina Independiente (CCI) always joined their marches.

Marching on the streets was not enough. Street vendors made sure to bring a number of visual and aural aids. Marches, like parades, are political rituals. Participants use symbols that spectators can easily recognize and understand.<sup>70</sup> Usually UPVA carried banners that the propaganda commission prepared for them. In their banners, it was common to read vendors' demands. Throughout the years, the banners became more sophisticated and began using a logo to indentify the UPVA.

---

<sup>68</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 021-056-002, legajo 1, November 11, 1980, AGN.

<sup>69</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-9-1-78, legajo 67, page 27, and file 021-056-002, legajo 1, August 16, 1982, AGN.

<sup>70</sup> David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).



UPVA logo

On April 30, 1997, UPVA's female vendors decided to organize a "children's march." This was an event responding to the imprisonment of dozens of vendors in the mid-1990s by state authorities, especially the imprisonment of Rubén Sarabia Sánchez in 1989. UPVA's members' goal was that Puebla's citizens felt some sympathy for these children whose fathers were in prison. Organizers chose April 30, Children's Day (Día del Niño) and invited the children of the working class to participate because the march also had the purpose of demanding that authorities improve living conditions for all Mexican children.<sup>71</sup> Organizers tried to stress family values and highlight the fact that authorities forced vendors' families to be separated. Only children and a few mothers paraded on the streets. Parents dressed their children nicely. In the front row, the daughter of one of the prisoners marched. With a fluffy dress, *quinceañera*-style, the little one used a microphone and stated how state authorities, especially the governor, Manuel Bartlett Díaz, did not have any mercy for these children because they were market children. Organizers, through the girl's voice, implied that authorities did not

---

<sup>71</sup> "El gobierno se niega al diálogo: 28 de Octubre," newspaper clipping, April 1997, box 46, file 36, AMP.

care about these children because they were part of the working-class. The girl even said that the governor did not like them because they were not white like him or upper-class children. They thought the children's march was one filled with a subtle (the children) and not so subtle (the girl's message) meanings.<sup>72</sup>

One of the most attractive elements during the marches was the chants and mottos. Some of these chants were quite witty. They provoked some vendors to chuckle. Many found these chants one of the most appealing parts of the marches. Probably these chants made some bystanders laugh and others raise their brows. Whatever the reaction was, they certainly got the attention of police infiltrators who wrote them down in their notebooks or learned them by heart to later report them to their bosses.<sup>73</sup>

Not surprisingly and like other protestors, street vendors were especially harsh to Mexico's politicians. In chants vendors always compared politicians and Puebla's elite to pigs and thieves. One of their slogans was "Gobierno poblano con cara de marrano," (Puebla's government has a pig face).<sup>74</sup> Other slogans usually offended politicians' mothers. In Mexico, one of the greatest offenses is to insult or make sexual references about one's mother.<sup>75</sup> For example, in one march in 1977, vendors shouted "LEA, LEA, tu mamá le talonEA." This was one of the shortest, most rhythmic, and vindictive chants

---

<sup>72</sup> Rita and Marina, interview by author, notes, August 15, 2007, Puebla, México.

<sup>73</sup> Police infiltrators wrote quite detailed reports, see "Información de Puebla", various, Galería 2, AGN.

<sup>74</sup> Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre, Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 58, p. 310, September 8, 1977, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>75</sup> Several observers of Mexican culture have pointed out and explain the meanings and effects of insulting Mexican mothers. See for example, Octavio Paz, *Laberinto de la Soledad* and Luis Alberto Urrea, *By the Lake of the Sleeping Children*.

addressed to President Luis Echeverría Álvarez (aka L.E.A.), in which protestors suggested that his mother “talonea” or worked very hard as a prostitute.<sup>76</sup>

On other occasions, they made references to politicians’ physical appearance or stressed some weakness such as baldness. Another slogan asked the people: *Quién es el ladrón del pueblo? Será melón, será sandía, será el pelón de Echeverría?*<sup>77</sup> “Who is the thief of the people? Is it a melon? Is it a watermelon? Is it the bald Echeverría?” Another characteristic of these slogans is that most of them rhymed and were easy to learn. For example: *!Vendedor seguro, al gobierno dale duro!* (Confident vendors, hit the government hard!)

Street vendors sought to make their demands and their presence as public, visible, and constant as possible. One way they achieved this goal was by joining other workers’ or other organizations’ events. One of them was the alternative Labor Day Parade. Not only was their participation important to make their demands public and the UPVA visible, but also to show their solidarity to independent organized labor. Every May 1<sup>st</sup>, most unionized workers affiliated with any of the big umbrella labor organizations, such as CTM, CROC and CROM, marched in the official Labor Day Parade. The official Labor Day Parade took place on the Cinco de Mayo Boulevard, one of Puebla’s most important and widest streets, where thousands of workers saluted union leaders and high-ranking state officials, showing –or at least pretending to show- their respect and recognition for their leaders.

---

<sup>76</sup> “Información de Puebla,” Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, October 17, 1974, box 1510-A, file 1, Galería 2, AGN.

<sup>77</sup> “Información de Puebla,” box 1510-A-2, file 405-85, February 21, 1975, Galería 2, AGN.

UPVA members and other members of the *Frente de Activistas Revolucionarios* (FAR) marched in the unofficial Labor Day Parade.<sup>78</sup> This parade took place on different streets, which typically started in popular locations and ended in a politically-charged space. The alternative Labor Day parade began in markets, parks, or plazas and ended in front of the Municipal Palace. The alternative parade was, like the marches, highly symbolic. Simply by marching and joining on May 1<sup>st</sup>, vendors demonstrated that they and their children were also workers. Not only did street vendors participate, but also independent unions, including the militant and independent Sindicato de Unitario de Trabajadores de la Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (SUNTUAP), the Central Campesina Independiente, CCI<sup>79</sup> and the so-called democratic branch of the Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Electricistas de la República Mexicana (SUTERM).<sup>80</sup> While the unofficial march took place at about the same time as its counterpart, the march took a different, but equally symbolic route.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to the alternative Labor Day parade, which only took place once a year, the UPVA leaders also tried to gain the attention of renowned national and foreign visitors to the city. On top of asking for the halt of police harassment and the construction of markets, vendors also demanded authorities free some of their comrades

---

<sup>78</sup> In 1975, organized street vendors joined the Revolutionary Activists Front, which included UAP's students, street vendors, and the *usuarios del distrito de riego no. 30* of Tecamachalco, Puebla, and Puebla's Molders League, the *Liga de Soldadores*. The land petitioners were affiliated to the Consejo General Campesino led by Gumaro Amaro Ramírez and the soldadores were led by Miguel Angel Rosas Burgues. "Información de Puebla," IPS, April 29, 1976, box 1510-A, file 3, pp. 157-158.

<sup>79</sup> "Información sobre Puebla," box 1510-A file3, pg. 158, IPS, Galería 2, AGN.

<sup>80</sup> For a concise explanation of the SUTERM's democratic branch lead by Rafael Galván, see Arnaldo Córdova, *La política de masas*, 80-83.

<sup>81</sup> "Información de Puebla," Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, April 29, 1976, Box 1510-A-3, file 405-157-158, Galería 2, AGN.

who were in prison. For many years, vendors sought to press authorities to liberate some street vendors who were arrested because of their political activities.

Despite their organization and their alliances, street vendors continued to be harassed by the police. Pushed by the organized business community and their own desire to beautify the city, authorities constantly sought to remove vendors from the streets. Authorities fabricated a number of pretenses in order to incarcerate a number of leaders of the sellers' organization. UPVA members were concerned about vendors and students in jail and demanded officials to set them free. Even if vendors did not have high hopes that prominent visitors would help them solve their problems, they sought to make their demands public and visible. The least they could get was media attention. Once again, their plights were not exclusively centered on sellers' right to make a living on the streets. Their demands were broader. In February 1975, when President Luis Echeverría visited Puebla, about 1,000 vendors and students organized a march to reach the president. Once they were close to him, they began shouting and demanding the nullification of the elections in a number of diverse towns of Puebla because the voting process was fraudulent.<sup>82</sup> Another example of gaining media attention came when in 1979, the *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* (CELAM) held its third meeting in Puebla. Aware that CELAM members were discussing the role that the Catholic Church should play with the marginalized sectors of society, the UPVA decided to send letters to

---

<sup>82</sup> "Información sobre Puebla," Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, February 8, 1975, box 1510-A, file 2, p. 12, Galería 2, AGN.



CELAM participants. In these texts, people protested not only the incarceration of street vendors, but also the overwhelming number of political prisoners all over Mexico.<sup>83</sup>

Another strategy used by vendors was to disturb the dynamics and life of the city, especially in the downtown the center of business and government. One way in which vendors disrupted activities was high-jacking public buses. UPVA members used them to transport their members and attend meetings and marches, especially if these events took place outside Puebla.<sup>84</sup> On January 18, 1977, for example, about sixty street vendors and high-school students kidnapped four buses and went to the headquarters of a phone company. Telephone workers had problems with the employer and asked for the support of the UPVA and students and they got it.<sup>85</sup> At the end of August of 1977, a few days after the imprisonment of a group of street vendors, the UPVA high-jacked sixteen buses to transport protesters against the government's decision to combat vendors.<sup>86</sup>

Besides the pragmatic goal of transporting members and supporters, high-jacking buses was a highly visible, powerful, and disrupting act. Public buses were big and vendors hung banners and painted slogans on them.<sup>87</sup> Vendors also parked the buses in the middle of street to halt traffic. Also, if they included a caravan of buses, their marches looked more impressive and when vendors honked the loud horn, they attracted more attention. Female vendors became experts in high-jacking buses. Rosa Martínez

---

<sup>83</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-79, legajo 71, p. 22, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>84</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-76, legajo 47, p. 346, February 2, 1976; legajo 53, p. 73, June 22, 1976, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>85</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 54, p. 252, January 18, 1977, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>86</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 59, p. 10, September 13, 1977, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>87</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 56, p. 234, May 5, 1977 Galería 1, AGN.

(pseudonym), a UPVA market woman, remembers the day she first high-jacked a public bus to protest the lack of transportation to the market where she worked. Rosa and a large group of vendors, mostly women, told the bus driver to stop. They demanded every passenger to get off the bus and made the driver take them to their market.<sup>88</sup> They did this until the city government finally provided public transportation.

For a long time, organized vendors also engaged in painting slogans in walls around the city, a practice that they called the *pintas*. With a wide brush and bottles of oil paint, vendors marked Puebla's most visible walls with their slogans. At least on one occasion, vendors painted some of the walls in the portales right around the main downtown plaza or zócalo. Throughout the 1970s, their slogans included *vivas* to Lucio Cabañas, the militant teacher and guerrilla leader in Guerrero who was murdered by the state and whose memory was still present among vendors, peasants, and students.<sup>89</sup> On other occasions, vendors, electrical workers, and students also painted messages on top of the PRI propaganda spread all over the city.<sup>90</sup> Some of their messages included, "Alto a la represión," "Viva el movimiento de los vendedores ambulantes," "Somos producto del mal gobierno," "El ambulantismo no es una lacra sino una consecuencia del mismo sistema explotador," "los ambulantes somos los campesinos sin tierra,"<sup>91</sup>

In 1977, the *pintas* and banners became more political and their language was heavily influenced by class analysis, with a revolutionary rhetoric, which included an

---

<sup>88</sup> Rosa Martínez, interview by author, February 6, 2006, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>89</sup> "Información sobre Puebla," IPS, box 1216-A, file 2, foja 126, Galería 2, AGN.

<sup>90</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre", Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-76, legajo 50, p. 282, June 16, 1976, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>91</sup> Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre, Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-76,; legajo 53, p. 73, and 112, June 22, 1976 and legajo 54, pg. 100, and file 100-19-1-77, legajo 54, pg. 227, Galería 1, AGN

ironic refusal to the capitalist system. Some examples included: “El mal que aqueja a la humanidad es culpa del sistema capitalista,”<sup>92</sup> “Qué va a hacer la burguesía para resolver los problemas del ambulantismo sin crear fuentes de trabajo?”<sup>93</sup> “Fuera el imperialismo yanqui,” “Vivan las dictaduras del proletariado,” and “La alternativa es la Revolución.”<sup>94</sup>

The year of 1977 is special because it marks the UPVA’s militant high point. The organization was then involved in the plights of Puebla’s workers, peasants, and students. At the beginning of that year, for example, UPVA vendors supported the demands of bus drivers of the Estrella de Oro company, workers at Hospital Haro y Tamariz, and telephone workers.<sup>95</sup>

1977 also marks the height of police repression against a number of street vendors and their leaders during that decade. The UPVA’s main intellectual advisor was the leftist teacher Bulmaro Vega, who, besides advising the street vendors’ union, was also very active with an independent molders’ union. Authorities at the local and federal level became wary about Vega’s militancy and his ability to form and sustain alliances. In order to put a halt to his activities, the state police imprisoned Vega on August 17, 1977.<sup>96</sup> Like many people who disappeared at the time, his family had no idea that he was in jail. The Vega family members thought that he had an accident and sought him in

---

<sup>92</sup> “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre”, Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-76, legajo 53, p. 73, June 16, 1976, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>93</sup> “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre”, Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 54, p. 227, January 1, 1977, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>94</sup> “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre”, Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 56, p. 156, April 28, 1977, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>95</sup> See *La Opinión*, February 26, 1977.

<sup>96</sup> “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre”, Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 58, p. 207, August 23, 1977, Galería 1, AGN.

all the city hospitals. A week later, his family found out that Bulmaro was in jail with other UPVA members.<sup>97</sup>

UPVA members organized a protest to demand the immediate release of their members and leaders, whom they considered to be “political prisoners.” Vendors argued that authorities imprisoned several vendors and their leaders because they wanted to create a negative image of the UPVA and because authorities sought to disrupt negotiations between vendors and city authorities.<sup>98</sup> The police had accused the sellers of mercilessly killing a thief who entered one of the markets that the municipality gave to the vendors, the Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre.<sup>99</sup> Vendors claimed that authorities had fabricated the thief’s murder to have an excuse to incarcerate the UPVA members. Protestors also argued that their imprisonment was illegal because the police had no evidence that vendors had killed the criminal.<sup>100</sup> Most importantly, in prison, state thugs tortured Bulmaro Vega and José Luis Hernández, another street vendors’ leader. When Vega was released on August 25, 1977 his family immediately took him to the hospital to recover from the injuries caused by the torture.<sup>101</sup> According to vendors, police had hit Bulmaro in the head and after his release, he was unable to coordinate his ideas.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> “No aparece el Profesor Bulmaro Vega,” *La Opinión*, August 24, 1977.

<sup>98</sup> “Dicen que son presos políticos 3 líderes acusados de asesinato,” *La Opinión*, August 25, 1977.

<sup>99</sup> “Rubén Sarabia (a) ‘El Simitrio’ junto con otros están acusados de Homicidio. Están en la cárcel,” *La Opinión*, August 24, 1977.

<sup>100</sup> “Dicen que son presos políticos 3 líderes acusados de asesinato,” *La Opinión*, August 25, 1977 and “Insisten en la Ilegalidad de la Detención de cuatro dirigentes e insisten que han sido torturados,” *La Opinión*, August 28, 1977.

<sup>101</sup> “Dicen que son presos políticos 3 líderes acusados de asesinato,” *La Opinión*, August 25, 1977. Mexican authors continue to publish their testimonies on torture. See Victoria Mendoza Salgado, *México 1977: testimonios de tortura* (forthcoming).

<sup>102</sup> “Insisten en la Ilegalidad de la Detención de cuatro dirigentes e insisten que han sido torturados,” *La Opinión*, August 28, 1977. At the beginning of October 1977, the police had imprisoned other members who were handing in propaganda. Vendors claimed that while they were in prison, they were tortured. “En una manifestación hoy demandarán hoy la libertad de 5 Ambulantes,” *La Opinión*, October 5, 1977.

Imprisonment and physical torture were not enough to deter Bulmaro or the state. Bulmaro Vega continued his activism and authorities kept on threatening him that if he did not stop his activities, authorities would do something bad against his family. As next chapter will discuss, the threats were actually far from being untrue. A couple of months later, on October 5, 1977, authorities kidnapped Teresa Rosales and Bulmaro Vega's son.

#### Students and vendors: the alliance continues

Members of the state university community who had established connections with peddlers were tremendously excited about the organization of the UPVA. The seller's union gave students and teachers an opportunity to continue their activism with vendors.

The presence of students and their teachers within the vendors' organization was not limited to marches or to the study groups where they explained political theories to vendors. Members of the state university participated in many activities and their advice became very important on different levels. During the UPVA's first years, students helped vendors to organize and sustain their union. Students were usually present during general assemblies and study circles. They acted as facilitators and moderators in these gatherings. According to former students, it was very important to maintain order in the assemblies and meetings. Street vendors were talkative, seldom shy, and occasionally were a bit on the unruly side; indeed, on many occasions, it was difficult to maintain order in the meetings.<sup>103</sup> Students, especially those who studied law, guided vendors in writing effective letters to authorities, in which they referred to various articles of

---

<sup>103</sup> José Luis Díaz, interview by author, notes, January 16, 2007, Puebla, México.

Puebla's legal code.<sup>104</sup> This is not to say that due to the influence and support of students, vendors wrote letters. Sellers had a long tradition of letter-writing. Students just advised vendors in legal matters.

In an interview, a vendor regretted that during the 1970s university students engaged in politics and helped vendors, while in the present (2007), the university community did not care about the popular classes.<sup>105</sup> Her analysis is correct. In Puebla students have remained neutral toward vendors and in the city of Morelia, Michoacán, students have been active participants in campaigns to remove vendors. Recently city boosters recruited university students and formed the Amigos del Rescate del Centro Histórico, (ARCOS). In exchange for grants, students acted as “vigilantes and citizen informants.” For six months, students made sure that vendors did not install their stalls. If they refused to move, the students called the police.<sup>106</sup>

In addition to Puebla's university students' involvement with vendors, throughout the 1970s, Lorenzo Hernández Becerra and Bulmaro Vega, the physics students and teachers of the Preparatorias Populares, became the intellectual advisors to the UPVA. As the UPVA's intellectuals and advisors, they were constantly reminding vendors the importance of recent history in contemporary problems. In a street vendors' General Assembly in their makeshift “28 de Octubre Market,” the teacher Lorenzo Hernández

---

<sup>104</sup> See for example letter to Procurador General de Justicia from members of UPVA, April 2, 1975, box 58, file 10, AMP.

<sup>105</sup> Paula Javier, interview by author, notes, January 25, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>106</sup> For a celebratory piece that traces the “rescue” of Morelia's dignity through the removal of Morelias's vendors, see Luis Felipe Cabrales Barajas, “The Historic Center of Morelia: A Case of Successful Negotiation” *Journal of Latin American Geography* 4, no. 2 (2005):46

Becerra advised sellers that they should be careful in their negotiations with Mayor Eduardo Cué Merlo. Cué Merlo, he said, was one of the beneficiaries from Governor Antonio Nava Castillo's business plans, which included the 1964 attempt to monopolize the production and distribution of milk. Hernández Becerra suggested that Cué Merlo's sympathy and commitment remained with the upper-classes and not with the vendors.<sup>107</sup> Lorenzo Hernández's words were prophetic. In the late summer of 1977, Mayor Eduardo Cué Merlo began a campaign, the *Plan de Coordinación para la Solución del Ambulantismo*, which tried to remove vendors from the streets and relocate vendors to existing markets. The dark side of the campaign consisted of the imprisonment of UPVA leaders.<sup>108</sup>

The physics teacher, Bulmaro Vega became the brain of the organization until 1977. His main goal was to keep the UPVA's political independence and enhance the links between vendors and other workers and peasants. Vega advised vendors that these alliances were important to achieve their goals and help other organizations and unions achieve theirs. He thought that all workers (rural and urban), regardless of their formal or informal nature belong to the masses who should become the agents of social change.

His involvement with vendors was such that he met vendor Teresa Rosales, a single mother of three children. They fell in love and decided to live together. Their decision caught not only vendors' attention, but also police attention. After their union, the couple had two children. Due to their involvement in the UPVA, both Teresa and

---

<sup>107</sup>“Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre,” Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-79, legajo 71, p. 19, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>108</sup>“El Cabildo en sesión extraordinaria condenó la toma de calles y los responsabilizó si surge la violencia,” *La Opinión*, August 28, 1977.

Bulmaro were under constant police surveillance. This was especially true for Bulmaro, who was also active organizing molders at the Federal Mogul factory, a facility where workers produced truck engines. While Bulmaro Vega was never a vendor, he understood the plights of vendors thanks to his wife who was also involved in the UPVA.<sup>109</sup> Whereas both of them were militant UPVA's members, the police referred to Teresa, not as a leader, but as "the lover of Bulmaro Vega."<sup>110</sup> Their language reflected how authorities dismissed her role in the UPVA.

### Gender and the UPVA

While students and their teachers held notions of social justice and equality, they were far less committed to questions of gender equality. Although most vendors knew that female vendors brought their children with them to work, few raised the question of helping vendors who were mothers with their children. Only on one occasion, one of the male leaders, the teacher Lorenzo Hernández Becerra, thought of creating a classroom for the children of vendors. While a good idea, the project did not last long because vendors did not have a safe space for the children.<sup>111</sup>

Intimate relationships between male students/teachers and female vendors were common. A number of them were attracted to each other and while they did not always legalize their unions, they lived together and had children. Whereas there was a power

---

<sup>109</sup> Teresa Rosales, interview with author, notes, March 8, 2007, Puebla, México. Bulmaro Vega and Teresa Rosales had a Catholic marriage a few years ago. Bulmaro's former students teased him and asked him: "can you explain to us how come does a Marxist marry in a Catholic church?"

<sup>110</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, File 100-19-1-77, legajo 59, page 42, September 20, 1977, AGN.

<sup>111</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," file 100-19-1-76, legajo 50, page 107, February 21, 1976, AGN.



imbalance between male students or teachers and female vendors, these relationships were consensual.<sup>112</sup> Arturo Garmendia, one of the teachers at the university, while filming the documentary *Los Vendedores Ambulantes* met the young vendor Olga Corona. Years later, they left Puebla, got married and had two children.<sup>113</sup> While Arturo Garmendia and Bulmaro Vega were committed to one woman, other students used their perceived positions of power and their “intellectual charm” to flirt and engage in romantic and sexual relationships with a number of female vendors. Some got pregnant, had their children, and the students did not take any responsibility regarding child support.<sup>114</sup>

While women vendors were more numerous than men, males dominated leadership positions. It was not until 1989, that a woman became the UPVA’s top leader (she continues to be the main leader of the organization). Only women who had formal education occupied top leadership positions in the political commission or as advisors. The majority, many of them illiterate, were leaders of other commissions.

The period from 1973 to 1989 represented the high point of intellectual interaction between students and street vendors. With the exception of one female student, all the members of the university community active with the UPVA were male. Whereas students and their teachers acknowledged the power of women in the organization, they favored their own male students and, to a lesser extent they favored

---

<sup>112</sup> Unlike female street vendors, female factory workers in Mexico were always subject to sexual harassment in the workplace by male managers and supervisors. Sexual harassment was also common among professional and office workers. Dan La Botz, *Mask of Democracy*: 27.

<sup>113</sup> Arturo Garmendia, interview with author, notes, March 20, 2007, Mexico City, Mexico.

<sup>114</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, March 17, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

male vendors for top leadership positions. In other words, formal politics were reserved for men by men.

Students and their teachers, despite their rhetoric of equality, displaced female vendors from political positions. Whereas students believed that the masses needed to unite and potentially become revolutionary actors, they did not fully believe that street vendors were able to do it independently. Students thought that street vendors needed their guidance and their knowledge. Years later, students admit that they perceived street vendors as uneducated people who lacked the skills to maintain their independent union. And as many men of their time, they believed that women were not truly fit for politics.<sup>115</sup>

While students thought that men were supposed to be the leaders of the organization, they recognized women's courage and constant participation in the UPVA's activities. Male leaders and the rank-and-file admired how female vendors were "always there." They recognized how women were in charge of their stalls, defended the organization, marched in the front rows, negotiated with authorities, took microphones, and addressed hundreds of people. The male leadership also recognized the courage of their female counterparts as they never stepped back in confrontations with police. A former UPVA leader stated that "women, unlike men, were not cowards; they didn't run away when they saw the police."<sup>116</sup> Despite all this, the political leaders were mostly men with the exception of street vendor Yolanda Gómez who was member of the

---

<sup>115</sup> José Luis Díaz Miñon and Miguel Angel Berguiss, interview by author, August 2007, notes, Puebla, México.

<sup>116</sup> Lorenzo Hernández Becerra, interview by author, February 1, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

political commission and, during the early 1980s, she was the second in command after the top leader. Another exception was Marina Sánchez who was an advisor, but none of them were UPVA's top leaders. In addition of being vendors, both women had a certain level of formal education. One of them had a teachers' degree and the other one had a BA degree.<sup>117</sup>

Ironically, women who participated in the UPVA believed that male members and students did not discriminate against them. This perception is partially correct as all women actively participated in all the commissions.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, most female vendors were active in the UPVA commissions and were proud of their work within their organization. As one vendor stated, "we were vendors, mothers, housewives, and revolutionaries."<sup>119</sup>

Most of these women, especially the ones who were married, were able for the first time to be active in politics. As married women, some vendors stated that their husbands did not allow them to engage in any kind of work other than taking care of their home, childrearing, and vending. Little by little, as members of the UPVA, women participated, in meetings, marches, sit-ins, and the high-jacking of buses. They also became in touch with the male leadership and with other male vendors. These were completely different activities that married women did not engage in on a constant basis before the UPVA's creation. While women were glad of their participation in these

---

<sup>117</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, 17 March 2007, Puebla, México.

<sup>118</sup> Only a few women participated in the political commission, one of them was Yolanda Gómez, a vendor who unlike other women, had completed higher education.

<sup>119</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, 28 Aug. 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

activities, husbands usually protested their wives' involvement in the UPVA. It was common that some men beat their wives and forbade them to attend union's activities. Aware of this problem, the UPVA leadership encouraged women to denounce their husbands' mistreatment. When these episodes occurred, UPVA members talked to the husbands, and if the mistreatment continued, women opted for a different solution. Usually, a group of women would confront the accused husband and beat him publicly.<sup>120</sup>

Vendors, especially women discovered a system to punish the behavior of some members. While increasingly women and men worked together in commissions, attended marches, and went out of town together, it was important not to engage with married female or male comrades. In other words, the rank-and-file and the leadership did not tolerate infidelity. For the leadership, it was essential that members were assured that by participating in the union, their relationships and marriages were not in danger. Again, women instituted a punishment for those members who cheated on their partners. While male cheaters were usually beaten and shamed by a group of women, female cheaters received a punishment that had the goal of embarrassing her and injured her private parts. A group of women would often surround the accused, open her legs, and rub chili paper on her vagina.<sup>121</sup> These kinds of punishments were both embarrassing and painful, and perhaps they discouraged cheating.

### The leadership

Students were able to consolidate UPVA leadership positions with vendors for sixteen years. Student leaders, politicized by the events of 1968, did not become

---

<sup>120</sup> Rita and Marina, interview by author, August 15, 2007, Puebla, México.

<sup>121</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, 28 Aug. 2007, Puebla, México.

vendors; they were simply attracted to the organization for ideological reasons. They wanted to guide vendors and they thought they were better qualified than sellers to do so. They convinced street vendors that they had the intellectual tools that vendors lacked.<sup>122</sup> Unlike vendors, students were literate, had more formal education, and believed that they possessed the 'know-how' to design policies, and take organized action against the state. They believed that they also had acquired political experience in the student movement and could teach vendors about politics and modes of action.

The first 'official' leaders of the street vendors' union were the members of the Corona family and the physics teachers Lorenzo Hernández Becerra and Bulmaro Vega Sánchez. Due to internal conflicts, in March 1975, street vendors and some students expelled the Corona family. According to a group of vendors and students, the Coronas had stolen money from the organization and were willing to negotiate with city authorities the removal of vendors from the streets.<sup>123</sup> Whereas Adolfo Corona and his wife Paula Javier have always denied their alleged involvement with authorities, in the view of some vendors, any suspicion of sellers or students acting in connivance with authorities was enough for the rank-and-file and other leaders to expel them from the organization. At any rate, other vendors like Yolanda Gómez and Esther Ramos continued very close to the top leadership. Working with them was a group of young students: Florentino Cantor Lira, José Luis Hernández, Oscar Polo Hernández, Guillermo

---

<sup>122</sup> In interviews, former students who participated as leaders or advisors accept that they really thought that vendors needed their guidance.

<sup>123</sup> Letter to Alfredo Toxqui Fernandez de Lara, Governor of Puebla and Mayor Eduardo Cue Merlo from a group of vendors, box 58, file 10, April 2, 1975, AMP.

Moreno, Cristóbal Robledo Valle and Alberto Hernández García.<sup>124</sup> Most importantly, from the state of Tlaxcala, came a former high-school student of Lorenzo Hernández Becerra, Rubén Sarabia Sánchez, who would later become the UPVA top leader until his incarceration in the summer of 1989.

Rubén Sarabia Sánchez (aka Simitrio) took over the direction of the UPVA in June 1979, when a group of vendors expelled Bulmaro Vega from the organization and he left the UPVA to continue his activism elsewhere. Vendors and some other leaders accused Bulmaro Vega of mismanaging vendors' fees.<sup>125</sup> Since the early 1970s, Simitrio was a favorite of Lorenzo Hernández and street vendors liked him immensely. He was a charismatic leader with an excellent memory who was able to remember vendors' names and details about their lives. In the 1970s, he married a street vendor and became increasingly active with the vendor's organization. Simitrio was in jail from 1977 to February 1979. Authorities accused him of killing a thief who had entered a market.<sup>126</sup> After he left prison, a group of vendors proposed that he become the new UPVA's top leader. Some vendors supported Simitrio for being an honest person and because they thought that he had "learned a lot during his time in prison."<sup>127</sup> His charisma and his negotiation skills with authorities made of Simitrio the UPVA's top leader after Bulmaro Vega left the organization. Soon, Simitrio became synonym with the vendors' union.

---

<sup>124</sup> "Mercado 28 de Octubre," Dirección Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-75, legajo 45, page 45, October 10, 1975 and November 19, 1979, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>125</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-79, legajo 73, page 176, June 16, 1979, AGN.

<sup>126</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-79, legajo 70, page 150, February 6, 1979, AGN.

<sup>127</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-79, legajo 72, page 324, May 26, 1979, AGN.

Born in 1958 in the state of Tlaxcala, Rubén Sarabia Sánchez, was a high-school student of the physics teacher, Lorenzo Hernández Becerra. Rubén later moved to Puebla, and by the mid-1970s he got involved in the street vendors' union. Since a young age, Simitrio read Marxist texts, which, according to authorities, explained his militancy. Authorities and members of the UPVA agreed that Simitrio was a modest person. Unlike many official leaders, he did not make any display of wealth despite the fact that he had access to union fees. He wore very simple clothing made out of manta, a cheap thick cotton cloth worn by the working class, liked sandals, had long hair, and used a palm-hat.<sup>128</sup> According to a vendor, Simitrio was also a down-to-earth person, (*una persona centrada*);<sup>129</sup> another vendor stated that he was the most honest leader the UPVA had ever had.<sup>130</sup> Needless to say, these were characteristics that vendors appreciated. It was not until the mid-1980s that, in general assemblies, some vendors began complaining about Simitrio's alcoholism.<sup>131</sup>

The police report stated that Simitrio "since the beginning was an active participant in the organization of [social] movements, in street assemblies; he is combative and charismatic in the eyes of street vendors."<sup>132</sup> According to police files, Rubén Sarabia was in jail in 1975 accused of robbery, and in 1977 accused of homicide.<sup>133</sup> As next chapter will discuss, his criminal past was very useful for authorities to portray him as a criminal and to incarcerate him. Unlike other male leaders

---

<sup>128</sup> Expedientes de Mercados, Caja 2590, Expediente 1158, n/d, AMP.

<sup>129</sup> Paula Maldonado, interview by author, January 23, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>130</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 021-056-002, October 25, 1983, AGN.

<sup>131</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 021-056-002, December 1, 1984, AGN.

<sup>132</sup> Expedientes de Mercados, Caja 2590, Expediente 1158, n/d, AMP.

<sup>133</sup> "Mercado 28 de Octubre," Departamento Federal de Seguridad, file 100-19-1-79, legajo 71, p. 21, Galería 1, AGN.

who always used a nickname for security reasons, Rubén Sarabia used a long pseudonym, Simitrio Tzompasquelitl Zitlal. Most people, however, called him simply “Simitrio” or “El Simitrio.”



Rubén Sarabia Sánchez (aka Simitrio) with a group of vendors.

Simitrio became the top leader of the UPVA from 1979 to 1989. While the rank-and-file loved their leader, Simitrio ironically violated one of the UPVA’s original precepts: avoiding a cacique or a powerful boss.<sup>134</sup> Although a petty-cacique, he was a leader who remained independent from the PRI or any other political party and did not sell out. He gained the respect of most vendors to this day.

---

<sup>134</sup> Interestingly, in 1980 interview, a UPVA’s member declared that in the organization, “we don’t have a leader, ours is a kind of cooperative (*cooperativa*).” Quoted in Manlio Barbosa Cano, *Plan de Ordenamiento Espacial de la Actividad Comercial para la ciudad de Puebla*, (Puebla: Centro Regional Puebla, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1981):46



## Conclusion

In 1973, street vendors organized a militant union, the Popular Union of Street Vendors (UPVA) to defend their right to sell on the streets. Vendors also continued their alliance with students and together, they built a democratic union free of *charros* and independent from the PRI's confederations. In an effort to encourage union democracy, they structured the union in such a way that all vendors –men and women- were able to participate. Indeed, most street vendors were active in their union; some participated voluntarily and others were forced by leaders to engage in the organization's multiple activities. Participating in commissions taught vendors diverse skills, from using escalators to negotiating with authorities. Although the leadership was committed to achieve equality among vendors, most leaders were not totally committed to gender equality. The top leadership positions, with a few exceptions, were dominated by male students and male vendors. Female sellers, however, were active in a number of commissions that sustain the everyday life of the organization.

Despite its faults, the UPVA was able to maintain its independence from the corporatist structure of the PRI-state. In this sense, the UPVA's history belongs to a struggle of union democracy and independence in Mexico. It is not surprising that authorities disliked the UPVA; their leaders did not sell out and the organization sought to maintain its links with blue collar workers, teachers, and peasants. Union democracy (or an attempt), alliances with broader sectors of the population, and independence from the ruling party were three elements that shook important pillars of the corporate state.

As next chapter will explain, authorities were relentless in their effort to destroy the Popular Union of Street Vendors.

## Chapter 5

### The Repression of the Vendors

On October 5, 1977 Teresa Rosales, a long-time vendor and mother of three, left her stall and two of her offspring to attend a march in support of landless peasants of the Central Campesina Independiente (CCI). Teresa left her stall and her two and a half-year old child in charge of her oldest son. After the march ended, Teresa rushed back to the “corralón,” the market that authorities had granted peddlers a few years earlier, to retrieve her children and to continue selling. When she returned, she was in shock when she realized that her toddler, Oscar Vega Rosales, was missing. Many vendors had attended the march and, as usual, their children stayed in the market, with little adult supervision. Someone came in the market and abducted her child. Her worst fears came true. For a number of months before the child’s abduction, authorities threatened her husband, Bulmaro Vega, that they would hurt his family if he did not stop organizing vendors and a group of molders at the Federal Mogul factory, a facility that produced truck engines.<sup>1</sup> Authorities knew that physical torture did not deter Bulmaro, and decided to destroy him and his family psychologically and emotionally.

Teresa, Bulmaro, and other vendors did everything they could to find the child. They put ads all over the city. A couple of days later, they handed in a picture of Oscar

---

<sup>1</sup> “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre,” Departamento Federal de Seguridad (hereafter DFS), file 100-19-1-77, legajo 58, page 232, October 22, 1977, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN).

for publication in a widely read newspaper in Puebla. Teresa found solidarity and help from fellow vendors; news of the missing child permeated the streets and the UPVA market. She and a group of female vendors spent months trying to find the little one. Female vendors went everywhere in downtown looking for Oscar. They even accompanied Teresa in her trips to small towns around Puebla state with the hope that one of the temporary vendors had taken the boy. According to Yolanda Gómez, a vendor and one of Teresa's friends, on one occasion women emptied a well located in their market. Female vendors thought that Oscar could have fallen into the well and drowned. As much as it could have been painful, at least they could find his little body.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly desperate, Teresa even went to the US-Mexican border, to the cities of Matamoros and Brownsville because, according to official investigations, someone located Oscar in this region.<sup>3</sup> Despite all these efforts and endless women's tears and prayers nobody could find Oscar. He was gone.

The disappearance of Oscar Vega Rosales was one of a number of authoritarian measures that the state employed to destroy the UPVA and halt its members' activism. From 1977 to 1995 the state relentlessly campaigned against the street vendors' union and its most militant leaders. For over two decades, repressive agents of the state beat, incarcerated, tortured, killed and disappeared vendors. Not only did the state use physical violence, but authorities also used non-violent attacks against the organization and its supporters. Moreover, all levels of the state were involved in its fight against the UPVA.

---

<sup>2</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, 17 March 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>3</sup> Teresa Rosales, interview by author, notes, March 8, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

While at the beginning of the 1970s, the UPVA was only attacked by local officials, later state and federal authorities became involved in destroying the vendors' organization.

This chapter explores the different methods that the Mexican state used against those who organized independently of the ruling party and fought for their rights. These tactics included media campaigns, the relocation of sellers, and irregular legal mechanisms to apprehend their leaders. Indeed, as many scholars have stated, the Mexican state was an authoritarian regime that engaged in a dirty war for decades. Street vendors and their supporters resisted such repression and were able to sustain their organization.<sup>4</sup>

Unquestionably, Oscar Vega Rosales' kidnap was a horrific experience for Bulmaro and Teresa's family. When Oscar disappeared, Teresa Rosales was a few months pregnant with her fourth child. The anguished Teresa lost many pounds as a result of her loss and multiple trips all over Mexico in search of her child. And when her baby was born, the little girl was anemic.<sup>5</sup> Teresa's other children suffered, too, and her income declined during this period because she spent time away from work.

In addition to the emotional damage that the whole family experienced, for Bulmaro, the disappearance of his first child distracted him from his organizing activities. According to Bulmaro's close friends, his son's disappearance destroyed him physically and emotionally. Indeed, the state hit its hardest blow against him by abducting the child.

---

<sup>4</sup> Despite the widespread use of violence in Mexico, the literature about the Dirty War is scant. Recently, a number of people who were victims of torture have published their testimonies. See Alberto Ulloa Bornemann and Aurora Camacho de Schimdt, *Surviving Mexico's Dirty War: A Political Prisoner's Memoir* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007) and Victoria Mendoza Salgado, *Mexico 1977: Testimonios de la tortura* (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> Teresa Rosales, interview by author, notes, March 8, 1007, Puebla, Mexico.

Bulmaro Vega had been in prison a number of times. When he was a student in Mexico City, authorities arrested him twice in September and in October 1968; a third occasion on October 8, 1970, and again, in 1977.<sup>6</sup> There is evidence that authorities tortured him while he was in prison. As mentioned in chapter 3, in 1977, immediately after he got his freedom, his family took him to the hospital to recover from the injuries he received in different parts of his body. According to his wife, state thugs crushed his hands as they forced him to lie on the ground; they put a chair on top of each hand and one person jumped on each chair. Vega also received electric shocks in various parts of his body, including his testicles.<sup>7</sup> Bulmaro, however, recovered from physical torture and continued his organizing with the UPVA.

Authorities took stricter actions against him and in 1977 they decided to kidnap his son. Officials knew that Teresa Rosales was also very active in the UPVA and that she attended marches and other UPVA's events. Authorities were aware that the child spent periods of time unattended, only under the supervision of his older brother, and it would be relatively easy to take the toddler away. And indeed, it was.

By kidnapping the child, the state sent messages to both parents and, most importantly, to other UPVA's vendors. For Teresa Rosales the message was clear. Instead of participating in political activities, she should take care of her children. By leaving the children unattended, one of them "got lost." Teresa felt tremendous guilt because she left the two of them alone while she went to the march.<sup>8</sup> When she went to

---

<sup>6</sup> "Investigación," DFS, file 100-19-1-79, legajo 71, p. 19, Galería 1, AGN.

<sup>7</sup> Yolanda Gómez, interview by author, notes, 17 March 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>8</sup> Teresa Rosales, interview by author, March 8, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico.

the newspapers, Teresa changed the version of the events, stating that she was walking on a street, the boy stayed behind and when she turned around, her son was gone.<sup>9</sup> In short, the state made her feel like an inadequate mother who left her children unattended. UPVA's marches distracted her from proper motherhood and good commerce. As some scholars have argued, guilt and shame are not uncommon among people who have been victims of state terror. The message for Bulmaro was to stop his organizing once and for all. The state sought to end the couple's militancy. Other vendors also understood the message as well.

Authorities distracted the couple's attention from the UPVA but Teresa and Bulmaro did not abandon their political activism; it just took a different direction. Indirectly, the state forced street vendors to become aware of the struggles of others who also experienced repression. For example, Bulmaro joined the *Comité Nacional Independiente Comité Pro-Defensa de Presos, Desaparecidos y Exiliados Políticos*.<sup>10</sup> Not only did Bulmaro Vega join, but he also encouraged the UPVA to support the committee's many events. One of the committee's goals was to make public that in Mexico there were political prisoners and dozens of people who had disappeared. In light of this, Bulmaro planned to produce a new theatrical play where vendors represented the ways in which political prisoners lived in jails. After all, he had also been a political prisoner and knew what happened inside prisons. His objective was to gain sympathizers, showing audiences the vendors' and political prisoners' plight.<sup>11</sup> Bulmaro thought that it was absolutely necessary to let people know that the Mexican government

---

<sup>9</sup> "El Niño Oscar Vega Continúa Extraviado," *La Opinión*, October 11, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> Departamento Federal de Investigación, November 19, 1979, p.18-27, AGN.

<sup>11</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-78, legajo 64, p. 125, April 5, 1978, AGN.

heavily repressed popular movements of independent groups of workers and *campesinos*. He added that the government kept political prisoners in Sinaloa, Guerrero, Morelos and Oaxaca, where many workers, peasants, students, and teachers went missing because they resisted *charro* leaders.<sup>12</sup> He constantly emphasized that the state disliked independent groups of workers trying to break from the PRI's structure.

The Mexican state engaged in a dirty war not only against guerrilla leaders, but also against left-wing activists of all sorts: students, labor organizers, and intellectuals. Torture, killings, and disappearances did not exclude the organized street vendors of Puebla. While some Mexicans knew about the 1968 student massacre in Tlatelolco and the *Jueves de Corpus* in 1971 against student protestors, fewer people knew about the massacre of people in Guerrero when the government tried to exterminate Lucio Cabañas and his followers. There were around 300 people who disappeared in different towns of the state.<sup>13</sup> Even fewer were aware of other leaders in other parts of Mexico such as Florencio *El Güero* Medrano. Authorities killed him in Morelos. Among other "offenses" he had formed an armed organization called the Partido Proletario Unido de América.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to kidnapping and imprison adults in unknown places, authorities abducted a number of children and young people in an effort to emotionally and

---

<sup>12</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-9-1-78, legajo 65, p. 241, July 28, 1978, AGN.

<sup>13</sup> Juan E. Méndez and Javier Mariezcurrena, "Unspeakable Truths," *Human Rights Quarterly*, 25 no. 1 (2003) Review, p. 253.

<sup>14</sup> Scholars still need to write the history of lesser known leaders, such as *El Güero* Medrano.



psychologically torture their parents or older siblings who, in most cases, were activists themselves.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the kidnap of Oscar Vega Rosales was not a random or isolated case. It was part of a larger history of repression in Mexico that peaked in the 1970s and 80s. Teresa and Bulmaro were not alone in their grief and desperation. Many other parents all over the country looked for their children and got together in an effort to find their young ones and make their plight known and visible to Mexican society. In the 1970s, state agents kidnapped the daughter of the president of the Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca, Felipe Martínez Soriano. And in 1977 Rosario Ibarra de la Piedra, now a senator and an activist, lost her son Jesús Piedra for his alleged membership to the *Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre*, a group of several urban guerrilla movements.<sup>16</sup> Parents feared that the government kept, tortured, raped, and killed their children in the clandestine Military Camp No. 1 and other military facilities.<sup>17</sup> After all, prisoners and their families knew that these were the places where the state kept political prisoners who participated in social movements or guerrillas who most of the times did not leave these

---

<sup>15</sup> In 1977, Victoria Mendoza Salgado was kidnapped by the White Brigade in Jojutla, Morelos when she was 17 years old. The White Brigade was a paramilitary group that President Echeverría created to exterminate urban guerrillas. She and her 18 year-old sister, Josefina, were tortured by the military in the famous Military Camp no. 1. Victoria's sister, Xóchitl who was 23 years old was raped a number of times by the *custodios*. "Tras la guerra sucia no hubo sicólogos para procesar la pesadilla; mucho menos justicia," *La Jornada*, May 7, 2008  
<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/05/07/index.php?section=politica&article=012n1pol> ; (last access May 8, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Miguel Nazar Haro, a long-time official and Director of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad, the Mexican intelligence service, was responsible for Jesús Piedra Ibarra's disappearance. Nazar Haro was imprisoned by a special prosecutor in 2004. The Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre was formed in 1973 and disbanded in 1976. Alberto Ulloa Bornemann and Aurora Camacho de Schimdt, *Surviving Mexico's Dirty War: A Political Prisoner's Memoir* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007): 206 and 208. For a study of the *Liga 23 de Septiembre* see Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México* (México: Grijalbo, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> A former military officer who now lives in Canada, Zacarías Osorio Cruz, maintained that between 1978 and 1983, he killed of at least 60 civilians in the military center San Miguel de los Jagüeyes. "Busca Comité 68 que militar desertor testifique sobre asesinatos de civiles," *La Jornada*, Septiembre 27, 2007.

facilities alive.<sup>18</sup> In 1968, for example, the military took hundreds of students to the Military Camp No. 1 and this practice continued all throughout the 1970s and 80s. The military killed approximately 143 prisoners on these military bases.<sup>19</sup>

Not only did the military target guerilla leaders and their followers, but officials also kidnapped their loved ones, including their children. For example, at the end of June 1971, Secret Service officers abducted one of Genaro Vázquez's sons, the eight year old, Genaro Vázquez Solís. By kidnapping the son of this Guerrero-based teacher and guerrilla leader and other members of his family including his wife and sister-in-law, the state tried to intimidate Genaro Vázquez, the founder of the armed group *Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria* (ACNR) and the *Asociación Cívica Guerrerense*, whose members, later on took up arms and kidnapped state officials and businessmen.<sup>20</sup> Another case is the one of Victoria Mendoza Salgado, a young woman from Morelos, who has recently recounted her experiences in the Military Camp No. 1 where the officials tortured her at the age of 17 and raped her 18-year old sister on multiple occasions. This military facility also served as a training site for paramilitary groups such as *Los Halcones* and the White Brigade or *la brigada blanca*. The *Halcones* were in charge of attacking students in 1971, and the white brigade had the mission of exterminating urban guerillas.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> For an excellent study of how the Argentinean military used language to terrorize and manipulate people see Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Bornemann and Camacho, *Surviving Mexico's Dirty War*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Laura Castellanos, "La represión contra la familia de Genaro Vázquez Rojas: la historia se repite?" *La Jornada*, September 2, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Gilberto López y Rivas, "¿Sedena forma paramilitares?" *La Jornada*, September 28, 2001.

Although Bulmaro Vega and Teresa doubted that the state had their toddler in the Military Camp, they shared many concerns with parents whose children disappeared. For nine years Bulmaro Vega and Teresa Rosales actively participated with other parents and family members whose sons and daughters were missing. Bulmaro traveled to South America and attended a number of congresses. In Mexico, Bulmaro Vega also spoke in public and reminded the audiences that the judicial police (*policia judicial*) had kidnapped his son in order to stop the street vendors' organization. He added that since the government of President José López Portillo (1976-1982), repression increased.<sup>22</sup> In the meantime, Teresa and other street vendors attended meetings with the Committee, which took place in Mexico City and Tuxtepec Oaxaca.<sup>23</sup> Teresa also joined other women of the *Comité Eureka de Desaparecidos* led by Rosario Ibarra de la Piedra. Ibarra formed the committee in 1977 with other mothers of the disappeared. These mothers, about 557, went on hunger strikes, and Teresa joined one for fifteen days in Mexico City.<sup>24</sup> While this committee eventually achieved the freedom of 148 political prisoners, violence continued in Mexico. By 1981, members of the *Unidad de Fuerzas Democráticas de la Lucha contra la Represión por la Libertad de los Presos Políticos y la Presentación de los Desaparecidos* calculated that there were about 400 people who had disappeared in the country and argued that the state repressed all of those who fought for democracy and that torture and kidnappings continued in Mexico. This group's

---

<sup>22</sup> "Información de Puebla," Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (hereafter IPS), box 1510-A-4, file 405-48, August 28, 1981, Galería 2, AGN.

<sup>23</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-78, legajo 64, p. 289, June 6, 1978, AGN.

<sup>24</sup> Teresa Rosales, interview by author, notes, March 8, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

members had no doubt that the state abducted the kid Oscar Vega Rosales because his father was a UPVA leader.<sup>25</sup>

Oscar Vega Rosales, like other victims of abduction, suffered unspeakable acts of terror. Most people who “disappeared” were tortured, usually with electric shocks, by the police or the military. Oscar Vega spent nine important years of his life, from two and a half years old to eleven under the supervision of a couple that the state paid to take care of the child. For a few years, the couple did not take the child out to the streets, fearing that someone might recognize him. In time the couple let him out and allowed him to play in the streets. By that time, Oscar did not remember his parents. The couple who took care of him abused him physically, and when Teresa and Bulmaro found their son, his body was full of scars. According to Teresa, Oscar remembers that the woman who took care of him was a drunk, who beat him, and threw hot objects at him like the *comal* where she heated tortillas.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup>Newspaper clipping, *Excelsior*, IPS, box 1510-A-4, file 405-263, August 28, 1981, Galería 2, AGN.

<sup>26</sup>Teresa Rosales, interview with author, notes, March 8, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.



Oscar Vega Rosales in *La Opinión*, November 1, 1977.

Dramatic events did not end when Teresa and Bulmaro retrieved their child in March, 1986. The boy and his family faced a number of problems as a result of the nine years that Oscar lived away from his family. Oscar had not attended school, so when his parents found him, he was illiterate. He had to start anew, and learning proved to be quite difficult. In addition, his parents suspected that the couple drugged him because he had become an addict.<sup>27</sup> To add to their frustration and pain, the Vega family was unable to prove that authorities had committed the kidnapping.

Authorities always denied that they had anything to do with the child's disappearance. The police claims that Bulmaro and Teresa staged their child's disappearance and that a family member was hiding the child. According to authorities,

<sup>27</sup> Teresa Rosales, interview by author, notes, March 8, 2007, Puebla, México.

the couple did it in order to instigate vendors against authorities.<sup>28</sup> Of course, such reports made little sense. Why would Vega family hide their own child for nine years? Without a doubt, the Vega's case was part of the dirty war.

On top of Oscar's kidnapping, authorities engaged in other kinds of violent acts and harassment against UPVA's street vendors and their allies. They discredited vendors through the press, arrested, beat, and imprisoned them, and infiltrated the organization with the objective of destroying it. In 1977, a group of vendors handed in fliers that summarized what city and state officials tried to do against the UPVA:

We, the street vendors, have decided to take Puebla's streets indefinitely as a sign of protest against authorities, and against the detention of our leaders...we believe that our leaders' imprisonment is an act of provocation to encourage a battle between the police and vendors with the objective of destroying our organization. Authorities are unable to provide a solution to our demands; instead they kidnap, threat, imprison, and seek our removal from the streets through violence. They think that we are the competitors to big industrialists and capitalists. They [the industrialists] manipulate the government in order to achieve their personal interests. Stop the repression...We will indefinitely take the streets.

Hasta la Victoria siempre! Venceremos, UPVA.<sup>29</sup>

### Defamation Campaigns

Indeed, the state used all means available to campaign against the UPVA. One of their methods was to use the media to discredit and obscure the UPVA's image and its allies. City and state officials were particularly incensed by the strong alliance between vendors and students. Newspapers depicted a negative image of the students. One of the most famous articles related how students beat journalists who were covering a story about *ambulantismo*. The popular newspaper, *El Sol de Puebla*, even published a picture

---

<sup>28</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-79, legajo 72, p. 196, AGN.

<sup>29</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-9-1-77, legajo 59, p. 19, AGN.

where students were hitting journalists. Interestingly, the supposed students were middle-age men who hardly looked like the young students who were involved with the vendors. This is not surprising because it was not uncommon for authorities to pay bullies to start fights and then blame others. In any case, newspaper writers called these students “malvivientes” and “agitators.” Some of them, according to authorities, were part of ‘urban guerrillas who kidnap people and take them to building in the university that serve as concentration camps.’<sup>30</sup> These descriptions suggested that students were not only trouble makers and criminals, but also that street vendors were their pawns.<sup>31</sup>

Not only did the press attack students, but it also discredited street vendors. The pro-government and widely read *El Sol de Puebla* was especially harsh against vendors. Since the early 1970s, authorities used newspaper editorials to harm the street vendors’ reputations.<sup>32</sup> In 1974, for example, in a newspaper picture, a group of female vendors and their children who were sitting on the street “represent a danger for cars and pedestrians.”<sup>33</sup> It was very common that newspapers concentrated on publishing many photographs accompanied with captions depicting and describing vendors as chaotic, disorderly and invasive agents. Photographers made sure to capture the worst aspects of informal commercial activities on the streets. They always took pictures of street dogs, garbage, and poorly built stalls. Writers made sure to include captions that stressed how

---

<sup>30</sup> See “Pretenden invadir calles,” and “Atacaron a siete civiles y a dos policias: las víctimas son de “El Sol” y “El Heraldo, la televisión y dos uniformados,” and “Varios detenidos: Hay malvivientes que cobran por dar protección.” *El Sol de Puebla* and *La Voz de Puebla*, February 6, 27, 28, and March 1, 1971, HJN.

<sup>31</sup> Two female leaders and vendors, Matilde and Esperanza Pastrana sent a letter to *El Sol de Puebla* to clarify that students did not impose anything or anyone to the vendors. “Que una comisión autonombra agita en el mercado rodante,” *El Sol de Puebla*, April 25, 1971, HJN.

<sup>32</sup> “Campaña de Difamación y de provocación denuncia el 28 de Octubre,” *La Opinión*, December 12, 1977.

<sup>33</sup> The caption reads: “Un peligro para automovilistas y peatones representan estos puestos ambulantes que ya no se conforman con colocarse en la acera, sino que se han extendido ya hasta la mitad de la calle...” *El Sol de Puebla*, July 16, 1974.

street vendors represented a problem not only for pedestrians and drivers, but also for the city's cleanliness, and a threat to consumers' health. Newspaper messages were always clear, street vendors were a problem for the city because they "invaded" streets and sidewalks and posed a danger for the city and its dwellers.<sup>34</sup> In other words, vendors were backward and annoying.

Whereas the press targeted all vendors, newspapers were harsher with their leaders. Editorials usually referred to the leaders with contempt and call them pseudo-leaders, (*liderzuelos*), troublemakers (*alborotadores*), and "outsiders." Writers could not accept that vendors were able to organize independently of the country's dominant institutions. One editorial even contrasted the leaders from the vendors, idealizing the latter and demonizing the former. The writer mentioned that "street vendors were simple people (*gente sencilla*) who were controlled by the manipulative leaders (*los manipuladores*).” The journalist ended by saying, “let's not allow them [the leaders] to continue exploiting [vendors'] innocence and good faith.”<sup>35</sup> Similar criticisms continued for decades. In February 1993 for example, in an effort to attack vendors' honorability, an article accused UPVA leaders for allowing their members to have brothels in markets disguising them as sea food restaurants.<sup>36</sup> Even the least skeptical readers thought there was something fishy about this comment.

---

<sup>34</sup> See *El Sol de Puebla*, May 13, 1973; September 7, 1973, November 22, 1973; June 16, 1974 and October 15, 1974, Hemeroteca Juan Nepomuceno, (hereafter HJN).

<sup>35</sup> "Gente," *El Diario de Puebla*, August 7, 1986, HJN.

<sup>36</sup> *El Universal*, February 3, 1993. The following day, the owners of those sea food restaurants sent a letter to mayor Roberto Cañedo arguing that their business were not brothels and that they were honorable people, February 24, 1993, box 46, file 30, AMP.



PRI-affiliated organizations of vendors also played their part in damaging the UPVA's image and their student allies. They urged authorities to take action against UPVA's members, calling them a "mafia group." They also called them "the society garbage." These vendors claimed that the UPVA beat and destroyed stalls of all of those vendors who were not part of their organization. They depicted the organization as one filled with criminals. In addition, they claimed that consumers were scared of buying products in makeshift markets because they feared that UPVA members would beat them as well.<sup>37</sup> Leaders of these organizations claimed that students were a negative element in the street vendors' union and that they tended to attack all of those vendors who did not want to join the UPVA.<sup>38</sup> Other people who opposed the UPVA claimed that students were criminals who forced vendors to pay fees to sell on the streets. Also, police called members of the university community "pseudo-students" and *sedicentes*.<sup>39</sup> By using these names, which denoted that they were fake students or fake teachers, federal authorities suggested that if these young people were really committed to studying, they would not be involved in politics.

### Arrests

Whereas vendors found defamation harmful, arrests were much more damaging to their economic and physical well-being. In an effort to intimidate vendors, the state

---

<sup>37</sup> Letter to governor Manuel Bartlett Díaz from members of Unión de Locatarios y Comerciantes "Solidaridad, AC." April 25, 1994, box 46, file 30; letter to governor from Unión de Comerciantes Fijos y Semifijos y Grupos no-asalariados 20 de Julio, A.C. del Mercado Madero, July 4, 1995, box 46, file 33; letter to Mayor from Grupo Independiente del Mercado Emiliano Zapata, February 23, 1996, box 46, file 37, AMP.

<sup>38</sup> Letter to Mayor from members of the Federación de Organizaciones Populares en el Estado de Puebla, PRI, CNOP, August 27, 1976, box 58, file 10, AMP and DFS, November 19, 1979, AGN.

<sup>39</sup> "Investigación," DFS, file 100-19-1-75, legajo 45, p. 45, Galería 1, AGN.

arrested hundreds of vendors. Detentions, imprisonment and a twisted use of the legal system were some of the favorite tools that authorities used against UPVA members. The state judicial police arrested a number of street vendors for minor offenses. On September 18, 1977, for example, a group of female and male vendors traveled to the town of Atlixco, Puebla to distribute UPVA's propaganda and to ask citizens of that town to support the vendors' marches. On their way back, the federal police were waiting for them and arrested the vendors including Teresa Rosales and Micaela Daniel (aka La Patricia) both of whom were pregnant.<sup>40</sup> Their crime was the distribution of propaganda. While the police granted Teresa Rosales her freedom, the men and the other pregnant woman stayed in prison for almost six months.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, as soon as Patricia left jail, she delivered her baby. Female vendors remember this episode well, and Patricia named her daughter Libertad.

Police found several instances where they could easily arrest militant UPVA members. UPVA marches proved to be the best opportunity. While some marches occurred without incidents, on other occasions, local and state authorities arrested leaders and accused them of attacking the means of communication (*delitos de ataques a vías de comunicación*), which meant that UPVA members obstructed streets or major roads. These kinds of "crimes" belong to the federal realm, as opposed to state or local, and thus the federal police could act against the vendors.<sup>42</sup> The fact that UPVA members committed federal crimes came handy for authorities to portray the street vendors' sellers as a criminal organization.

---

<sup>40</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 59, p. 42, September 20, 1977.

<sup>41</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-78, legajo 47, p. 346, February 21, 1976, AGN

<sup>42</sup> DFS, November 19, 1979, AGN.

## Infiltrations

As it did to most organizations, independent movements, and guerrilla groups in Mexico, the state infiltrated the UPVA. The state's attempts to infiltrate organizations worked at two levels. Authorities sought to find out as much information as possible about these groups. They then used such information to divide organizations and spread rumors in order create internal conflicts and divisions. As a result, UPVA's events were always under the watchful eye of special police and their allies. For a number of years, the government tried to divide the union. As early as 1976, one of the UPVA's leader, Rubén Sarabia (aka Simitrio), stated that the government tried to infiltrate agents to artificially create divisions within the UPVA. He also maintained that authorities wanted to relocate vendors to markets where sellers had to join CNOP *charro* unions.<sup>43</sup> Beginning in 1975, secret service police agents working for the *Secretaría de Gobernación*, began spying the organization and attending most of their activities: their general assemblies, major meetings, marches, and meetings with other organizations.<sup>44</sup> These agents took detailed notes, usually daily, about these events and reported them to their bosses in Mexico City.<sup>45</sup> Authorities in Puebla were also beneficiaries of those reports, if they asked for them.

---

<sup>43</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-76, legajo 47, p. 346, February 21, 1976, AGN.

<sup>44</sup> In 1975, the Federal Security Department, a branch of the *Secretaría de Gobernación*, opened a file (100-19-1-year) in which they carefully traced all the activities of the UPVA street vendors. Researches can consult the file up to 1985.

<sup>45</sup> Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México* (México: Grijalbo, 2001) is the best Spanish account of *Gobernación's* secret police in Mexico. For the recently declassified files see Kate Doyle, "'Forgetting is not Justice.'" Mexico Bares Its Secret Past," *World Policy Journal*, 20, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 61-72.

In 1975 some vendors believed that members of the Corona family, the first organizers of the UPVA in 1973, were sell-outs who provided information to authorities. As a result, UPVA members expelled them from the organization because they were “traitors.”<sup>46</sup> In interviews with members of the Corona family, they declared that they never sold out or worked for the state.<sup>47</sup> Other members of the UPVA, however, were certain that they did and others state that in retrospect, the Corona family was not involved with the government. It is possible that an infiltrator spread the rumor to create distrust among UPVA members.

Indeed the state targeted leaders to spread rumors. Simitrio was a very outspoken leader, who was constantly proposing alliances in support of other organizations such as the independent Volkswagen workers’ union, and Tecamachalco peasants. His militancy and charisma worried officials, and they tried a number of tricks to discredit him in the eyes of street vendors. In 1977, for example, infiltrators tried to spread the rumor that Simitrio frequently met with city officials to negotiate the final removal of vendors from the streets behind their backs.<sup>48</sup> There is no doubt that Simitrio, like other street vendors’ leaders, constantly met with city authorities to negotiate street vending matters, what is not clear is that he was indeed negotiating their removal as street vendors remained on the streets until 1986. Infiltrators also maintained that Simitrio kept

---

<sup>46</sup> Letter to Procurador General de Justicia del Estado; to Dr. Alfredo Toxqui Fernández de Lara, Gobernador del Edo. de Puebla and Mayor Eduardo Cue Merlo, from Tzompazquelitl Simitrio, Alejandro Torres, Jorge Rojas, Julio Morales y Esther Ramos. Box 58, file, 10, April 2, 1975, AMP.

<sup>47</sup> Paula Javier, interview by author, January 25, 2007, notes, Puebla, Mexico and Adolfo Corona, interview by author, notes, August 13, 2007, Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>48</sup> “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre,” DFS, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 56, p.100, April 4, 1977, AGN.

members' fees to enrich himself and his family members.<sup>49</sup> While this was possible, he did not make any display of wealth, and his family kept working their stalls in the streets. Believing what they heard, some UPVA members refused to pay fees to the union. This created some problems among vendors and between members and leaders. In short, in some instances, these rumors were effective, and some vendors even left the UPVA and joined other organizations.

### Removals

In addition to infiltrators and rumors, authorities' most enduring and damaging tactic against vendors was the threat of removing them from the most remunerative commercial spaces. The UPVA's rank-and-file worried that city authorities deprived them from earning their daily subsistence. While the UPVA guaranteed them their permanency on the streets, vendors were also aware that the government grew increasingly aggressive against the organization and its members. In 1979, one of the UPVA's main leaders warned vendors that they had to be prepared to confront those who wanted to remove them.

Sellers' removal from the streets was indeed approaching and city authorities were very creative in the methods they used to accomplish this goal. The departure did not happen overnight; it was a long process that required a number of plans, organization, forced relocations, lies, and a grand rhetoric that highlighted the embellishment of Puebla's downtown.

### The *Desconcentración Comercial*.

---

<sup>49</sup> "Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre," DFS, file 100-19-1-77, legajo 55, p. 296, March 3, 1977, AGN.

For a number of years, Puebla's business community pushed the city government to solve the problem of *ambulantismo* or street vending. The established business owners complained that vendors blocked the entrance to their stores, did not pay taxes, and represented unfair competition. While acknowledging these problems, the municipality failed to clean the streets of vendors. In 1982, shopkeepers proposed a plan to decentralize the commercial activities and expel the vendors from the downtown to other parts of the city.<sup>50</sup> Authorities seriously considered this plan and modified it.<sup>51</sup>

As a result, at the beginning of 1984, the city council headed by Mayor Jorge Murad Macluf, set up a revised plan, the "Commercial Decentralization" (*Desconcentración Comercial*) which included two smaller plans, the "Commercial Reordering" (*Reordenamiento Comercial*) and the "Historic Center Regeneration" (*Regeneración del Centro Histórico*). The "Commercial Decentralization" aimed to encourage businesses people to move to other areas in the city in order to decentralize some of the commercial activity from the downtown. Up to the mid 1980s, most specialty stores, markets, and restaurants were concentrated in the downtown area. The "Historic Center Regeneration" was a larger program that included the beautification and renewal of the so-called historic buildings.

For city boosters, the problem was not the concentration of stores and formal commercial establishments in downtown, their real problem was the street vending

---

<sup>50</sup> Gareth Jones and Ann Varley, "The Contest of the City Centre: Street Traders versus Buildings," *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 13, no. 1 (January 1994): 31.

<sup>51</sup> In 1980, city officials had designed a "Plan Global de Desarrollo 1980-1982," in which they had planned to build new markets and warehouses and improve the transportation system in the city. Manlio Barbosa Cano, *Plan de Ordenamiento Espacial de la Actividad Comercial para la ciudad de Puebla* (Puebla: Centro Regional Puebla, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1981):55-57.

population. Street vendors were an aesthetic offense to the city's embellishment and historical value and unfair competition to established shops.<sup>52</sup> Thus the Commercial Decentralization consisted of relocating peddlers and street vendors with semi-fixed stalls from the downtown. Their solution was to move street vendors to seven markets and "popular commercial centers" that the municipality was about to build. These were situated in distant places, away from the city center in the outskirts of the city. Supposedly, these markets had the function of serving the new popular neighborhoods that were sprawling in the city.

#### Mercados de Apoyo:

Héroes de Puebla  
 Ignacio Zaragoza  
 Francisco I. Madero  
 Independencia

#### Centros Comerciales Populares:

Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla  
 José María Morelos y Pavón (aka Mercado Morelos)  
 Emiliano Zapata

Since the late months of 1984, authorities demanded that street vendors relocate to a huge lot (23, 755 m<sup>2</sup>) in the northern section of the city. Municipal authorities referred to this land as the Market Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, but the vendors who agreed

---

<sup>52</sup> In other parts of Latin America, such as Peru, the government has blamed street vendors and small-scale marketers for the increase in food prices and thus for the country's economic downfall. In 1977 and especially in 1981, the government launched campaigns against street vendors. Florence E. Babb, *Between the Field and the Cooking Pot: The Political Economy of Marketwomen in Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998): 177, 187-188.

to move began calling it the *Tianguis Popular 28 de Octubre*.<sup>53</sup> Technically speaking, the vendors were right, an open makeshift market was indeed a *tianguis* not a market. According to the vendors, the new location lacked basic amenities; the so-called market had only some electricity posts and a few water faucets.<sup>54</sup> This *tianguis* was a painful reminder of “el corralón-market” that authorities had granted them ten years before, a very modest market that had nothing but four walls. At least the old facility was located in downtown; the new Miguel Hidalgo market was really far away from the downtown. Vendors worried that only a few customers went could reach such a distance.

While in 1984 most vendors refused to move to this market, by the end of the summer of 1986, the UPVA’s leadership insisted that all street vendors take stalls not only at the Miguel Hidalgo, but also at the other new markets. The UPVA leadership had signed an agreement with Puebla’s mayor Jorge Murad Macluf in which the UPVA committed to *voluntarily and peacefully* relocate all its members to the new markets. It was rather surprising that the municipality had achieved its goal.

Why did a militant vendors’ union that defended the right of sellers to work on the streets agree to move to distant markets? What mechanisms did authorities employ to convince them? Most importantly, why did the UPVA’s leadership sign an agreement with authorities?

A possible explanation rests on the fact that authorities were able to buy or bribe the UPVA’s main leadership, headed by Simitrio. After all, this would not be the first time that the Puebla’s government officials tried to buy UPVA leaders. Many people

---

<sup>53</sup> “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre,” DFS, file 021-056-002, November 5, 1984, AGN

<sup>54</sup> “Mercado Popular 28 de Octubre,” DFS, file 021-056-002, November 13, 1984, AGN



wondered if Simitrio sold out. Six months after the signature of the agreement, a journalist of a popular local political magazine interviewed Simitrio and asked him if authorities bribed him. Simitrio smiled and politely responded that “when we were in negotiations, there were offers of money. It was said that 50 to 1,000 million pesos [would be offered]....but it was only gossips, just talk.” Then, the journalist added that the leader still lived in a modest apartment, very close to one of Puebla’s downtown markets, that Simitrio had his meals at stalls in markets, and that he did not own any properties.<sup>55</sup> The article suggested that Simitrio did not compromise the organization’s integrity.

While there is no evidence, only suppositions, that Simitrio accepted money in exchange for the removal of vendors, it is clear that the political context in Puebla changed to such degree that city authorities would not have much tolerance for street vendors in the downtown area.

In 1986, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized Puebla as a World Heritage site (*Patrimonio de la Humanidad*).<sup>56</sup> Puebla’s government officials and city boosters could not have been happier and prouder. This world-class recognition granted them the resources to restore certain run-down buildings and carry out measures for the conservation of the historic downtown. According to the UNESCO, 30 percent of Puebla’s historic buildings were deteriorated,

---

<sup>55</sup> “Los ambulantes amenazan,” *Momento, en el vértice de Puebla*, February 19, 1987, no. 56, pg. 10-11.

<sup>56</sup> In 1984, the UNESCO recognized Mexico City as World Heritage. Gareth Jones and A. Varley, “The Contest of the City Centre: Street Traders versus Buildings”: 31.

and city officials and the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) were ready to restore them.<sup>57</sup>

Most importantly, the city council used the UNESCO recognition as an excuse to finally remove street vendors from the downtown. Geographers Gareth Jones and Ann Varley have stated that downtown conservation policies in many parts of the world, including Puebla, can be selective and destructive. Where authorities renew buildings, policies damage the economic interests of the people who use those spaces to make their living, such as street vendors.<sup>58</sup> Without a doubt, the city council boosted the economic activities of certain members of the business community and tried to clamp down street vendors and the UPVA.

It is clear that the mayor Murad and UPVA's leader Simitrio were able negotiators who had limited options. On the one hand, the business community pressed Murad to carry out the necessary changes to embellish Puebla and get rid of the vendors. On the other hand, the mayor knew that he or any other politician could not simply get rid of the UPVA's members without major repercussions. At the same time, the UPVA leadership was aware that either the UPVA tried to make the best out of the Municipality proposals or they would have to confront police forces and face the many arrests of its members.

---

<sup>57</sup> Gareth Jones and A. Varley, "The Contest of the City Centre": 30.

<sup>58</sup> Gareth Jones and A. Varley, "The Contest of the City Centre": 27. Gary I. Gordon has criticized Gareth Jones and Ann Varley because according to Gordon, these authors did not consider that if authorities had not carried out the downtown renewal established businessmen would have negatively been affected by the lack of commercial activities. Gary Gordon, "Peddlers, Pesos, and Power: The Political Economy of Street Vending in Mexico City," (PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 1997).

Murad and Simitrio made a long-term deal, in which they pretended negotiating an agreement that was beneficial for everyone. The mayor promised that the Municipality would aid vendors not only to relocate, but also to fully support and promote vendors' commerce. The municipality would help in the acquisition of products from wholesalers, their distribution to vendors, and the promotion and publicity of the new markets. In other words, the Mayor seemed to be committed to improve the whole commercial chain if vendors agreed to relocate. The construction of markets was only a part of a contract between the municipality and the UPVA.

This commitment was reflected in a legal contract between the Mayor and the UPVA. On August 1, 1986 Puebla's Mayor Jorge Murad Macluf and Simitrio, signed an agreement that vendors later referred to as the "Convenio del 86." In this document the Mayor agreed to take several actions:<sup>59</sup>

- To build commercial facilities for wholesale and retail
- To promote organizational methods for the acquisition and transportation of merchandise from production centers to commercial centers.
- To regulate Puebla's use of space for commerce
- To update the Municipal Market Regulations
- To forbid mobile *tianguis* (mercados rodantes) and two other fixed *tianguis*

The agreement also contained three clauses in which the Municipality granted the UPVA large subsidies for the acquisition of stalls in markets and committed to provide legal advice to the sellers' organization. Simitrio was able to convey authorities that vendors relied on their sales on the streets during certain periods of the year. These sales

---

<sup>59</sup> "Convenio celebrado entre el H. Ayuntamiento del Municipio de Puebla y el Consejo de Representantes de la Unión Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes 28 de Octubre encabezada (sic) por el C. Rubén Sarabia Sánchez, para el traslado voluntario de los miembros de la organización que ocupaban las calles de la ciudad." Box 42, file 9, August 1, 1986, AMP.

allowed them to increase their capital in order to buy merchandise for the rest of the year. On the other hand, during certain dates, Puebla's citizens ventured to the streets to do their shopping and expected to find street vendors and good deals. It was a tradition that no agreement could change. The Mayor agreed that street vendors could leave their stalls in the market and sell on the downtown streets three times a year, Todos Santos (October 28 to November 2), Christmas (December 16-24 and 30-31) and Reyes (January 4-5).<sup>60</sup>

As a result of the 1986 Agreement, the UPVA gained more control over their members because authorities officially granted them some concessions. The most important was that the mayor allowed the UPVA's leadership to fully manage the distribution of stalls among its members. The UPVA could also manage fifty mini-buses that reached the new markets. And the drivers could become UPVA members. The municipality also granted the organization the old downtown market, the "corralón" as office space for ten years.<sup>61</sup>

From Jorge Murad's perspective, the agreement was nothing but perfect as the UPVA agreed to voluntarily and peacefully move their members from downtown to the newly built facilities. The City council's dream finally became a reality, and vendors left the 43 streets they occupied by 1986. Simitrio could argue that the agreement was an achievement for the UPVA's vendors, the result of years of struggle. In other words, he could claim that the membership could finally get the markets that they always wanted, at reasonable prices and they could have peace of mind, as the police would not harass

---

<sup>60</sup> "Convenio," box 42, file 9, August 1, 1986, AMP.

<sup>61</sup> "Convenio," box 42, file 9, August 1, 1986, AMP.

them. And even if the markets were far away, vendors' would have the full support of the Mayor and the municipality to make sure that their commercial activities prospered.

Simitrio and authorities forced the UPVA's rank-and file to move. They relocated at the beginning of August 1986. Everything seemed to be working well for Murad and Simitrio but a week after Murad signed the agreement, he died in a car crash in Puebla.<sup>62</sup> The members of the city council did not sign the agreement and some time later members of the city council nullified the agreement. The municipality and the new Mayor, Amado Carrillo Sánchez, refused to comply with the agreement. They sent police forces to downtown to avoid that vendors returned to downtown. Everything worked well for Simitrio because he could claim that if the Mayor had not died, authorities would have respected and carried out the agreement.

#### "El despojo del siglo:" the Removal of La Victoria's Marketers

Peddlers and semi-fixed street vendors were not the only obstacle for the commercial reordering. City boosters and the municipality planned the relocation of all the marketers of La Victoria Market and the closure of the Porfirian building that housed it. Since 1913, La Victoria had been the largest and most important market in Puebla. Since the nineteenth century, the lot where the building was later constructed housed a *tianguis* where the city's inhabitants acquired their merchandise. From 1910 to 1913, despite the convulsion of the revolution, city authorities began the re-construction of the

---

<sup>62</sup>His replacement was Amado Carrillo Sánchez.

market.<sup>63</sup> With an impressive architecture and situated in the heart of downtown, the market served an important commercial function for thousands of families who both sold and bought a wide array of products in and around the market. In 1971, the market hosted approximately 10,000 sellers<sup>64</sup> and by 1986 there were 15,000 sellers.<sup>65</sup>

Joining peddlers, long time merchants with fixed stalls of La Victoria had to relocate to the new markets. The National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) considered that La Victoria Market was a “monument” in the “historic downtown,” which needed urgent renovations and believed that “the market needed to be dignified.”<sup>66</sup> City boosters also claimed that the streets surrounding the market needed new pavement. On the other hand, the municipality argued that the market posed sanitary, environmental, and structural deficiencies.<sup>67</sup> In other words, government officials claimed that the market was infested with rats, the drainage system and electric connections were in terrible shape. In fact some of those accusations were not new. For decades city authorities complained that the market housed thousands of rodents. Ironically, at marketers’ requests, the city council carried out extermination campaigns that they called “campañas de desratización,” in which they were able to get rid of most of the rats.<sup>68</sup> In addition, marketers and firefighters cleaned the building on different occasions during the “operaciones limpieza.” They even closed the market while they cleaned because they

---

<sup>63</sup> Saúl Rodiles, “El Mercado La Victoria,” *Puebla Mágica*, 1, no. 16 (April-June 1993): 11.

<sup>64</sup> *El Sol de Puebla*, April 4, 1971, HJN.

<sup>65</sup> Box 15, file 3, AMP.

<sup>66</sup> Acuerdo del Ayuntamiento, October 14, 1986, box 15, file 3, AMP.

<sup>67</sup> Acuerdo del Ayuntamiento, October 14, 1986, box 15, file 3, AMP. Authorities claimed that the La Victoria market endangered public health, “pone en evidente peligro la salud pública.”

<sup>68</sup> In 1948, for example, the mayor stated that the campaign to kill rats was satisfactory, see 1er Informe de Gobierno del Presidente Municipal Enrique Molina Johnson, January 2, 1949, Volumen 1365, expedientes, AMP. In 1971, authorities announced the killing of approximately 50,000 rats at La Victoria Market, *El Sol de Puebla*, February 3, 1971.

were committed to show customers that their market was as clean as the supermarkets.<sup>69</sup> But in 1986, the precedent of effective cleaning campaigns in previous years did not matter. Authorities used La Victoria's allegedly unsanitary conditions to state that the market was a danger and an eyesore for Puebla's citizens. In other words, they wanted to protect middle class consumers, not marketers.

While the market had deficiencies that the city council and marketers could easily resolve, the major problem for Puebla's downtown beautification project was that La Victoria served the needs of the working class, and in city boosters' view, it did little to embellish the downtown area. Workers' wives and their children, maids, and folks from the countryside were the usual clientele. The city's snobs never went to the market. The middle and upper classes preferred to avoid the downtown and go shopping in the spacious supermarkets and the recently built shopping malls. While a bit more expensive than the public markets, the supermarkets provided free parking lots, charts, bright lights, air conditioning, and a sense of order and cleanliness that contrasted with the boisterous and disorderly nature of La Victoria.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, authorities argued that the public market La Victoria did not attract tourists in their existing form and they wanted to transform it into a "typical market" (un mercado típico) with small sized restaurants (*fondas*), ice-cream stores, sea food restaurants, sandal stores, and flowers. In short, city boosters wanted to transform the

---

<sup>69</sup> "Otra limpieza en La Victoria," *El Sol de Puebla*, February 11, 1971.

<sup>70</sup> In the late 1960s, there was at least one supermarket, *Comercial Mexicana*, which was the first supermarket in Puebla followed in 1971 by Astor, and in 1973 followed by *Aurrera*. In the inauguration advertisement Aurrera's owners stated that this supermarket was the most modern in Mexico's provincial cities and that people were welcome to participate in its happiness and great sales ("venga a participar en la alegría y en los grandes ahorros). *El Sol de Puebla*, November 31, 1973.

market into a commercial center that would appeal to middle class shoppers and foreign tourists. In light of this, they sought to get rid of the working class consumers from an important area of the downtown.<sup>71</sup>

By mid-October 1986, the Mayor announced the immediate end to market activities and the temporary relocation of vendors.<sup>72</sup> Their removal was based upon lies, deception, and repression. The city council convinced marketers to relocate by assuring them that once the market was renovated, they could go back to La Victoria.<sup>73</sup> City authorities and boosters, however, knew that those marketers had to leave for good because authorities had different plans for the market. After months of negotiations, angry marketers and their leader agreed to move. When marketers first heard of the removal project, they opposed it and organized a series of protests with banners that read “we won’t leave the market,” (“*no nos vamos*”) and “the market belongs to those who work inside of it” (“*el mercado es de quién lo trabaja.*”).<sup>74</sup> Marketers also tried to gain the sympathy of Puebla’s dwellers and went to radio stations to air their plights. On many occasions, marketers blamed street vendors for the rowdiness in the downtown area and suggested authorities remove street vendors to achieve order.<sup>75</sup> Marketers’ efforts to stay at La Victoria were useless and ironically their complaints about street vendors justified authorities’ removal of all vendors.

---

<sup>71</sup> For a flair of city boosters’ intensions, see letter to Mayor Amado Carrillo from Colegio de Arquitectos de Puebla, October 27, 1986, box 15, file 4, pp. 1-6, AMP.

<sup>72</sup> Acuerdo del Ayuntamiento, October 14, 1986, box 15, file 3, AMP.

<sup>73</sup> Convenio para la Reubicación de los Comerciantes y Locatarios del Mercado La Victoria, October 20, 1986, box 15, file 4, AMP.

<sup>74</sup> Socorro Santín Nieto, *El Mercado Guadalupe Victoria*: 25.

<sup>75</sup> Socorro Santín Nieto, *El Mercado Guadalupe Victoria*: 24.



At any rate, Germán Méndez Silva, the leader of the *Unión de Locatarios, Comerciantes en Pequeño y Ambulantes del Mercado La Victoria*, a CNOP-PRI affiliated union, signed an agreement with the mayor Amado Camarillo Sánchez to voluntarily vacate the market.<sup>76</sup> Those marketers who were recalcitrant and had their doubts about authorities' good intentions, were forced to leave as city authorities employed armed police and firefighters to make sure that every vendor left the facility.<sup>77</sup> There was a huge display of armed police all around the market making sure that everybody left. Immediately after, city workers began destroying all of the stalls, preventing anyone from returning.<sup>78</sup>

Authorities relocated the marketers of La Victoria to the seven markets.<sup>79</sup> Sellers were angry because they had to pay high prices for their poorly built new stalls. Some elderly marketers did not have the energy and the capital to start anew in different markets after an entire life at La Victoria.<sup>80</sup> At any rate, La Victoria marketers moved in 1986. A year later they were still complaining that the new markets lacked roofs, water, lights, sewage, janitors, security guards, and telephones.<sup>81</sup> For sellers, the lack of water was a big problem. According to one marketer, sellers had to carry water from a

---

<sup>76</sup> Convenio para la Reubicación de los Comerciantes y Locatarios del Mercado La Victoria, October 20, 1986, box 15, file 4, AMP.

<sup>77</sup> Marketers formed a Comité Pro-Defensa del Mercado La Victoria to defend their right to stay in the market. They claimed that the market was their workplace (*centro de trabajo*) and an important institution for Puebla's history. Some 2,000 marketers claimed they have been working in the market for at least 50 years. Letter from Comité to President Miguel de la Madrid, March 20, 1986, AMP.

<sup>78</sup> The Municipal Archive houses dozens of photographs showing the marketers removal and the destruction of stalls, Mercados, Fototeca, AMP.

<sup>79</sup> Most La Victoria marketers moved to Mercado Emiliano Zapata and Morelos. Box 46, folder 13, September 7, 1987, AMP.

<sup>80</sup> Socorro Santín Nieto, *El Mercado Guadalupe Victoria*, (Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Colección Tercer Milenio, Serie Casas de Puebla, 1999): 24-25.

<sup>81</sup> Letter to Governor Mariano Piña Olaya from locatarios del Mercado la Victoria, September 6, 1987, box 45, file 13, AMP. See also "400 locatarios regresan a La Victoria," *Momento, en el vértice de Puebla*, February 19, 1987, no. 56, pg. 11.

common faucet and bring it to their stalls. Sometimes, the faucet did not work and they had to knock on the doors of local neighborhood people to ask them for water. It was tremendously inconvenient and required a lot of physical work.<sup>82</sup> Authorities did not do much to accommodate these CNOP-PRI affiliated marketers. In 1970, the *Unión de Locatarios del Mercado* joined the CNOP.<sup>83</sup> In fact both marketers and UPVA members experienced the almost the same treatment.<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, authorities made no concessions to any group.

### The Results

From street vendors' point of view, the *Reordenamiento* was a total failure. The city council built poorly designed markets that lacked basic needs and were located in places far removed from densely populated areas. Vendors complained that even the streets that surrounded or led to the streets were unpaved, making it difficult for cars to reach the markets.<sup>85</sup> Authorities never met with vendors to consider their needs *before* planning the construction and location of markets.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the markets' design was awful. Despite vendors' desire to be consulted about the design of the new markets,

---

<sup>82</sup> "Mercado Héroes de Puebla," *Momento, en el vértice de Puebla*, February 19, 1987, no. 56, pg. 13.

<sup>83</sup> Socorro Santín Nieto, *El Mercado Guadalupe Victoria*: 19.

<sup>84</sup> Street vendors from PRI organizations had the same problems. In 1993, vendors were still complaining about how bad one of the 'new' markets was. "Our market has no signs, no lights and there is no transportation to our market." Letter from Locatarios y Comerciantes Solidaridad del Mercado Héroes de Puebla to Mayor Rafael Cañedo, August 4, 1993, box 46, file 29, AMP.

<sup>85</sup> "Mercado Emiliano Zapata," *Momento, en el vértice de Puebla*, February 19, 1987, no. 56, pg. 14.

<sup>86</sup> In 1975, a group of vendors wrote a letter to the governor saying that if authorities decided to build new markets, authorities had to consult with them to avoid old mistakes. Vendors claimed that there were many old markets that were practically useless, the so-called *elefantes blancos*. Letter from Federación de Locatarios y Comerciantes Ambulantes to Governor Alfredo Toxqui, February 22, 1975, box 42, file 218, AMP.

authorities simply refused to take their opinions into account.<sup>87</sup> As a result, city boosters, who had no idea about vendors' business practices, designed markets poorly. In meetings between the municipality and the UPVA that took place after the markets were built, vendors expressed their dissatisfaction about the terrible design of stalls that would not allow them to display their merchandise effectively and thus prevent them from making profits. The municipality promised marketers and street vendors that the new markets had all basic services: water, bathrooms, storage place, lights, security, and even day care centers. In addition, the city government agreed to widely publicize the new markets. While authorities claimed that the markets were fine, vendors stated that the markets, however, lacked all basic services.<sup>88</sup>

The location of the new markets was far away from downtown, in the outskirts of the city and there was no public transportation for customers and vendors to reach the new facilities. When street vendors first occupied the unfinished markets, they had many difficulties selling their wares because they did not have enough customers. With no buses reaching those markets, people hardly made their purchases in the new markets. In the 1986 agreement between the UPVA and the mayor, city authorities agreed that in order to encourage a smooth transition for vendors and marketers, the city government would add public buses that would reach those markets.<sup>89</sup> Despite this commitment,

---

<sup>87</sup> Since 1977, UPVA members were conscious that most of the commercial activities in the city were concentrated downtown and during that year participated in negotiations and talks with authorities trying to provide their input to authorities. "Los de la 28 dicen que hay comicionistas entre ambulantes," *La Opinión*, October 3, 1977, p.2.

<sup>88</sup> Expedientes de Mercados, Caja 2590, Expediente 1158, n/d, AMP and letter from Adolfo Corona and Paula Javier representatives of Unión de locatarios del Mercado Independencia de la Agrupación Ricardo Flores Magón to governor Mariano Piña Olaya, Februray 25, 1987, box 40, file 329, AMP.

<sup>89</sup> "Convenio entre Ayuntamiento y UPVA," Punto no. 4: "Del Transporte," August 1, 1986, box 42, file 9, AMP. Gareth Jones and Ann Varley, "The Contest of the City Centre": 31.

transportation improvements were tremendously slow. Worst of all, vendors feared that authorities were planning on giving licenses for the construction of large supermarkets in close proximity to the new markets, which would undermine vendors' ability to sell their merchandise. Competition would be fierce since supermarkets offered many of the products that they sold, such as fruits and vegetables.<sup>90</sup>

UPVA's members were not the only ones who criticized this plan. The Universidad Autónoma de Puebla's (UAP) urban researchers believed that the lack of planning made markets very expensive.<sup>91</sup> Street vendors had many difficulties in buying stalls in these new markets. Some vendors even asked authorities to offer credit so that they could buy stalls.<sup>92</sup> An anthropologist even called city authorities' removal of La Victoria marketers from the downtown an act of "urban vandalism."<sup>93</sup>

Authorities did not solve one of the causes of street vending. UPVA's members criticized city authorities for not recognizing that street vending was the result of unemployment and workers' miserable wages. The *Reordenamiento* did not solve anything.<sup>94</sup> In short, city authorities and boosters failed miserably to solve *ambulantismo*. Markets were ill planned, expensive and left the municipality indebted to

---

<sup>90</sup> Vendors proved to be right. Large supermarkets such as Walmart were later built next to markets. One of the mercados de apoyo, the Hidalgo market is now surrounded by Sam's Club and Soriana supermarkets as well as Suburbia, a department store owned by Walmart.

<sup>91</sup> Letter to authorities, student, vendors, and general public from Departamento de Investigaciones Arquitectónicas y Urbanísticas published in *Cambio*, August 1986, newspaper clipping, Expediente Presidencia, administración 1984-1987, file 531, AMP.

<sup>92</sup> "Manifestación de ambulantes: piden mejores condiciones para trasladarse a los centros de abasto," *Cambio*, August 1, 1986, newspaper clipping, AMP.

<sup>93</sup> Manlio Cano Barbosa, "El cierre del mercado La Victoria: vandalismo urbanístico," *Crítica, Revista de la Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*, no. 39, n/d in Socorro Santín Nieto, *El Mercado Guadalupe Victoria*: 39. Marketers called their removal and the closing of the market as "el despojo del siglo," p. 24.

<sup>94</sup> Ayuntamiento-UPVA Meetings Minutes, mimeógrafo, April to September 27, 1985, José Luis Díaz's private documentation, pp. 4, 20, 23, 25, 31, 32, 35, 37, 39 and 41.

private banks. The construction of markets came to a total of 17,589,519,865 pesos.<sup>95</sup> Three years earlier, the State Congress had authorized municipal authorities to spend 2,195,940 pesos for the construction of four markets.<sup>96</sup> Street vendors complained that only few customers actually reached the new locations. According to Rubén Sarabia Sánchez (aka Simitrio), while street vendors began their working day in the new markets, in the afternoon, they went to downtown streets to sell their products.<sup>97</sup> Forced to earn a living, street vendors went back to the streets. The downtown, however, looked different because La Victoria Market was closed and street vendors could not use the facility to buy wholesale and could not use the market as storage place like street vendors used to do in the past.<sup>98</sup>

At the end of the summer of 1986, when police expelled the last street vendors who refused to move, shopkeepers, city boosters, and some members of the elite were very excited that authorities had finally “dignified” the city and “rescued” its historic value. They applauded their authorities stating that finally all national and international tourists would have a good and agreeable impression of Puebla’s citizens.<sup>99</sup> Shopkeepers were especially happy that vendors were gone. They lauded the Mayor Jorge Murad Maclud as the best politician ever. They perceived the city as cleaner, more

---

<sup>95</sup> “Ambicioso programa para rescatar el centro histórico,” *Momento, en el vértice de Puebla*, February 19, 1987, no. 56, pg. 8

<sup>96</sup> Libro de expedientes, Septiembre-Octubre 1984, exp. 988-998, vol. DXX Expediente 993, Octubre 23, 1984, Archivo del Congreso del Estado de Puebla.

<sup>97</sup> “Los Ambulantes Amenazan,” *Momento, en el vértice de Puebla*, February 19, 1987, no. 56.

<sup>98</sup> Jones and Varley, “The Contest of the City Centre”: 34

<sup>99</sup> “Se dignifica el Centro de la Ciudad con la Reubicación,” *El Diario de Puebla*, August 1, 1986, HJN.

modern, prettier, and they had noticed that their sales went up.<sup>100</sup> Other people were less concerned about sales and tourists and more concerned about their daily activities. Some people said that they supported the mayor's decision to clean the streets of vendors because it had become impossible to walk on sidewalks or to drive in downtown.<sup>101</sup>

Years later, former stall owners of La Victoria Market were outraged because nobody could return to the market. In sum, the city council lied to them. The market did not become a "mercado típico" where some of the displaced marketers could return to continue their business. Instead, municipal authorities granted the Fundación Amparo the right to rent and use at their will the building for a period of 99 years. The Fundación Amparo, an altruistic, cultural, and educational organization created in 1979, was part of the William Jenkins foundation, which invested money in the renewal of La Victoria. After seven years, from 1986 to 1994, of being empty the former market building became a shopping mall that housed VIPS, a national chain restaurant, and Suburbia, a department store. Both businesses now belong to the US-based chain of Walmart (which happens to be the biggest private employer in Mexico). The mall was inaugurated in November 1994 by Puebla's governor, Manuel Bartlett Díaz and Manuel Espinosa Iglesias, the representative of the Jenkins Foundation.<sup>102</sup> The former Porfirian market now the *centro comercial La Victoria*, is far from attracting national or international tourists as the Municipality allegedly claimed in the mid-1980s.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> "Comercio Organizado," *Momento, en el vértice de Puebla*, February 19, 1987, no. 56, pg. 15.

<sup>101</sup> "Histórica la Reubicación: Ciudadanía," *El Sol de Puebla*, August 1, 1986, HJN.

<sup>102</sup> Socorro Santín Nieto, *El Mercado Guadalupe Victoria*: 30.

<sup>103</sup> The closing of markets is not uncommon. In 1987, Peruvian authorities torn down Huaraz's most important and old central market. They reopened it in 1994 but only vendors with large capital could get stalls in the new market. Florence E. Babb, "Market/places as Gendered Spaces: Market/women's Studies

### Still strong

City authorities thought that by removing street vendors from the downtown, they would finally achieve two goals: the beautification of the so-called historic center and the destruction of the UPVA. Authorities thought that by relocating UPVA members to different markets, sellers would lose the cohesive element that brought them together, that is the fact that they all sold their wares in a relatively small radius. However, the core of UPVA street vendors moved to the big Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla market and they continued their activities in the new place organizing the vendors who went to the other markets. By the beginning of 1987, the UPVA coordinated 5,000 stalls in the different markets.<sup>104</sup>

Despite their geographical disunity, the UPVA was able to maintain its strength, not without difficulties and failures. After all, the organization was active in organizing vendors for 13 years and all it needed was to change some of their methods to continue with its work. After 1986, instead of having street representatives, there were market representatives. Each market functioned like a street where there were meetings, elections, representatives, and different commissions where members remained active.

In an effort to keep their members and add others, UPVA leaders in each market encouraged people from the working class neighborhoods where the new markets were located to acquire stalls and join the UPVA. They convinced several people, including housewives, to establish their own business. One way to persuade them was by telling

---

over Two Decades,” in *Women Traders in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Linda Seligmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001):237.

<sup>104</sup> “Los Ambulantes Amenazan,” *Momento, en el vértice de Puebla*, February 19, 1987, no. 56, pg. 10.

them that entry costs were low and that they should sell vegetables, fruits, chile peppers, grains, and other staples that they used for cooking on a daily basis. In case they were unable to sell everything, they could use that merchandise to feed their own family. It was a win-win situation. Moreover, the UPVA helped them get a stall with the condition of joining the organization. Rosa Martínez (pseudonym) was one of the housewives who accepted the offer and opened a stall in one of the seven markets, the Francisco I. Madero, which was located a few blocks from her house. Rosa was attracted by the fact that she could earn her own money and become a bit independent from her abusive husband. Leaving the house for part of the day was also an attractive idea. With seven children to feed, it was not too difficult to convince her husband that by having a stall in the market, she could contribute financially their family. In the 1980s, it was not difficult to persuade anyone that some extra pesos came in handy.<sup>105</sup>

Ironically, the UPVA gained other members who used to belong to PRI-affiliated union. About 1,000 disgruntled marketers who used to sell at La Victoria market also joined the UPVA after their leader forced them to leave the market and authorities did not allow them to return to downtown.<sup>106</sup> In addition to gaining members, by 1987, the Miguel Hidalgo Market became the UPVA's stronghold and the busiest market of the seven that the municipality built during the *Reordenamiento*. Street vendors, now marketers, worked very hard to attract customers and to push authorities to finish the basic infrastructure.

---

<sup>105</sup> Rosa Martínez, interviews with author, notes, February 6, 2006 and January 14, 2007, Puebla, México..

<sup>106</sup> Gareth Jones and Ann Varley, "The Contest for the City Centre": 34.



From 1986 to 1989, the UPVA focused on organizing marches from the Hidalgo market to the Municipal Palace to demand that authorities comply with the August 1 Agreement and to protest the lack of basic services in the markets, which negatively affected their everyday commercial activities. UPVA marches became increasingly common and could block about 30 streets, which became annoying to the established business owners in downtown and to Puebla's authorities.

### A new wave of repression

Unlike previous politicians, Puebla's new governor, Mariano Piña Olaya (1987-1993) showed hardly any tolerance for the UPVA's members or any other group defending their rights. Like most of his predecessors, Piña Olaya was a shamelessly corrupt politician who expropriated thousands of hectares of land from impoverished peasants to supposedly build a highway. In 1991, Piña Olaya illegally sold these lands to Puebla's elite for the construction of a high-end mall and a super exclusive neighborhood and golf course.

In addition to his business skills (which he used to enrich himself), Piña Olaya also applied an iron fist against most grass-roots organizers and supporters of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) who campaigned in favor of Cuahutémoc Cárdenas in the 1988 presidential election. During Piña Olaya's administration, government forces murdered a number of PRD militant supporters, among them Gumaro Amaro,<sup>107</sup> who

---

<sup>107</sup> Victoria Mauleón, "The Other PRD Victims: The Widows of Puebla," The Mexico Report, UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, <http://journalism.berkeley.edu/projects/mexico/victoriapuebla.html> (last access June 2, 2008).

was also a leader of an independent garment union, the Sindicato Único de Trabajadoras de la Industria de la Confección, SUTIC.

Puebla's governor was relentless against the UPVA and used several mechanisms to clamp down on the organization. Piña Olaya and city authorities threatened UPVA vendors in three of the new markets with the removal of their vending licenses if they did not join CNOP unions.<sup>108</sup> Piña Olaya's main objective, however, was to destroy the UPVA leadership, especially Rubén Sarabia (aka Simitrio). The governor thought that if he could eliminate the leadership, then the UPVA would be an easy target to destroy.

In the summer of 1989, authorities declared the UPVA responsible for kidnapping a German engineer. In order to trap the kidnappers, the government sent the police to the UPVA's headquarters in the downtown. On June 16, 1989, members of the local and federal police entered the UPVA's office at the so-called "corralón" and introduced or planted arms and drugs. A few hours later, additional police officers arrived to the UPVA's office and "discovered" these objects, accusing the organization for having these illegal objects in their possession. Police officers arrested 17 vendors accusing them of arms and drugs possession.<sup>109</sup> On that day, Simitrio and other leaders successfully escaped, but authorities soon caught them.

On July 4, 1989, the federal judicial police arrested the UPVA's main leader, Simitrio, in Mexico City outside his doctor's office. According to Humberto Fernández de Lara, the State's Procurador, at the moment of his detention, Simitrio was carrying a

---

<sup>108</sup> Jones and Varley, "The Contest for the City Centre": 36

<sup>109</sup> Letter to Chamber of Deputies from Consejo General de Representantes and Comisión Negociadora de la UPVA-28 de Octubre, March 23, 1995, box 58, n/f, AMP.

gun that only army officers could carry and a “certain amount of drugs.”<sup>110</sup> The police detained Simitrio because the state of Puebla denounced him for a number of crimes that included “gun possession and rebellion.”<sup>111</sup>

Simitrio was one of the dozens vendors arrested and imprisoned at Puebla’s Centro de Readaptación Social San Miguel (CERESO) by the government in an effort to definitely destroy the UPVA. The imprisonment was not enough; judges sentenced Simitrio to 116 years in prison, although authorities later reduced his sentence to 67 years.<sup>112</sup> Officials claimed that Simitrio had nine previous charges.<sup>113</sup> Authorities also accused other militant UPVA leaders: Guillermo Herrera Mora, Raúl Ronquillo Hernández, Felipe de Jesús Tovar Cano, Ramón Alcalá Salinas, Mario Pérez Pérez, and José Maldonado Téllez of diverse crimes (*delitos del orden común*).

Street vendors claimed that their comrades’ detention followed tricky procedures and sentences that relied upon UPVA’s members’ false confessions under torture.<sup>114</sup> Sellers also stated that the state carried out obscure judicial procedures. For example, street vendors could not explain why the Mexican legal system held Simitrio prisoner in jails that were located miles away from Puebla where he supposedly committed the

---

<sup>110</sup> “Texto de la Conferencia de Prensa del Procurador Licenciado Humberto Fernández de Lara sobre la situación jurídica de Rubén Sarabia Sánchez, “Simitrio.”” July 11, 1989, *El Sol de Puebla*, and “Formal prisión a un líder de ambulantes poblano,” *La Jornada*, July 11, 1989, sección país, p. 16, HJN.

<sup>111</sup> Simitrio’s offenses were: delitos contra la salud, acopio de armas, rebelión, asociación delictuosa, y portación de armas de fuego. “Texto de la Conferencia de Prensa,” July 11, 1989, *El Sol de Puebla*, HJN

<sup>112</sup> Letter to Chamber of Deputies from Consejo General de Representantes and Comisión Negociadora de la UPVA-28 de Octubre, March 23, 1995, box 58, n/f, AMP.

<sup>113</sup> Letter from Deputy Maria Ynes Solis González to Puebla’s governor Lic. Mariano Piña Olaya, January 18, 1990, box 42, file 9, AMP. In a rather bureaucratic tone the deputy stated that the UPVA demanded that Puebla’s authorities respected their constitutional right to work and the halt to judicial and police harassment. Ms. Solis also suggested that there were some “irregularities” in Simitrios’ case.

<sup>114</sup> Letter from UPVA Consejo General de Representantes to President Carlos Salinas de Gortari and State Department Secretary Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, box 42, file 9, December 14, 1989, AMP.

crimes. Simitrio was first in Puente Grande, Jalisco<sup>115</sup> and in 1997, he was transferred to Centro de Readaptación Federal Número Uno de Almoloya de Juárez in the state of Mexico,<sup>116</sup> both of them were high-security prisons. The maximum security federal prison, Almoloya de Juárez, hosted Mexico's most wanted criminals including Mario Aburto, the killer of the 1994 PRI-presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio; Raúl Caro Quintero, the famous drug lord founder of the Guadalajara Cartel and assassin of DEA special agent Kiki Camarena in 1981. Last but not least Almoloya also held Raúl Salinas de Gortari, the "hermano incómodo" of former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The federal government accused Raúl Salinas for the assassination of PRI's General Secretary José Francisco Ruíz Massieu and for large amounts of money laundering.<sup>117</sup> Street vendors, like many people, could not explain why their leader shared the same roof with Mexico's most wanted criminals. The state disdained the UPVA so much that they sent Simitrio to Almoloya. Authorities also sent a message to the UPVA membership and to Mexico's citizens: Rubén Sarabia was as despicable as Mario Aburto, Raúl Salinas, and Caro Quintero. Despite authorities' decision to send them all to the same prison, Raúl Salinas, for example enjoyed the privileges of being President Carlos Salinas's older brother and prison officials treated him relatively well.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> "El gobierno se niega al diálogo: 28 de Octubre," newspaper clipping, April 1997, box 46, file 36, AMP.

<sup>116</sup> "Proposiciones de Ciudadanos Legisladores," Gaceta del Senado, no. 17, Año 2005, Senado de la República, <http://www.senado.gob.mx/gace2.php?sesion=2005/08/24/1&documento=104> (last access June 2, 2008).

<sup>117</sup> For a fascinating yet disturbing description of the lavish life in prison of some of Mexico's most wanted criminals see Julio Scherer García, *Cárceles* (México DF: Aguilar, Altea, Taurus Alfaguara, 1998). This award-winning Mexican journalist and founder of the political magazine *Proceso* also describes the horrific experiences that common prisoners and their families witnessed in overcrowded prisons in Mexico City.

<sup>118</sup> In 2005, the "hermano incómodo" published a book about his experience in prison. Raúl Salinas de Gortari, *Diálogos de un Día*, Mexico: Editorial Diana, 2005.

Unlike the special treatment that Raúl Salinas received in prison, the violation of human rights is common in Mexican prisons, especially for political prisoners and common criminals. Street vendors accused the Director of Public Safety, Ventura Rodríguez Verdín and Puebla's state Procurador, Humberto Fernández de Lara responsible for UPVA's members' mistreatment in Puebla's jail.<sup>119</sup> A PRD deputy also stated that while Simitrio was in jail, prison authorities did not allow Simitrio to talk and violated other basic human rights.<sup>120</sup>

While the imprisonment of Simitrio and other UPVA organizers represented a low blow to the UPVA rank-and-file, the organization continued its operations under the leadership of Simitrio's wife, Rita Amador, a vendor and a UPVA activist.<sup>121</sup> From 1989 to 2001, when authorities conditionally liberated Simitrio, the organization spent all these years fighting for the freedom of its former leader and other UPVA members whom vendors considered political prisoners. The day Simitrio was arrested there was a march of 4000 people. The march included students and Samuel Malpica, the State University's president, who claimed that the UPVA leaders were political prisoners.<sup>122</sup> Two days after

---

<sup>119</sup> Letter from UPVA Consejo General de Representantes to President Carlos Salinas de Gortari and State Department Secretary Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, box 42, file 9, December 14, 1989, AMP.

<sup>120</sup> "Proposiciones de Ciudadanos Legisladores," *Gaceta del Senado*, no. 17, Año 2005, Senado de la República, <http://www.senado.gob.mx/gace2.php?sesion=2005/08/24/1&documento=104> (last access June 2, 2008). Indeed many prisoners in Almoloya are in total isolation. Their cement cells are small, no windows and artificial light all day long. Almoloya can hold 407 prisoners who are classified by their alleged threat (*peligrosidad*). See Julio Scherer, *Cárceles*, 108-110.

<sup>121</sup> UPVA members considered that Simitrio's incarceration was a "an example of how authorities wanted to destroy the organization and Simitrio's family physically, economically and psychologically." Letter from Comisión Negociadora de la UPVA to Governor Manuel Bartlett Díaz, March 24, 1994, box 58, file 11, AMP.

<sup>122</sup> *La Jornada*, July 11, 1989, sección País, p. 16.

Simitrio's detention, 5,000 UPVA vendors took to the streets and organized sit-ins in front of Puebla's state Procuraduría.<sup>123</sup>

UPVA members, now under the leadership of Rita Amador, organized dozens of marches in Puebla and Mexico City, wrote letters to Mexico's presidents, human rights organizations, and independent groups all over the country, hoping that federal authorities helped them liberate their members. One of these organizations was the Coordinadora Obrera, Campesina, Indígena y Popular (COCIP), which on more than one occasion sent letters to the media to let people know the repression and injustice that authorities committed against the UPVA.<sup>124</sup>

UPVA members also accused Puebla's government, especially governors Mariano Piña Olaya (1987-1993) and Manuel Bartlett Díaz (1993-1999), of constantly harassing and violently attacking the UPVA. Local and state authorities continued arresting a number of UPVA vendors who were very active in the organization. For example in 1991, at the height of Christmas season, the police arrested one of the UPVA's leader, Rafael Ramírez Hernández who was a member of the Consejo de Representantes. During the arrest, the UPVA and the police engaged in a fight.<sup>125</sup> A few years later, in March 1994, the police arrested two female vendors. When the officials arrested one of them, they beat her and her children. Other vendors such as Rafael

---

<sup>123</sup> "Plantón de Protesta de Comerciantes," *La Jornada*, sección País, p. 16, July 6, 1986, HJN.

<sup>124</sup> On other occasions, the COCIP had also joined UPVA's marches in Mexico City protesting Simitrio's imprisonment. Texto de carta from Armando Quiroz Alejandre to Director of magazine *Proceso*, "Represión en Puebla," *Proceso*, no. 961, April 3, 1995.

<sup>125</sup> Miguel Cabildo, "Ambulantes y policías combatieron en Puebla: Los líderes, acusados de homicidio; los vendedores aumentan en número," *Proceso*, no. 791, December 28, 1991.

Ramírez and Raúl Ronquillo received death threats.<sup>126</sup> In addition, vendors claimed that every time the UPVA organized a march, authorities punished Simitrio in jail placing him in solitary confinement.<sup>127</sup>

On some occasions, authorities punished all vendors by indirectly destroying their merchandise. The government cut the electricity to the markets where the UPVA had a strong presence. The government did this when the UPVA refused to pay the electricity bills. The UPVA argued that the electricity system was in terrible shape and that the state-run Comisión Federal de Electricidad had to replace the electrical installations. Vendors would not pay until the company fixed the problem. Instead of fixing it, authorities ordered the company not to provide with electricity to UPVA markets. This meant that thousands of perishable products that vendors sold in the markets went bad and this action negatively affected vendors' economic conditions. On one occasion, there was a fire at the Emiliano Zapata Market due to the bad and old electrical system.<sup>128</sup> Municipal firefighters refused to extinguish the fire and dozens of stalls and hundreds of products became ashes in a couple of hours. Once more city authorities did all they could to punish UPVA vendors and deteriorate their economic situation. It was a kind of "low intensity" war against this independent organization, which refused to be defeated and to join the PRI.

---

<sup>126</sup> Letter from Comisión Negociadora de la UPVA to Governor Manuel Bartlett Díaz, March 24, 1994, box 58, file 11, AMP.

<sup>127</sup> Letter to Governor Manuel Bartlet from UPVA's Comisión Negociadora, September 14, 1993, box 2590, file 1156, AMP. Even recently, every time there is a march, authorities threatened the organization to imprison Simitrio once again, claiming that every march is a "provocation" that Simitrio organizes against the government. "UPVA acusa al gobierno de sabotear las movilizaciones de apoyo a Simitrio," *La Jornada*, August 27, 2002.

<sup>128</sup> Letter to Governor Manuel Bartlet from UPVA's Comisión Negociadora, March 24, 1994, box 58, file 11, AMP.

Although the government succeeded in isolating one of the UPVA's most important and charismatic leaders, the state was unable to destroy the organization. Vendors continued selling in the market, holding meetings, assemblies, and marches. Authorities were upset that the organization did not disappear. In one of the last efforts to get rid of the UPVA, the city began another campaign to discredit the organization. The City Council claimed that Puebla's citizens and groups of shop keepers constantly complained about the behavior of UPVA's members.' The Municipality stated that during marches to downtown, UPVA members constantly stole shop keepers' merchandise, damaging their stores, and verbally or physically injured people. On top of this, the complainants stated that UPVA negatively affected public order and tranquility when its members engaged in marches, sit-ins, and protests. Shop keepers, according to the Mayor, had to close their stores when the UPVA marched on the street because they feared them. Moreover, the UPVA frequently obstructed traffic.<sup>129</sup> Apparently "the different sectors of Puebla's society were angry because vendors occupied not only sidewalks, but also part of the streets. They also argued that street vending caused problems such as "gang activity and the propensity to drug addiction".<sup>130</sup>

For those reasons, city authorities organized a popular forum, the "Foro de Consulta Popular," in which diverse groups evaluated and analyzed all of the problems that the UPVA caused in Puebla.<sup>131</sup> For three days in February, 1995 "all sectors of

---

<sup>129</sup> Mayor Roberto Cañedo Benítez's dictamen, February, 1995, box 2590, file 1185, AMP.

<sup>130</sup> Circular No. 92 to Regidores y Síndico Municipal from Secretaria General del H. Ayuntamiento, María Laura Rojano Merino, no. III, p. 2, box 58, n/f, February 27, 1995, AMP.

<sup>131</sup> Convocatoria, Foro de Consulta Popular, *El Sol de Puebla*, February 22, 1995; box 2590, file 1156, p. 026, AMP. In other parts of the country there were similar projects. For example in Mexico City, there was the *Programa de Recuperación del Centro Histórico* and in Morelia the *Patronato Pro-Rescate del Centro*



Puebla's society" could vent their dissatisfactions about the UPVA.<sup>132</sup> These groups included shop keepers, political parties, municipal employees, businesses associations, PRI-affiliated unions and city inhabitants. According to the UPVA and its allies, authorities sought to appear neutral toward the UPVA and act "democratically."<sup>133</sup> At the end, the "Foro de Consulta" gave authorities an excuse to act against the vendors' organization.

After the forum took place, the city council made public Puebla's dwellers' supposed feedback. According to authorities, everybody agreed that the UPVA was a problem for Puebla's community, that authorities should take strict actions against the organization, and that authorities had to punish those vendors who were in prison; and that police should reinforce public security in markets.<sup>134</sup> Without a doubt, the city council's goal in promoting the forum was to have a justification to repress the UPVA. In other words, authorities claimed that practically everyone in Puebla disliked the UPVA and that police should make sure that the organization was under control and that Puebla's citizens had to be protected from the many problems the UPVA caused in the city.

With the alleged support of all Puebla's inhabitants, the state struck again. Authorities sent hundreds of police officers to the markets where the UPVA had a strong

---

*Histórico*, see Luis Felipe Cabrales Barajas, "The Historic Center of Morelia: A Case of Successful Negotiation" *Journal of Latin American Geography* 4, no. 2 (2005).

<sup>132</sup> Circular No. 92 to Regidores y Síndico Municipal from Secretaria General del H. Ayuntamiento, María Laura Rojano Merino, no. III, p. 2, box 58, n/f, February 27, 1995, AMP.

<sup>133</sup> Texto de carta from Armando Quiroz Alejandro to Director of magazine *Proceso*, "Represión en Puebla," *Proceso*, no. 961, April 3, 1995

<sup>134</sup> Circular No. 92 to Regidores y Síndico Municipal from Secretaria General del H. Ayuntamiento, María Laura Rojano Merino, no. III, p. 2, box 58, n/f, February 27, 1995, AMP.

presence. Officials justified their actions against the UPVA saying that Puebla's markets needed "to be secured to protect non-UPVA marketers and consumers."<sup>135</sup> At the break of dawn, on March 8, 1995, 2000 members of the federal police with their police dogs, fire department members, police and municipal inspectors broke into the Miguel Hidalgo market, the UPVA's main and largest market. Police arrested approximately 78 UPVA members, destroying thousands of products and setting on fire between 1,000 to 1,400 stalls.<sup>136</sup> According to witnesses, the arrested vendors, men and women alike, were held at the Procuraduría General del Estado where they were beaten by the police.<sup>137</sup>

On March 20, 1995, the police engaged in a similar action against UPVA vendors in a smaller market, the Emiliano Zapata. The police destroyed stalls and tons of merchandise. Approximately 5000 vendors were negatively affected after the attacks on March 8 and 20.<sup>138</sup> As a response, vendors organized the *Marcha Nacional de Protesta Pacífica de la UPVA*, in Puebla's downtown to protest police violence. As if vendors did not have enough, on March 22, when the march took place, 500 riot policemen attacked again. Officers and provocateurs dissolved the march, leaving behind injured women, men, and children who were victims of beatings, police dogs' bites and tear gas. The state police took pictures and a video of the protestors in order to "recognize" the trouble

---

<sup>135</sup> Letter from Carlos Palafox Vázquez, Secretario de Gobernación to Teniente Coronel, Jorge Mauro Escudero Yereña, Director General de Seguridad Pública, March 3, 1995, box 58, AMP.

<sup>136</sup> Letter to Chamber of Deputies from Consejo General de Representantes and Comisión Negociadora de la UPVA-28 de Octubre, March 23, 1995, box 58, n/f, AMP.

<sup>137</sup> Letter to President Ernesto Zedillo and Governor Manuel Bartlett from Comité Independiente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos del Estado de Puebla, March 8, 1995, box 58, file 11, AMP.

<sup>138</sup> Texto de carta from Armando Quiroz Alejandro to Director of magazine *Proceso*, "Represión en Puebla," *Proceso*, no. 961, April 3, 1995

makers. A police spy wrote a report identifying UPVA leaders during the march.<sup>139</sup> Immediately after the march, the government apprehended 80 other vendors who were active in the UPVA's political activities.<sup>140</sup> The government claimed that the protestors had damaged the municipal building in front of the zócalo.<sup>141</sup> The imprisonment of *compañeros* continued in the summer of 1995 and vendors bitterly complained that the police violently arrested Heraclio Juárez Cordero, Simeón Amaro Mora, Crescencio Alcantarilla Orea, Ramón Herrera, and Antonio Vidal Pérez.<sup>142</sup> Authorities also threatened UPVA members on a constant basis. Officials told vendors that they would demolish the organization's office, bathrooms, and one of the market's chapel. Police also told vendors that if they did not join the PRI, their lives would be miserable (*se los llevaría la fregada*).<sup>143</sup> These threats caused a lot of anxiety among vendors because they were no longer street vendors who could be simply removed from the streets; now they were marketers with stalls that they bought and thought it was illegal and anti-constitutional that authorities were arresting them and threatening them.

After these aggressions in 1995, vendors used their political skills and contacted human rights organizations, the chamber of deputies, and President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León. Vendors claimed that police officers were drugged while engaging in the beatings, which made them more aggressive, and that Puebla's governor Manuel Bartlett

---

<sup>139</sup> "Reconocimiento de militantes de la UPVA que participaron en los actos violentos del pasado 22 de marzo en el zócalo," April 21, 1995, box 2590, file 1156, AMP. The document includes the names of the UPVA's militants.

<sup>140</sup> Texto de carta from Armando Quiroz Alejandro to Director of magazine *Proceso*, "Represión en Puebla," *Proceso*, no. 961, April 3, 1995.

<sup>141</sup> "Reconocimiento de militantes de la UPVA." The document said that the Presidencia, Cabildo, Sindicatura, and Contraloría were damaged by the protestors. Apparently, UPVA militants threw Molotov cocktails to the municipal building.

<sup>142</sup> Letter to Governor Manuel Bartlett Díaz from UPVA members, August 1, 1995, box 58, file 11, AMP.

<sup>143</sup> Letter to Governor Manuel Bartlett Díaz from UPVA members, August 1, 1995, box 58, file 11, AMP

Díaz and the mayor Rafael Cañedo Benítez were responsible for these acts against the UPVA.<sup>144</sup> In addition, vendors claimed that some comrades were not in prison or in hospitals, they had simply disappeared. One of them was vendor Juan Tapia. In June 1995, the federal police kidnapped him and perhaps killed him. According to witnesses, police took him in a white car without license plates.<sup>145</sup> Vendors did not know what happened to him.

While vendors lacked information about some of their comrades' whereabouts, authorities continued to spy the organization. In 1996 the Jesuit priest, Dávid Fernández Dávalos, the director of the Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Pro, declared to the press that in 1995, he received an 18-page anonymous document with a list of organizations and members whom the army and the Mexican secret police were infiltrating. The UPVA and some of its leaders such as Raúl Ronquillo appeared in that list.<sup>146</sup>

### Conclusion

For two decades, from the mid 1970s to the mid-1990s, local and federal authorities joined forces to get rid of street vendors and destroy their organization. Government tactics included abductions, the incarceration of dozens of vendors, and their removal from the most remunerative commercial places. The government's harshest method was

---

<sup>144</sup> Letter to Chamber of Deputies from Consejo General de Representantes and Comisión Negociadora de la UPVA-28 de Octubre, March 23, 1995, box 58, n/f, AMP.

<sup>145</sup> Letter to Governor Manuel Bartlett Díaz from UPVA members, August 1, 1995, box 58, file 11, AMP.

<sup>146</sup> The Mexican political magazine *Proceso* published the document and it is very similar to the documents that the secret police wrote in the 1970s and 1980s. See "En un documento recibido por el Centro de Derechos Humanos 'Miguel Pro', se mencionan nombres y se asignan responsabilidades," *Proceso*, no. 1006, February 10, 1996.

the abduction of a two-year old child, son of two militants in the street vendors' organization. The government's goal was to halt the activism of the parents and instill fear among the vendors. But authorities' tactics did not always include terror. In 1986, the UNESCO recognized Puebla as a World Heritage City, and with the support of some sectors of Puebla's society, city officials succeeded in relocating vendors to markets in the outskirts of the city. Their excuse was that city officials, the INAH, and private investors had to restore Puebla's downtown buildings and streets. At the same time, authorities hoped to finally clamp down on the organization by dividing their membership into several markets. To authorities' disappointment, the UPVA did not die out. It extended its membership and maintained its strength. In 1989 and then again in 1995, the state struck again apprehending dozens of vendors, including the UPVA's top leader. The police also destroyed thousands of stalls and continued to harass the organization. In 2001, authorities granted conditional freedom to UPVA's former leader Simitrio. As part of the conditions to set him free, Simitrio cannot return to the state of Puebla and get involved in political activities. His supporters claim that authorities continue to violate his constitutional rights because officials prevent him from moving freely across Mexico. Despite all the efforts to wipe out the organization, the UPVA, led by Rita Amador, continues to protect vendors' rights in markets and continues to defend the increasing number of vendors who make their living in the streets of Puebla.

## Conclusion

Street vending and other informal activities are not restricted to the past. The Mexican economy in 2008 does not show any signs of producing enough jobs in the formal sector, which means that people will continue to engage in various activities that allow them to survive. According to a July 14, 2008 report of the Secretaría de Desarrollo Social of the municipality of Puebla, 600,000 inhabitants earn a total of \$4.60 a day.<sup>147</sup> On the same day, the front page of *El Sol de Puebla* claimed that Puebla was among the most expensive cities in the country.<sup>148</sup> Not only do people earn very little, but they also face a high cost of living. It is not surprising that the informal economy continues to grow. The Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI) reported that the state of Puebla had 773,000 informal workers.<sup>149</sup> In May 2007, the UPVA's main leader, Rita Amador, stated that in 2006 the number of people seeking to sell on the aisles of the Mercado Hidalgo, a UPVA bastion, increased by 10 per cent. Around 400 *ambulantes* sell in the market during the weekday and 800 over the weekend. These vendors supplement sellers with fixed stalls.<sup>150</sup> There is no question that the urban poor continue to seek job opportunities that help them bring food to their tables and pay their bills.<sup>151</sup>

---

<sup>147</sup> "Más de 600 mil personas en Puebla viven con un salario mínimo al día," *La Jornada de Oriente*, July 14, 2008.

<sup>148</sup> "Puebla entre las ciudades más caras," *El Sol de Puebla*, July 14, 2008.

<sup>149</sup> "Más de 773 mil, los trabajadores informales de Puebla, señala el INEGI," *La Jornada de Oriente*, June 18, 2007.

<sup>150</sup> "El Mercado Hidalgo, el principal receptor de desempleados en Puebla," *La Jornada de Oriente*, May 2, 2007.

<sup>151</sup> The other option to make ends meet is to migrate to "el otro lado." Every month thousands of Mexicans cross the US-Mexican border in search of jobs despite the danger that the trip entails. According to the

Unable or unwilling to design economic policies that provide jobs for working class families, Mexican officials have come up with the most uncreative and short-sighted ideas. For example, the official in charge of social development policies in the city of Puebla, Fernanda Diez Torres, recommended that people who earn \$4.60 a day start “saving.” Ms. Diez Torres, whose own financial situation places her miles away from ordinary people, suggested that families should earn their living through self-employment.<sup>152</sup> What sort of practical advice does she offer? She proposes that a family member at home should cut the children’s hair for free, instead of taking them to a barber shop. In that way, people could save up to 10 dollars a month. Others could attend government-sponsored courses to train people on how to start their own “micro-business.”<sup>153</sup> Shamelessly this government official, like others before her, encourages small-scale businesses and informal activities as the only solution for miserable wages and lack of employment. There is hardly any evidence to suggest that such activities will substantially improve the standard of living of the working poor.

This kind of advice is not new. The Mexican government has officially embraced the “wonders” of the informal economy for a long time. During the administration of Vicente Fox Quezada, the government encouraged the famous *micro-changarros* or micro-business<sup>154</sup> as a panacea for lack of formal jobs and decent salaries. The state

---

World Bank, between 2000 and 2005, two million Mexicans migrated to the US. “México, el mayor expulsor de migrantes del planeta, dice el BM,” *La Jornada*, April 16, 2007.

<sup>152</sup> For a fascinating account on how low-income inhabitants of Chicago get by, see Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006

<sup>153</sup> “Más de 600 mil personas en Puebla viven con un salario mínimo al día,” *La Jornada de Oriente*, July 14, 2008.

<sup>154</sup> *Changarro* is the slang for small shop or business, the word microchangarro implies a very small and usually informal business.

“helped” poor families to start their own enterprises by providing them with small credits that went from 30 to 2,000 dollars. In an interview, a journalist asked the coordinator of the Sistema Nacional de Microcréditos, Maricarmen Díaz, what kind of business could a family start with 30 dollars? The very naïve, condescending, and disconnected Díaz immediately responded that people could sell small table clothes, “you just need to buy thread and needles and start hustling!”<sup>155</sup> In a similar way, Felipe Calderón (“*el presidente del empleo*”) has encouraged and subsidized home-based day care centers for working class women who have no rights to send their children to public day care. Most probably these mothers are part of the informal economy. Women in charge of the day-care centers are supposed to modify their homes and take care of about 30 children.<sup>156</sup> Housewives, who are the workers in these informal day-care centers, earn low wages and do not receive benefits or social security from government agencies. In short, current state policies not only perpetuate the idea that women must be the sole care-givers, but also encourage them to engage in informal activities. The Mexican state, more than ever, refuses to offer social welfare benefits. Well-paid government officials offer short-term solutions to long-term, systemic problems. As a result, we will witness an increase of the so-called underground economy with the blessing of the state.

Historians need to look more carefully at these actors in the informal economy. What does it mean for labor history that a large percentage of the population engaged in the informal economy? What has been the impact of these workers on organized labor?

---

<sup>155</sup> “*Microchangarros* han reducido 3% la pobreza en México: Fox en Nueva York,” *La Jornada virtual*, November 11, 2002.

<sup>156</sup> “Pese a burlas,” Calderón inauguró ayer la estancia infantil mil 500 de su gobierno,” *La Jornada*, May 10, 2007.



How do street vendors, for example, identify themselves, as workers, as petit entrepreneurs? What kind of class-consciousness do they have? How do working on the streets and facing officials' abuses shape their political views? What has been their relationship to the PRI and its CNOP?

This dissertation has argued that street vendors have engaged in a struggle to sell on the streets and to fight for causes that went beyond their immediate commercial activities. They organized the UPVA to defend themselves against violent removals, seizure of merchandise, fee collectors' abuses, and threats by the established business community. Street vendors fought to secure spaces to sell and to have peace of mind.

Unlike the Mexico City vendors' unions that John C. Cross and Gary I. Gordon examined, the Puebla's street vendors' union remained independent from the PRI. Street vendors were tired of abuses and obscure policies that did not guarantee that they could stay on the streets earning a living. They also distrusted *charro* leaders who did little to help the membership.

This dissertation has shown that street vendors were unique in that students supported their political activities. The UPVA formed at the height of student activism in Puebla, in the early 1970s. Together they collaborated to organize and challenge authorities. Very young, working-class students were inspired by a number of events in recent Mexican and Latin American history that included the railroad strikes of 1958-1959, the Cuban revolution, and the 1968 massacre of students in Tlatelolco. Also inspired by Marx's, Engel's and Mao's ideas and their study at the university, students believed that the best way to begin social change in Mexico was through their alliance

and support to the urban poor. Street vendors' organizations represented an opportunity for students to make such an alliance. Street vendors had much to offer to students. Sellers helped them as they attempted to achieve a more affordable and less conservative university. They entered a variety of different struggles together. Street vendors assisted students in taking over buildings and providing free food. Sellers and students built grass roots democracy as they distanced themselves from the PRI.

Female vendors, who constituted a large percentage of the street vending population, played an important role in organizing vendors and maintaining the daily activities of their union. Women printed and handed in flyers on the streets; others took the microphones and addressed hundreds of people in speeches, and during marches. The UPVA helped large numbers of women become confident leaders. Many women had the chance, for the first time of negotiating with city officials. A vendor stated that the UPVA taught her many skills and she was especially proud that she was able to speak in public and addressed Puebla's governor face to face.<sup>157</sup>

The UPVA not only protected vendors' economic interests, but also their safety. Police and inspectors sexually harassed female vendors, especially when vendors were disorganized. Mexican police were notorious for these practices during detentions of protestors and activists.<sup>158</sup> Street vendors feared that the officers would beat them, sexually molest them, or rape them when they were transported in trucks from the streets to the police stations. Women rarely reported these cases and nobody held these

---

<sup>157</sup> Rosa Martínez, interview by author, February 6, 2006, notes, Puebla, Mexico

<sup>158</sup> Sexual harassment and rape continue to happen when police detains female protestors. During the 2006 conflict over land and street vending in Salvador Atenco, state of Mexico, officers sexually harassed more than two dozen women and raped at least seven. "Confirman observadores abusos sexuales en Atenco," *La Jornada*, June 4, 2006.

criminals accountable. After the organization of UPVA, women felt protected from these kinds of abuses because the police knew that it was more difficult to deal with an angry group than with individual women.<sup>159</sup>

One of the goals of this dissertation is to reveal state violence. Mexico was certainly not peaceful country under the PRI. This dissertation has sought to link state repression against organized street vendors to the larger campaign by the Mexican state to get rid of left-wing political activists. Imprisonments, torture, disappearances, and kidnappings have been common not only during the Mexican “dirty war” in the 1960s and 1970s, but also during the following decades. During the 1960s and 1970s there were approximately 2,000 cases of documented disappearances.<sup>160</sup> Unfortunately the number of *desaparecidos* continues to increase under the rule of the conservative Partido Acción Nacional, (PAN). In recent years, independent labor organizers, indigenous activists, members of the Ejército Popular Revolucionario (EPR), students, and Oaxacan teachers have been detained, tortured, and killed.<sup>161</sup>

The organization of the UPVA took place during Mexican dirty war. Historians have now access to the files produced by the Secretaría de Gobernación’s Departamento Federal de Seguridad (DFS) and the Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (IPS). These well organized collections at the Archivo General de la Nación reveal the state’s

---

<sup>159</sup> Mexican street vendors in New York declared that they were touched by the NY police in parts of their body that are not appropriate. These women have organized and have also fought for their right to sell on the streets. “Los ambulantes mexicanos, legales en Nueva York,” *La Jornada*, Masiosare, July 24, 2005.

<sup>160</sup> Duncan Kennedy, “Mexico’s Long Forgotten dirty war,” BBC News, Mexico, July 19, 2008. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from\\_our\\_own\\_correspondent/7513651.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/7513651.stm)

<sup>161</sup> “Exigen la presentación de detenidos en Oaxaca,” *La Jornada*, December 4, 2006; “Solicita CDIH información sobre indígenas desaparecidos,” December 7, 2006; “EPR desaparecidos podrían estar en casas de seguridad estatales,” *La Jornada*, June 25, 2008.

surveillance of many social organizations and individuals. The UPVA was one of these groups and hundreds of pages document vendors' political activities. This dissertation has sought to demonstrate that these informal economic actors were not pawns of the state and that authorities worried about their militancy. The government took action against vendors and their leaders. Since the 1970s, UPVA members, like factory and railroad workers, land petitioners, and teachers were victims of state repression. Bulmaro Vega's torture, the kidnapping of his toddler, Oscar Vega Rosales, in the 1970s; the incarceration and sentence of Rubén Sarabia Sánchez in the late 1980s, and the disappearance of Juan Tapia in the mid-1990s, are some examples of state violence against those who refused to join the PRI's structure and who refused to blindly support PRI's candidates. Despite these obstacles, street vendors continue to organize, to support other organizations, and to challenge authorities. As they claim in their marches: "la lucha sigue y sigue."

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Archives

Archivo Municipal de Puebla  
 Archivo del Congreso del Estado de Puebla  
 Archivo General de la Nación  
 Archivo Judicial de Puebla  
 Archivo de la Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla

Hemeroteca Juan Nepomuceno

### Magazines

*Cambio*  
*Momento: en el vértice de Puebla*  
*Siempre!*  
*Proceso*

### Newspapers

*El Sol de Puebla*  
*El Universal*  
*La Jornada*  
*La Jornada de Oriente*  
*La Opinión*  
*La Opinión, Diario de la Mañana*  
*The New York Times*

Aguayo Quezada, Sergio. *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México*. México: Grijalbo, 2001.

Aguilar-Rodríguez, Sandra. "Cooking Modernity: Nutrition Policies, Class, and Gender in the 1940s and 1950s Mexico City." *The Americas*, 64:2, October 2007.

Alan, Gilbert. Ed. *The Mega-City in Latin America*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1996.

Alexander, Robert Jackson. *International Maoism in the Developing World*. Westport: Praeger, 1999.

- Alfaro-Velcamp, Theresa. *So Far From Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007.
- Arizpe, Lourdes. *Indígenas en la ciudad de México: el caso de las Marias*. México: SEP Diana, 1979.
- Arizpe, Lourdes. "Women in the Informal Sector: The Case of Mexico City." *Signs*. 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1977).
- Arrom, Silvia. *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1830*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985.
- Babb, Florence E. *Between the Field and the Cooking Pot: The Political Economy of Marketwomen in Peru*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998.
- Babb, Florence E. "Producers and Reproducers: Andean Marketwomen in the Economy." In *Women and Change in Latin America*. June Nash and Helen Safa Eds. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1985.
- Barbosa Cano, Manlio. *Plan de Ordenamiento Espacial de la Actividad Comercial para la ciudad de Puebla*. Puebla: Centro Regional Puebla, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1981.
- Behar, Ruth. *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.
- Behar, Ruth. "Rage and Redemption: Reading the Life Story of a Mexican Marketing Woman." *Feminist Studies*. 16, no.2, 1990.
- Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. *Sucesos Universitarios (1970-1980) en la revista Siempre!* Puebla: BUAP-Cuadernos del Archivo Histórico Universitario, 2000.
- Bennett, Vivienne. Ed. *Opposing Currents: The Politics of Water and Gender in Latin America*. Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005.
- Bennett, Vivienne. "Orígenes del movimiento urbano popular mexicano: pensamiento político y organizaciones políticas clandestinas, 1960-1980" *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 55, no. 4 (julio-septiembre 1993).
- Berdan, Frances. "Markets in the Economy of Aztec Mexico." In *Markets and Marketing*, Monographs in Economic Anthropology. Stuart Plattner. Ed. Lanham, University Press of America, 1985. Pp. 339-367

- Blacker-Hanson, O' Neill. "La lucha sigue! (The struggle continues!): Teacher Activism in the continuum on Democratic struggle in Mexico," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2005.
- Blum, Ann S. "Cleaning the Revolutionary Household: Domestic Servants and Public Welfare in Mexico City, 1900-1935." *Journal of Women's History*. 15(4), 2004.
- Blum, Ann S. "Conspicuous Benevolence: Liberalism, Public Welfare, and Private Charity in Porfirian Mexico, 1877-1910," *The Americas*, 58(1), 2001.
- Boris, Eileen. "Editor's Note." *Journal of Women's History*. 15(4), Winter 2004.
- Boris, Eileen and S. J. Kleinberg, "Mothers and Other Workers: (Re)Conceiving Labor, Maternalism, and the State," *Journal of Women's History*, 15(3), 2003.
- Boserup, Ester. *Woman's Role in Economic Development*. New York: St. Martins Press, 1970.
- Bortz, Jeffrey. *Revolution within the Revolution: Cotton Textile Workers and the Mexican Labor Regime, 1910-1923*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Bortz, Jeffrey. "Authority Reseated: Control Struggles in the Textile Industry during the Mexican Revolution." *Labor History* 44 no. 2 (2003): 171-188.
- Breña Valle, Gabriel. *Las mil caras de la moneda: comercio en México*. México City: BANPECO, 1991.
- Bromley, Ray. "A New Path to Development? The Significance of Hernando de Soto's Ideas on Underdevelopment, Production, and Reproduction." *Economic Geography*. Vol. 66(4), Production and Reproduction in Latin American Cities: Concepts, Linkages, and Empirical Trends (October 1990) pp. 328-348.
- Buechler, Hans and Judith-Marie Buechler. *The World of Sofía Velasquez: The Autobiography of a Bolivian Market Vendor*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Buechler, Judith-Marie. "The Visible and Vocal Politics of Female Traders and Small-Scale Producers in La Paz, Bolivia." In *Women and Economic Change: Andean Perspectives*. Ed. Ann Miles and Hans Buechler. Society for Latin American Anthropology, 14. Washington: DC.: American Anthropological Association, 1997.
- Buck, Sarah. "Activists and Mothers: Feminist and Maternalist Politics in Mexico, 1923-1953." Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers University, 2002.

- Bunster Ximena and Elsa M. Chaney. *Sellers and Servants: Working Women in Lima, Peru*. New York : Praeger, 1985.
- Bunster Ximena. "Taking Pictures: Field Method and Visual Mode." *Signs*. 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1977).
- Cabrales Barajas, Luis Felipe. "The Historic Center of Morelia: A Case of Successful Negotiation." *Journal of Latin American Geography* 4, no. 2 (2005).
- Carr, Barry. *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992.
- Carr, Barry. *Mexican Communism, 1968-1983: Eurocommunism in the Americas?* Center for US-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1985.
- Carey, Elaine. *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005.
- Castillo, Jaime. Ed. *Los Movimientos Sociales en Puebla*. Tomo 1 and Tomo 2. Puebla: DIAU, ICAUP, 1984.
- Chant, Sylvia. *Women and Survival in Mexican Cities: Perspectives on Gender Labour Markets and Low-Income Households*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. 1990.
- Clark, Gracia. *Onions are my Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Clark, Gracia. Ed. *Traders versus the State: Anthropological Approaches to Unofficial Economies*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1988.
- Clark, Marjorie Ruth. *Organized Labor in Mexico*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1973.
- Córdova, Arnaldo. *La política de masas y el futuro de la izquierda en México*. México D.F: Editorial Era, 1979.
- Craig, Ann and Joe Foweraker. *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico*. Boulder: R. Lienner Publishers, 1990.
- Cross, John C. and Alfonso Morales. *Street Entrepreneurs: People, Place, and Politics in Local and Global Perspectives*. Routledge, 2007.
- Cross, John C. *Informal Politics: Street Vendors and the State in Mexico City*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998



- Cross, John C. "Co-optation, Competition and Resistance: State and Street vendors in Mexico City." *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 2 (1998).
- Cook, Scott. "Craft Businesses, Piece Work and Value Distribution in the Oaxaca Valley, Mexico." In *Markets and Marketing*. Stuart Plattner. Ed. pp. 235-258
- Dávila Peralta, Nicolás. *Las Santas Batallas: El Anticomunismo en Puebla*. Puebla: BUAP-Cuadernos del Archivo Histórico Universitario, 2000.
- Davis, Mike. *Planet of Slums*. New York: Verso, 2006.
- De Soto, Hernando. *The Other Path: The Invisible Revolution in the Third World*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989.
- Dias, Maria Odila da Silva. *Power and Everyday Life: The Lives of Working Women in Nineteenth-Brazil*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995.
- Dirlik, Arif. Ed. *Critical Perspectives on Mao Zedong's Thought*. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1997.
- Doyle, Kate. "'Forgetting is not Justice:' Mexico Bares Its Secret Past." *World Policy Journal*. 20, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 61-72
- Elbaum Max. *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che*. New York: Verso: 2006.
- Farnsworth, Ann. *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905-1960*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Fernández-Kelly Patricia and Jon Shefner. Eds. *Out of the Shadows: Political Action and Informal Economy in Latin America*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University: Press, 2006.
- Fink, Carol, Philipp Gassert and Detlef Junker. Eds. *1968: The World Transformed*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Francois, Marie Eileen. *A Culture of Everyday Credit: Housekeeping, Pawnbroking, and Governance in Mexico City, 1750-1920*.
- Frazier, Lessie Jo and Deborah Cohen. "Mexico '68: Defining the Space of the Movement, Heroic Masculinity in the Prison, and "Women" in the Streets." *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 83:4, November 2003.

- French, John and Daniel James. *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: from Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- French-Fuller, Katharine. "Gendered Invisibility, Respectable Cleanliness: The Impact of the Washing Machine on Daily Living in Post-1950 Santiago, Chile." *Journal of Women's History*. 18(4), 2006.
- Gordon, Gary. "Peddlers, Pesos, and Power: The Political Economy of Street Vending in Mexico City," (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1997).
- Grindle, Merilee, S. *Challenging the State: Crisis and Innovation in Latin America and Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gutiérrez de Hoyos, Gustavo. "Comercio callejero en el centro histórico capitalino: el caso de la organización de artesanos y vendedores del centro, de lo formal a lo informal." Tesis de Licenciatura, Departamento de Antropología, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Iztapalapa, 1997.
- Haber, Paul Lawrence. *Power from Experience: Urban Popular Movements in Late Twentieth-Century Mexico*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State Press, 2005.
- Hart, Keith. "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana." *Journal of Modern African Studies*. Vol. 11(1), March 1973, pp. 61-89.
- Hecht, Tobias. Ed. *Minor Omissions: Children in Latin American History and Society*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.
- Hellman, Judith Adler. *Mexican Lives*. New York: The New Press, 1994.
- Hernández-Peña Patricia, et. al. "Study of Street Vendors in Mexico City-Condicion de trabajo, fatiga laboral y bajo peso al nacer en vendedoras ambulantes." *Salud Pública en Mexico*, 41(2), marzo-abril, 1999.
- Herrera, Robinson A. *Natives, Europeans, and Africans in sixteenth-century Santiago de Guatemala*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.
- Hutchison, Elizabeth. *Labors Appropriate to their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900-1930*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Iragorri, Raúl Victoria. *Diagnóstico del ambulantismo en la ciudad de Puebla y sus posibles soluciones*. Puebla: H. Ayuntamiento, 1980.
- James, Daniel. *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

- Jiménez, Christina M. "Performing their right to the city: political uses of public space in a Mexican city, 1880-1910s." *Urban History*. 33, no. 3 (2006).
- Jiménez, Christina M. "Popular Organizing for Public Services: Residents Modernize Morelia, Mexico, 1880-1920," *Journal of Urban History*. 30, no. 4 (2004).
- Jiménez, Christina. "Making the City Their Own: Popular Groups and Political Culture in Morelia, Mexico, 1880 to 1930," (PhD Dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2001).
- Jones, Gareth, Elsa Herrera and Sarah Thomas de Benítez. "Tears, Trauma, and Suicide: Everyday Violence among Street Youth in Puebla, Mexico." *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 26 no.4, 2007.
- Jones, Gareth and Ann Varley. "The Contest for the City Centre: Street Traders versus Buildings." *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 13(1), January 1994.
- Kaplan, Temma. "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918." *Signs*. 7(3). *Feminist Theory*. Spring 1982.
- Kertzer, David. I. *Ritual, Politics, and Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Kiejman, Claude and Jean-Francis Held. *Mexico: le pain et les jeux*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969.
- Kinsbruner, Jay. *Petty Capitalism in Spanish America: The Pulperos of Puebla, Mexico City, Caracas, and Buenos Aires*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1987.
- Kublock, Thomas. *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile's El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904-1951*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Knight, Alan and Wil Pansters. *Caciquismo in Twentieth-Century Mexico*. London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2005.
- La Botz, Dan. *Mask of Democracy: Labor Suppression in Mexico Today*. Boston: South End Press, 1992.
- Lara y Parra, Manuel. *La lucha universitaria en Puebla: 1923-1965*. Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2000.
- Larson Brooke, Olivia Harriss, and Enrique Tandeter. *Ethnicity, Markets, and Migration in the Andes: at the Crossroads of History and Anthropology*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

- Leicht, Hugo. *Las Calles de Puebla*. Puebla: Ed. Junta de Mejoramiento Moral, Cívico y Material del Municipio de Puebla (JMMCyMMP). Edición Conmemorativa al V Centenario del Descubrimiento de América, 1992.
- Lessinger, Johanna. "Nobody Here to Yell at Me": Political Activism Among Petty Retail Traders in and Indian City. In Stuart Plattner. Ed. *Markets and Marketing*. Lanham, University Press of America, 1985.
- Mabry, Donald J. *The Mexican University and the State: Student Conflicts, 1910-1971*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982.
- Mackin, Robert Sean. "Becoming the Red Bishop of Cuernavaca: Rethinking Gill's Religious Competition Model." *Sociology of Religion*. Winter 2003, 64(4).
- Marti, Judith E. "Nineteenth-Century Views of Women's Participation in Mexico's Markets." In *Women Traders in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Ed. Linda Seligmann. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.
- Marti, Judith E. "Subsistence and the State: The Case of Porfirian Mexico," In *The Economic Anthropology of the State*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brumfiel. Lanham: University Press of America, 1994.
- Marti, Judith E. "Breadwinners and Decision Markers: Nineteenth-Century Mexican Women Vendors." In Womack, Mari and Judith Marti. Eds. *The Other Fifty Percent: Multicultural Perspectives on Gender Relations*. Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1993.
- Marti, Judith Ettinger. "Subsistence and the State: Municipal Government policies and Urban Markets in Developing Nations; the Case of Mexico City and Guadalajara, 1877-1910." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1990.
- Martínez Novo, Carmen. "The 'Culture' of Exclusion: Representations of Indigenous Women Street Vendors in Tijuana, Mexico." *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 22(3) 2003.
- Middlebrook, Kevin. Ed., *Unions, Workers, and the State in Mexico*. San Diego: Center for US-Mexican Studies, University of California Press, 1991.
- Mintz, Sydney. "Men, Women and Trade." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 13 no. 3, 1971.
- Mosquera, Daniel O. "Consecrated Transactions: of Marketplaces, Passion Plays and other Nahua-Christian Devotions." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*. 14( 2) August 2005, pp. 171-193.

- Ochoa, Enrique. *Feeding Mexico: The Political Uses of Food since 1910*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2000.
- Olcott, Jocelyn. "Miracle Workers and State Mediation Among Textile and Garment Workers in Mexico's Transition to Industrial Development." *International Labor and Working Class History*. 63 (Spring 2003)
- Ontiveros, José René. *La Izquierda estudiantil en la UNAM: organizaciones, movilizaciones y liderazgos, 1958-1972*. México: UNAM-Miguel Angel Porrúa, 2007.
- Orlove, Benjamin and Henry Rutz. Ed. *The Social Economy of Consumption*. Lanham: University Press of America, Society for Economic Anthropology, 1989. Ortiz, Orlando. *Jueves de Corpus*. Mexico City: Editorial Diogenes, 1979.
- Pansters, Wil. *Politics and Power in Puebla: The Political History of a Mexican State, 1937-1987*. Amsterdam: Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation, 1990.
- Padilla, Tanalís. "From Agraristas to Guerrilleros and the Myth of the Pax Priista." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2001.
- Piccato, Pablo. *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City 1900-1931*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Piccato, Pablo. "Urbanistas, Ambulantes and Mendigos: The Dispute for Urban Space in Mexico City, 1890-1930." In *Reconstructing Criminality in Latin America*. eds. Carlos A. Aguirre and Robert Buffington. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2000.
- Pilcher, Jeffrey. *Qué Vivan los Tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998.
- Pilcher, Jeffrey. "Industrial *Tortillas* and Folkloric Pepsi: The Nutritional Consequences of Hybrid Cuisines in Mexico," in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2002): 222-239.
- Pilcher, Jeffrey. "Was the Taco Invented in Southern California?" *Gastronomica*, vol. 8, 1 (Winter 2008) pp. 26-38.
- Poniatowska, Elena. *Massacre in Mexico*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992.
- Porter, Susie S., *Working Women of Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003.

- Portes, Alejandro, Manuel Castells and Lauren A. Benton. Eds. *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1989.
- Potthast, Barbara and Sandra Carreras. *Entre la familia, la sociedad y el Estado: Niños y jóvenes en América Latina (siglos XIX-XX)*. Frankfurt am Main: Bibliotheca Ibero-Americana, Vervuert, 2005.
- Raibmon, Paige. "The Practice of Everyday Colonialism: Indigenous Women at Work in the Hop Fields and Tourist Industry of Puget Sound." *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas*. 3(3) Fall 2006.
- Rodiles, Saúl. "El Mercado La Victoria." *Puebla Mágica*, 1, no. 16 (April-June 1993).
- Sangster, Joan. "Making a Fur Coat: Women, the Labouring Body, and Working-Class History." *International Review of Social History*, 52( 2), August 2007.
- Santín Nieto, Socorro. *El Mercado Guadalupe Victoria*. Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Colección Tercer Milenio, Serie Casas de Puebla, 1999.
- Sausi Garavito, María José Rhi. "Las primeras tres décadas del juicio de amparo: notas entorno a la percepción pública de un nuevo instrumento jurídico." In Sacristán, Cristina y Pablo Piccato. Eds. *Actores, espacios y debates en la esfera pública de la Cd. de México*. México: Instituto Mora, 2005.
- Scherer García, Julio. *Cárceles*. México DF: Aguilar, Altea, Taurus Alfaguara, 1998
- Seligmann, Linda. Ed. *Women Traders in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.
- Seligmann, Linda. "The Art of Expressive Exchange: The Mediation of Quechua Identity in the Marketplace." In John Schechter and Guillermo Delgado, eds. *Quechua Verbal Artistry: The Inscription of Andean Voices*, pp. 123-144. Bonn: Boner Amerikanistische Studien (BAS, Volume 38). 2004.
- Seligmann, Linda. "Market Places, Social Spaces, in Cuzco, Peru." *Urban Anthropology* 29(1): 1-68. April 2000.
- Seligmann, Linda. "Survival Politics and the Movements of Market Women in Peru in the Age of Neoliberalism." In Lynne Phillips, Ed. *The Third Wave of Modernization in Latin America: Cultural Perspectives on Neoliberalism* 65-82. Jaguar Books (Scholarly Resources). 1998.
- Seligmann, Linda. "Between Worlds of Exchange: Ethnicity among Peruvian Market Women." *Cultural Anthropology* 8(2): 187-213. 1993.

- Seligmann, Linda "To Be in Between: The *Cholas* As Market Women in Peru." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31(4):694-721. 1989.
- Shank, Theodore. "A Return to Aztec and Mayan Roots: At the Chicano and Latin American Festival." *The Drama Review: TDR*. 18(4). Indigenous Theater Issue, 1974.
- Sikkink, Lynn. "Traditional Medicines in the Marketplace: Identity and Ethnicity Among Female Vendors." In *Women Traders in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Ed. Linda Seligmann. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.
- Teltscher, Susanne. "Small Trade and the World Economy: Informal Vendors in Quito, Ecuador." *Economic Geography*. Vol. 70 (2), Global-Local Relations (April 1994), pp. 167-187.
- Tinker, Irene. *Street Foods: Urban Food and Employment in Developing Countries*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Tinsman, Heidi. *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1951-1973*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Trevizo, Dolores. "Between Zapata and Che: A Comparison of Social Movement Success and Failure in Mexico." *Social Science History*, 30:2, Summer 2006.
- Ulloa Bornemann, Alberto and Aurora Camacho de Schimdt. *Surviving Mexico's Dirty War: A Political Prisoner's Memoir*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007.
- Urrea, Alberto. *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border*. New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1993.
- Van Allen, Judith. "Aba Riots or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women." In *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976.
- Vanderbush, Walter K. "Independent Organizing in Puebla, Mexico, 1961-1992: Social Movements, the Struggle for Autonomy, and Democratization." Ph.D. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1993.
- Venkatesh, Sudhir Alladi. *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Wences Reza, Rosalío. *El movimiento estudiantil y los problemas nacionales*. Mexico: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1971.

Zolniski, Christian. *Janitors, Street Vendors, and Activists: The Lives of Mexican Immigrants in Silicon Valley*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Zolov, Eric. *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999.



## Curriculum Vita

Sandra C. Mendiola García

## EDUCATION

***Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ*** ***2003- 2008***

Ph.D. in Latin American History, expected May 2008

Dissertation: "Street Vendors, Marketers, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Puebla, Mexico."

***University at Albany, State University of New York*** ***2000-2003***

Graduate courses toward Ph.D.

***University of Toronto, Canada*** ***1999-2000***

M.A. in History

Major Research Essay: "Francisco José Múgica: The Failed Project of the Mexican Revolution."

***Universidad de las Américas-Puebla, México*** ***1993-1998***

B.A. in International Relations

Thesis: "El Papel de Vicente Lombardo Toledano en la Construcción del Estado Post-Revolucionario en México."

Magna Cum Laude

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

***Rutgers University- Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Department***

-Mexico and Migration

***Spring 2008***

-The U.S.-Mexico Border

***Fall 2007******Rutgers University- History Department***

-Race, Gender, and Nation in the Americas

***Fall 2007***

-Social History of Latin America

***Summer 07 & 06***

-Revolution in Twentieth-Century Latin America

***Summer 2005***

-Teaching and Technologies Trainer for Faculty members

***2004-2005******Union College, Schenectady, NY, Department of Modern Languages***

-Spanish Language Assistant

***1998-1999***

## GRADUATE AND TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

***Africana Studies Department, Rutgers University***

- Helped write grant application for "Philosophy Born of Struggle"

***Spring 2004***

XI Conference at Rutgers University

***Institute for Electrical and Electronic Engineers, IEEE******Fall 2004-Spring 2005***

-Wrote book reviews for newsletter

-Updated "Today in History"

***University at Albany, State University of New York***

-Teaching Assistant- History of Colonial America

***Fall 2002-Spring 2003***

-Teaching Assistant- History of American Cities I&amp;II

***Fall 2001-Spring 2002***