

**The *Universidad-Pueblo*: Journalism, Politics, and Democracy in Southern Mexico in the 1970s**

**La Universidad-Pueblo: Periodismo, política y democracia en el sur de México durante la década de 1970**

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the relationship between the State and the university sector in Mexico during the 1970s. The Universidad-Pueblo project of the *Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero* (UAG) is addressed from a sociohistorical perspective. The emphasis on written press revealed a series of critical university models proposed by higher education institutions and their students. These were well articulated with social demands and leftist movements in defiance of an authoritarian political regime in which democratic institutional participation mechanisms were practically closed. The *Universidad-Pueblo* project is one of the most radical and complex experiences within this process. Its study makes it possible to analyze the relevance of higher education institutions within public life and consider the UAG as a democratic sphere in Guerrero's political context.

*Keywords:* 1. *Universidad-Pueblo*, 2. higher education, 3. journalism, 4. democracy, 5. Guerrero, Mexico.

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza la relación entre Estado y universidad en el México de la década de 1970. Desde una perspectiva sociohistórica, se aborda el proyecto de Universidad-Pueblo, de la Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero (UAG). Estudiar este proyecto a través de la prensa escrita permite observar la forma en que algunas instituciones de educación superior y sus estudiantes propusieron modelos de universidad críticos, fuertemente articulados con las demandas sociales y movimientos de izquierda frente a un régimen político autoritario en el que las vías democrático institucionales de participación ciudadana estaban prácticamente cerradas. El proyecto de Universidad-Pueblo constituye una de las experiencias más radicales y complejas de este proceso y su estudio permite analizar la relevancia de las instituciones de educación superior dentro de la vida pública de los estados y considerar a la UAG como una esfera democrática al interior del contexto político del estado de Guerrero.

*Palabras clave:* 1. Universidad-Pueblo, 2. educación superior, 3. periodismo, 4. democracia, 5. Guerrero, México.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study presents the first reflections on a larger project around the public university's role in reconfiguring the State and Mexico's postrevolutionary politics. The objective is to understand the characteristics and role of popular university projects in Mexico (for instance, in Guerrero, Sinaloa, Nuevo León, and Puebla). Although these experiences were meaningful, this study sought to research and understand new cases of this radical trend within Mexican higher education. One premise of this study is that all these cases are deeply related, although that relationship needs to be explored in depth. However, Guerrero and Puebla's experiences stand out due to their temporal scope and socio-political relevance.

In twentieth-century Mexico, the relationship between local governments and political dissent was highly conflictive. One of the turning points of this dynamic took place in 1960 in the State of Guerrero, located in Mexico's southwest when the student and academia's demand to create an autonomous institution of higher learning found points of convergence with social groups who sought more profound social and political transformations. The *Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero* (UAG) [Autonomous University of Guerrero] was associated from the onset with opposing the governments' authoritarian structure and the arbitrary exercise of power in Mexico, which at some point made it the focal point of national political dissent and a constant challenge to the local and national government. We present a first approach to the conflict between the University in Guerrero and the State; its meaning to the slow construction of democracy as a matter of public discussion in Mexico, highlighting the relevance of journalism during the conflict and its role in shaping the UAG as an agent of socio-political change in southern Mexico.

Methodologically, this study is based on a review of documentary and newspaper sources, exploring the relevance of the written press in the conflict about the legitimization of the university project in Guerrero. The present study is not an exhaustive study of the publications since the purpose is not to characterize journals, newspapers, or journalistic careers. Notwithstanding, media consultation is the starting point to reconstruct the role of journalism in the debates around political participation and democracy based on the coverage of events in Guerrero during the study period.<sup>3</sup>

Given that the central issue is the relationship between university and State, most of the journalistic reports used are part of the files dedicated to the UAG in the *Fondo de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales del Archivo General de la Nación* [Political and social research repository of the General Archive of the Nation]. The notes prepared by

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<sup>3</sup> Similar studies of the period and the development of journalistic practice in Mexico are, in our opinion, essential as there is a lack of relevant publications in this regard. For a study as mentioned above, see Carlos Illades (2011).

the *Secretaría de Gobernación* (SEGOB) [Ministry of the Interior] during the mentioned dates consider national newspapers and are exhaustive, cross-checked with the source newspapers, and indicates the degree of interest on matters related to UAG by the Mexican government.

The observations are based on 28 in-depth interviews and numerous informal conversations with participants in the Guerrero university process, such as professors, students, and university authorities. However, emphasis is placed on written sources, leaving to future studies the analysis of the interviews in the formation of the memory of the university process.

As an exercise in systematization and criticism, the present study allows for the complexity and richness of both newspaper sources and the plurality of the voices and experiences in the memory of the university process in Guerrero, expressed in the different interviews carried out during the first two phases of fieldwork. In this regard, the main objective of this study is to present the main lines of conceptual observations to which this first systematization has led us.

#### SOCIETY AND UNIVERSITY IN THE STATE OF GUERRERO

During the 1950s, a group of young students from the *Colegio de Guerrero* repeatedly stated the importance of establishing a university in the State in order to broaden the knowledge areas open to students in the region and, above all, to integrate an autonomous educational institution with the freedom to establish its academic orientation and define its role as an actor in Guerrero society. Large sectors of the local society provided constant support to the university project. The *Universidad de Guerrero* [Guerrero University] was founded on March 30, 1960; all of this in the midst of a severe political crisis in the State (Sandoval Cruz, 1999).

In 1957, General Raúl Caballero Aburto assumed executive power in Guerrero state. His mandate was characterized by the determination to eliminate any difference of opinion or political dissent and the patrimonial and discretionary use of public resources. The level of opposition generated by Caballero Aburto and his government started a series of social movements that had a critical moment on October 31, 1960, when a massive demonstration took place in Chilpancingo, the state capital. University students were among the groups that joined the event. The two fundamental demands were the disappearance of powers in Guerrero and the establishment of university autonomy. At the moment, according to university professor and historian Mario García Cerros, the university's struggle became a student-popular movement (García Cerros, 1991, p. 102). With the general strike on November 7 in the state capital, the university's demands were joined by workers, industrialists, merchants, bankers, state and federal bureaucrats, and local teachers (García Cerros, 1991, p.101). Some of these groups formed the *Coalición*

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*de Organizaciones del Pueblo* (COP) [People's Organizations Coalition], which served as a space to formulate a common strategy to oppose Caballero Aburto's government.

The COP articulated five fundamental demands: the disappearance of powers in Guerrero; the implementation of the *Ley de Responsabilidades* [Responsibilities Law] on the governor;<sup>4</sup> the repeal of detrimental decrees to the population, the elimination of large estates, and the university's orientation toward the service of society and promotion of Guerrero's social, industrial, and political development. The bonds between the university and Guerrero's society interests were strengthened during this time of solidarity and civic participation, which gave rise to politicizing university life and set the institution's direction in the decades to come, reaching its peak of radicalization during the 1970s (García Cerros, 1991).

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<sup>4</sup> The declarative function of the disappearance of powers in Mexico is a constitutional precept that empowers the Federation to intervene in states in case of conflict. Manuel González Oropeza states that the disappearance of powers must be considered an extreme measure in resolving serious political conflict (1987, p. 85). The declaration of the disappearance of powers has been associated with criminal offenses by governors or local representatives. Official crimes are those harmful to public interests, established in the Responsibilities Law, and reviewed by impeachment proceedings. Official offenses include an attack on the republican, federally representative form of government; the assault on freedom of suffrage; the violation of individual rights, and any violation of the Constitution (González Oropeza, 1987).

Image 1. Petition document from Universidad de Guerrero students in 1960

Xavier Oléa Muñoz



**"Federación Estudiantil Universitaria Guerrerense"**

OFICINAS. EDIFICIO TELEFONO DE  
Chilpancingo, Gro. 21 de Octubre de 1960.

DEPENDENCIA.- Comité Ejecutivo.  
No. DE OFICIO.- 41.  
ASUNTO.- Pliego Petitorio.

**COMITE EJECUTIVO.**

José Araujo Hernández  
PRESIDENTE

José González Anudillo  
VICE-PRESIDENTE

Antonio Ortega Motezuma  
SRRO. GENERAL

Angélica Cuevas  
SRRO. DE HACIENDA

Araucario Castro Vega  
SRRO. DE CULTIVOS

Luz María Silva  
SRRO. DE FERIA Y FERIAJONES

José Calvo Vilca  
SRRO. DE ORO Y TRABAJOS

José Julio González  
SRRO. DEL EXTERIOR

Celso Villanar Miranda  
SRRO. DEL INTERIOR

Felipe Sandoval  
SRRO. DE ACCION SOCIAL

Isabel Villanar Ochoa  
SRRO. DE ACCION CULTURAL

Gustavo Arce Páez  
SRRO. DE ACCION POLITICA

Ana María Villalba  
SRRO. DE ACCION Y SERVICIOS

Esperanza Chedera  
SRRO. DE ACCION FEMENIL

Constantino Salas  
SRRO. DE ACCION JUVENIL

José Néstor Nájera  
SRRO. TRANSMISORES ESTUDIANTILES

Rafael Solís Calzada  
SRRO. DE SERVICIOS

SECRETARIS

Pedro Pastor Rodríguez  
Rafael Moreno

Sr. Gral. Raúl Caballero Aburto.  
Governador Constitucional del Edo.  
Palacio de Gobierno.

Un análisis minucioso de la situación de la Universidad de Guerrero nos hizo saber que su marcha era imposible por la existencia de problemas que minaban grandemente el aprovechamiento cultural del alumnado. Estos problemas exigen solución inmediata y efectiva, pues de lo contrario continuaría la situación caótica que viene afectando los intereses más sagrados de la Patria.

Los alumnos de esta Institución a través de su Comité de Huelga, exigen las siguientes soluciones:

- 1.- Se aprueben las Reformas de la Ley Organica de la Universidad que den completa Autonomía.
- 2.- Se aumente el subsidio de nuestra Institución a un total de cuatro millones de pesos, de parte del Estado.
- 3.- Se decrete como parte del Patrimonio de nuestra Institución, los inmuebles que ocupan: TALLERES DEL GOBIERNO DEL ESTADO, EL LIENZO DEL CUERPO, ESTADIO "ANDRÉS FIGUEROA", LAS CANCHAS DE BASKET BOLLY EL CASINO APOLONIO CASTILLO EL EDIFICIO QUE OCUPAN LAS INDUSTRIAS 1.2.3. Y EXTENSION DE DOMBEROS.
- 4.- Restitución de Decas.
- 5.- Se nos entregue de inmediato el camión de la Universidad.
- 6.- Destitución de la Junta de Gobierno, por que la mayoría de los integrantes carecen de los requisitos vitales que marca la Ley Organica.
- 7.- Renuncia inmediata del Rector, por carecer de requisitos elementales que lo faculten para serlo y por ser el responsable directo de la anarquía reinante en nuestra Institución.
- 8.- Plantas de maestros universitarios para las Escuelas Profesionales.
- 9.- Dotación de Material Didactico.

En espera de una solución inmediata que satisfaga nuestras peticiones por considerar que de ella depende el termino de nuestro movimiento, le reiteramos el deseo de dedicarnos al estudio integral para una mejor preparación.

A T E N T A M E N T E .

POR EL COMITE DE HUELGA PRO REFORMA Y CONSOLIDACION  
UNIVERSITARIA.

Source: Private collection Roberta Campos Adame.

The protest mobilization continued over the following weeks. On November 20, a silent march took place in Chilpancingo with more than 10,000 women and students from Guerrero participating, accompanied by students from two of the largest higher education institutions in Mexico, the *Instituto Politécnico Nacional* [National Polytechnic Institute], and the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM) [National Autonomous University of Mexico]. After the march, the permanent protest was organized in the Francisco Granados Maldonado avenue, across from the university's main building (Sandoval Cruz, 1999). On the 25th of that month, police and military officers evacuated citizens from the avenue and surrounded the university building. On November 27, the local legislature decreed the university's closure for an indefinite period since the university was considered the main bastion of the anticabalist struggle. Entire families organized to remain in a permanent assembly and to listen for information about the development of the struggle and the latest events (García Cerros, 1991, p. 115). Manifestations of support for the movement were replicated in other cities and towns in the State: some neighborhoods and towns sent money or food, while others organized protest demonstrations.

The student-popular movement reached December 30 in full force. Guerrero families were assembled in the Francisco Granados Maldonado avenue as had become customary in recent months. On that date, the army fired on citizens, leaving an undetermined number of people dead, including women and children. The immediate result of this tragic event was the destitution of the governor and the declaration of autonomy for the Guerrero University, now Autonomous University of Guerrero. Conversely, the bonds between different political and social groups and the university community were strengthened (García Cerros, 1991).

Thereafter, the university became an articulating axis of political opposition to the state government and a point of reference for leftist movements in Mexico. This trend was accentuated after 1972, when the institution adopted a markedly leftist pedagogical and social orientation: the *Universidad-Pueblo* project. In the words of one of its deans, the exercise of autonomy meant that university students should develop a serious questioning and critique of state policy by combining their civic attitude with the demand of fully respecting the Constitution since discussion in a public arena was one of the new norms of democratic governments (Revolution, 1977, p. 284).

The main objective of the Autonomous University of Guerrero was social transformation based on a project of broad democratization of higher and upper secondary education. Including seeking to establish a close relationship between the university community and rural and urban populations through concrete actions that put into practice the knowledge acquired in the classroom for the benefit of society, especially among groups with the most needs: If the people finance the university, it had to be at their service (Huerta, 1977, p. 8). Longterm, the decision to be an agent of social change, coupled with the association of some university students with different—and sometimes

contradictory—left-wing political groups, was the foundation by which during the entire 1970s and into the mid-1980s (González Ruiz, 1989), both local and national governments sought to attack, discredit, and reduce the scope of the university's social influence, which by 1972 was known as the *Universidad-Pueblo* project.<sup>5</sup>

Establishing a coherent and definitive concept of what the *Universidad-Pueblo* was historically is complicated, and therein lies the complexity and richness of such process. Historically, the idea of the university in nineteenth-century Europe was associated with the configuration of national states, the French, and mainly, the German, conformations gave the characteristic traits picked up in Latin America. According to Readings (1997), the German university fulfilled the role of incorporating the nascent bourgeoisie of the Prussian regime to avoid a revolutionary movement such as the one in France. Thus, the university would play the role of incorporating the nascent wage-earning and commercial class into the structure of the State and configuring the idea of the people's spirit: structuring the socio-political nation. In Mexico, this process would be expressed in UNAM's motto: *The spirit will speak for my race*. Although the development of this idea in the Mexican context is beyond the scope of this study, we can say that one of the roles of the modern university is the hegemonic incorporation of emerging sectors of State structures through culture and vocational training.

In postrevolutionary Mexico, the crisis of this mission was manifested in the 1968 student movement, which has been widely studied in journalistic and academic literature. In the context of the Cold War and the advance of leftist ideology in Latin America, the criticism of the university adds a classist element to it and its role in the reproduction of capitalism (Wences Reza, 1971; Burgueño, 1971; Tecla Jiménez, 1976). Although much has been written about the student movement in Mexico's capital, little has been written about the forms it acquired in other states, even obscuring the temporal prominence of local experiences, such as the cases of Michoacan and Guerrero (Gutiérrez López, 2011). Additionally, we found no studies addressing the relevance of the rural-teacher movement to establish murals later incorporated in universities, such as in Guerrero.

The concept of the *Universidad-Pueblo* from Guerrero would be inspired by the experiences and thinking of the Marxist-based leftist that formed the rural-teacher movement, the student movement of 1968, and the current influences on the ideological formation of its main figure: Dr. Rosalío Wences Reza.<sup>6</sup> Critics of the model, such as Esteban Dávalos Rueda (1999), pointed out that the *Universidad-Pueblo* was a radical

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<sup>5</sup> Similar experiences with different degrees of success would occur in the states of Puebla and Sinaloa. For Sinaloa, consult Sánchez Parra (2013), and for Puebla, review Tecla Jiménez (1976) and Yáñez Delgado (1988).

<sup>6</sup> Wences Reza's ideas about the concept of *Universidad-Pueblo* have their main sources in similar experiences in the Southern Cone (Argentina and Uruguay), especially in the thinking of Uruguayan Marxist Rodney Arismendi (1972). See Wences Reza (n.d.).

educational model in which the university's mission as an agent of social change would be to contribute to the transformation of the world, associate with the popular classes and give society the leadership it needed, and that the social revolution could be produced by the university (Dávalos Rueda, 1999, p. 53). According to Ávila Serrano (n.d.), Wences Reza would say that the hegemonic university:

has to yield to the *Universidad-Pueblo*, where academic and research activities are complemented by close contact with the society that gives it life. The *Universidad-Pueblo* will cease to be an elitist institution because it should not only be for the few people who get to the university through sacrifices; universities should go to the people and bring them to its bosom (Ávila Serrano, n.d., p. 75).

However, Wences Reza would stress that the vocation of the *Universidad-Pueblo* should be democratic, critical, and popular:

[...] in no way does the university belong to socialism or is for socialism. [...] The envisioned university intends to join efforts in the struggle to achieve a broad academic and democratic transformation within a capitalist society such as ours, to prepare the necessary conditions for the advent of socialism; but the carrying out of the revolution—socialist or bourgeois—is a task that falls to the social classes; and not higher education institutions (Wences Reza, s.f.b.).

Creating conditions for socialism by being near the people but also demarcating the university from the struggle. Contrary to seeing this as a sign of sterile incoherence, it is precisely this ideological ambiguity that will allow the UAG to become, as a *Universidad-Pueblo*, a relatively protected sphere of criticism and democratic experiences in a strongly authoritarian and repressive environment. Spaces would be generated within the university for different ideological perspectives and social demands from different political and popular sectors to be articulated and presented to the State and society. The UAG established itself as a democratic, although delimited, public sphere (Habermas, 1981).

At the end of the 1970s, the scientific role was added to the critical and democratic role of the University: *The Universidad-Pueblo: Critical, Scientific, Democratic, and Popular*. These objectives would be reflected in the *Ley Universitaria de la UAG de 1978* [UAG University Law of 1978]. This emphasis on science sought to rescue the academic element at a time when education was subordinate to political struggles in and from the university, primarily as a result of the constant and violent attack by the State and its efforts to stifle and vanish the UAG, and would reach its peak during the administration of Jesús Reyes Heróles as head of the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* [Ministry of Public Education] (1982-1985) (González Ruiz, 1989).

As pointed out in previous paragraphs, Guerrero's *Universidad-Pueblo* project's ideological and practical configuration is multifaceted and contradictory; it is beyond the scope of this paper to address it in its totality. However, the democratic, critical, and

popular nature of the university was what would attract the animosity of the State; the conflict would develop around the premise of UAG's public opinion representations.

In the following sections, we focus on a period of State-University conflict: the year 1976, emphasizing the relationship between written journalism, popular-university mobilization, and the significance that such dynamics had in democracy's transformation as a public issue in Mexico.

*We do not want to study; we want to be guerrillas*

A growing political radicalization characterized Latin America's twentieth-century student movement due to increasing authoritarianism and dictatorial regimes in the region (Feixa, Saura & Costa, 2002; Walker, 2013; Langland, 2013). The students from Guerrero were not the exception. A mural on a university wall that read *We do not want to study; we want to be guerrillas*, became the touchstone used by Guerrero's government to begin a period of intense confrontation with the UAG. The local government's determination to link the university with the guerrillas was a constant in its quest to challenge its legitimacy as an institution of higher education and to justify any action against it.

Even though different factions existed within the university, at the beginning of the 1970s one of these groups achieved sufficient consensus to establish a general goal of forming a democratic, critical, and popular institution (over time, they would add the scientific adjective). This goal was set in 1972, following the federal government's attack on the 1968 and 1971 student movements. However, the political interaction between the university and popular movements in Guerrero preceded the 1968 events by almost a decade. Those who supported the development of a university involved in Guerrero's public life pointed out that the UAG was the product of a popular struggle that cost the lives of many local democratic people (Rojas Delgado, 1973b, n.p.). The 1960 events were still recent history in the State and had generated a process of interaction between popular politics and leftist ideologies (Aviña, 2014, p.7).

After legal and civic actions demanding changes in the Mexican government's structure failed before state violence, some groups considered that the only alternative was to take up arms, in line with the different national liberation movements in Latin America after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s. In 1976, when the confrontation between the State and higher education institutions entered a particularly bitter phase, the two most powerful guerrilla groups in the history of postrevolutionary Mexico were present in Guerrero and opposed the Mexican political system.<sup>7</sup> The reaction

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<sup>7</sup> These were the *Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria* [National Revolutionary Civic Association](ACNR), led by Genaro Vázquez Rojas, and the *Partido de los Pobres* [Party of the Poor](PDP), led by Lucio Cabañas Barrientos, both rural teachers. (Glockner, 2019; Aviña, 2014; Mayo, 2006).

of the local government to the guerrillas—supported by the federal government—,was unrelenting, exacerbating the violence that was already a feature of relations between the authorities and Guerrero society. The portrayal of the guerrilla fighters as criminals sought to justify the absence of any legal framework regulating the government’s actions and the ferocity of the conflict.

Within the diverse ideological and interest groups in the UAG, some sympathized, supported, and even participated actively with the guerrilla groups. However, the university authorities were careful to maintain and specify their separation from these armed groups. The university was critical, but its authorities considered its mission to transform society through education and citizenship training, expressed by its adjectives Democratic, Critical, and Popular. The expressed vocation of the university made it the most critical voice of the local government, resulting, in the early 1970s, in Guerrero’s governor, legislatures, and other authorities undertaking a systematic campaign to link the university with the guerrillas and with the violence in the State.

Then governor, Ruben Figueroa Figueroa, stated that Lucio Cabañas was the university’s military arm (Sandoval Ramírez, 1973, n.p.), and that forming guerrillas was an institutional goal. This was one of the governor’s most controversial declarations against the university, which clarified his administration’s attitude toward the university. The six years of his administration were characterized by clashes and constant aggression between dissent, the university, and the local government. This conflict unfolded in the local and national press.

Spring 1976 began with students and professors marching from Chilpancingo, the state capital, to Mexico City to present a series of demands to the federal authorities related to the economic resources that both the federal and State governments had committed to delivering annually to the institution and to denounce the attacks on the university’s autonomy by Guerrero’s government. Among the most relevant issues to address was the return of the Higher School of Agriculture facilities, which had been transformed by legislative decree into the Higher Agricultural and Livestock Institute of the State of Guerrero, under the control of the local government.

The appearance of eight abducted students was demanded. The respect for autonomy and the democratic process experienced by the UAG since 1972, when substantial changes in university orientation were made, was paramount (*El Universal*, 1976, p. 66). Although the goal was to obtain clear answers and solutions from the federal authorities about the economic situation and future of the university, the student and professor’s march also sought to make Mexican citizens aware of the institution’s challenges and, in general, the political conflicts surrounding the State of Guerrero.

The national press followed Guerrero’s events closely, and both actors, the university and the local authorities, presented their versions of the conflict to the national public through different media. *Avance*, *Ovaciones*, and *Excélsior*’s editorialists pointed out that

Governor Rubén Figueroa Figueroa had launched an in-depth offensive against the university since 1975. Descriptions of this offensive are disturbing. The local government wanted to control the university and spared no expense on either the type or number of resources or the violence exerted to achieve it: kidnapping students and teachers, forced entry into facilities by the State Judicial Police, or legislative decrees that violated university assets.

The demonstration was supported by peasants and workers from different groups and by citizens of Guerrero. According to the report by Antonio Caram, journalist from the newspaper *Ovaciones* (1976b), a rally to support the university cause held in the *Plaza de la Bandera* in Iguala attracted more than 3,000 people. Students from UNAM and the National Polytechnic Institute also joined the cause. Although official sources state that the number of demonstrators in the march was less than 500, media sources consistently estimate it to be more than 1,000 (*Avance*, 1976).

Although the march failed to reach Mexico City because university authorities, led by Dean Arquímedes Morales Carranza (1975-1978), agreed with the federal government to increasing subsidies and regularizing university assets, this escalated the conflict with the local government. Journalist Antonio Caram claimed that Governor Figueroa Figueroa had an undisguised intention to annul the university's autonomy and seize control of it (*Ovaciones*, 1976b, p. 64). Figueroa Figueroa's undisguised intentions would become a constant affirmation from the press' perspective, from multiple mass democratic organizations, and the university itself.

On May 20, 1976, the Higher School of Agriculture's Assembly published an article in the newspaper *Excélsior* that exposed "to Mexico's university community" the State's repression on educational aims and activities that linked the UAG with "the working class"; supporting "the working classes struggles against those who exploit and oppress them" (*Excélsior*, 1976h, p. 105). Even though the university students and staff had different nuances and positions that easily reached conflict, they considered the UAG a democratic institution with a political vocation based on revolutionary theory but independent of political parties and other movements.

This democratic vocation entailed recognizing the diversity of positions within the university. However, the struggle for social change, said dean Morales Carranza, must be based on a consensus capable of mobilizing all university students and staff "toward constructing a democratic movement leading to a revolutionary movement" (*Excélsior*, 1976e, n.p.). Words suitable for a dean but difficult to formalize when within the university groups were accusing the parties, especially the Mexican Communist Party (PC), of hindering the revolutionary advance and student struggle in Guerrero due to its "Trotskyist policy".

Two schools of thought contended the university's direction. On the one hand, some considered that the university should be limited to academic work to train professionals

to participate in the State's economic development process, outside of all political activity. While others considered the university a catalyst of change to be involved with social problems, entailing not only the discussion of ideas but also political participation; factions within this last group hoped to transform the university into a support element for the socialist revolution's success. In contrast, another faction within that group was more concerned with modifying socio-political conditions based on the parameters of modern democracy (Dávalos Rueda, 1999).

Despite these differences, journalists sympathetic to the internal renewal process of the university asserted that studying takes place at UAG, and the administration has focused on creating a democratic environment where the ideological and political inclinations of students and faculty develop with freedom (Rojas Delgado, 1973b, n.p.). The university was a space attempting to practice the ideals of democratic participation developed in America's 1960s and 1970s social movements. During these years, the importance of establishing more equitable discussion environments and inclusive decision-making methods began to be discussed (Knappe, 2017). From this perspective, the university had to transform itself from within based on participatory norms.

Those who proposed and supported the *Universidad-Pueblo* project sought to institutionalize the permanent participation of the community in the election of authorities (universal university vote), as well as in making decisions through deliberations in assemblies and collegial bodies (Technical Councils within the different schools and faculties and the University General Council) to allow for the consideration of the diversity of points of view within the university. Although the process eventually gave way to clientelistic patrimonial power within the institution, the proposals were based on student participation experiences promoted by professors with a long political commitment to revolutionary change.

Contrary to the dominant social reality within the UAG, it was possible to begin articulating new forms of freedom of expression and levelness as fundamental elements of an incipient idea of participatory democracy emerged within speeches with much more radical revolutionary roots in its objectives. It was a democratizing and didactic process of university life beyond revolutionary discourse. Democratic values were transmitted to students through experience in the different forms of political participation, even when they were not articulated discursively in that way. Students acquired the skills to debate, demand rights, and participate in constructing a more just society.

In the following section, the importance of the struggle for legitimizing the university movement at the local and national levels is addressed, highlighting the role of the written press's representation of the Guerrero student struggle.

## JOURNALISM AND LEGITIMIZATION OF GUERRERO'S UNIVERSITY MOVEMENT

During the 1960s and 1970s, Mexican higher education institutions considered themselves environments where freedom of expression, equity, and participation were articulated as fundamental elements in a democratic idea that aspired to argumentation and deliberation of the decision-making process. This process democratized university life and was didactic since it entailed transmitting civic values to students, who would acquire the skills to demand rights and participate in constructing a more equitable society (Knappe, 2017).

At the time, different newspapers followed the events related to the universities. In UAG, editorials and analysis notes provided context, but they also interpreted information from a political perspective (Palti, 1998). Therefore, the media's information on events helped mobilize society for concrete political purposes, such as demands for justice and democracy.

In 1976, the Political and Social Research Department of SEGOB considered that the student issue was the most acute of all Guerrero's problems. That statement had a foundation. That year on November 24, the national press reported the kidnapping of four high school students from *Preparatoria 10* in Iguala municipality, a high school dependent on UAG. The story was broken by Rafael Mora Gómez, a researcher at the Higher School of Agriculture, who told the newspaper *El Sol de México* that the state government tried to connect the students with a kidnapping that took place a few days before in Iguala.

The Guerrero University Student Federation denounced the army's actions, demanded that they leave the State, and expressed their condemnation of the systematic repression of any democratic manifestation by the local government, especially against the UAG. The accusations about the kidnapping of other students by the army and judicial police, most of them from Acapulco's *Preparatoria 7* (*Últimas Noticias*, 1976, n.p.), were rerun in November press releases. Of particular relevance was the kidnapping, which was later explained as detention by local authorities of Professor Eloy Cisneros Guillén in Ometepec. To the university, Cisneros Guillén was an advocate of university autonomy and an academic committed to connecting the university with the people by creating literacy centers and medical dispensaries in communities and ranches. According to the UAG's Professors' Union, this relationship with the people had earned him the hostility of the local despot and the army in the area (*Excelsior*, 1976f). A few days later, the Professors' Union denounced the disappearance of Jesús Heriberto Noriega Cantú, a professor at the School of Architecture, and Lucía Lozano, a student from the School of Nursing. Although the union described these detentions and kidnappings as an act of provocation, the Independent and Democratic Journalists Union from Guerrero depicted these acts as violations of individual rights (*Excelsior*, 1976g).

In the weeks that followed, newspaper articles by members of the UAG continued, and others soon followed them from groups affiliated with the government. The first was signed by students from the *Instituto Superior Agropecuario del Estado de Guerrero* [Higher Agricultural and Livestock Institute of the State of Guerrero]—an institute created by the local government based on the Higher School of Agriculture—accusing the UAG of being a mixture of cynicism, crime, and lies (*El Heraldo de México*, 1976, n.p.). Governor Figueroa Figueroa declared before the private initiative that violence and kidnappings are produced in schools, a clear allusion to the university and its high school system.

The exchange of accusations in national newspapers intensified at the end of December 1976. That year, Guerrero's Attorney General's Office named Eloy Cisneros Guillen as boss of guerrilla commando *Carmelo Cortéz* of the Revolutionary Armed Forces—a guerrilla group that branched from the Party of the Poor, with a presence in the touristic port of Acapulco—and as the intellectual and material author of the abduction and murder of Hermelindo Tiburcio Velasco Ibarra. The victim's family published a display in *Excélsior* demanding “justice, rights, and security in Guerrero.” In this document, the family mention Cisneros Guillén with extraordinary detail and assert that Cisneros Guillén confessed that he and Professor Noriega Cantú, both UAG teachers, were leaders of a guerrilla group dedicated to kidnapping. The link between the institution and these people was direct since the Velasco family firmly stated that “Guerrero University is full of criminals” and demanded that the Presidency of the Republic and the governor, Figueroa Figueroa, “put an end to the threat of the kidnapers who emerged from the UAG” (*Excélsior*, 1976a, p. 248).

The state government adhered to its statements and positions and sought the best way to sustain them. In 1977, prosecutor Carlos Ulises Acosta Viques stated that the entity's study centers were nothing more than criminal hideouts and endeavored to find links between the detainees, the university, and guerrilla groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the People's Revolutionary Peasant Armed Vanguard, pointing out the relationships with political groups outside the State, such as within the Federal District (*Excélsior*, 1976c). Afterward, flyers appeared plastered on city walls in Ometepec demanding the release of Cisneros Guillén and bearing the signatures of the university, the Communist Party, the 23rd September League, the Francisco Villa command, and the Lucio Cabañas brigade. Immediately, the state government made accusations, and university authorities denied them, indicating that the flyers were fake. In an official notice, the dean, Morales Carranza, stated that the university was not a political group; we know that the problems in the official circle force them to commit criminal acts shielding themselves in the university (Huerta, 1977, p. 8). On this occasion, even the Communist Party separated itself from the situation.

Through an article published in the press, titled *Subsidy to UAG to carry out terrorism and kidnappings?*, Ometepec authorities and community committees supported the local

government's version of guerrilla-university relations, citing the People's Revolutionary Armed Vanguard as "a subversive group, formed and tolerated within the UAG, and perhaps even inspired by institutional students and teachers". However, this document clarifies that the university's problem lies in its members' decision "to practice socialism" (*Excelsior*, 1976b, p. 252; *Excelsior*, 1976d). Other observers, such as Alejandro Miguel, mentioned governor Rubén Figueroa Figueroa "as an authoritarian character who speaks about the university as a subversion center" and the man responsible for circulating this type of flyers. In Alejandro Miguel's opinion, the accusations were false. They pointed only to "a war on the university" because no evidence had been presented against the institution. The governor had shielded himself with the same old and discredited visions of visceral anti-communism. Those who sided with the university, from the dean to national press journalists, agreed that the cause of the government's hostility was the "UAG's critical attitude" and its decision to establish links and solidarity with Guerrero's society, especially "with those who are victims of an unjust social system of predation and pretense" (*Ovaciones*, 1976a, p. 228).

Alejandro Miguel was part of a group of journalists willing to take up the pen to comment on life and the university's problems, supporting the right of university students to participate in public life, and insist on the structural causes of violence in Guerrero. The origin of the violence was "the social system and the despotic way of governing, the injustice, poverty, and ignorance" afflicting Guerrero society. Journalist Eduardo T. Vaughan supported these statements in early 1977, when he presented *Excelsior* readers an assessment of the relationship between the government and the university over the previous years, emphasizing the increase of the government's reactions: the occupation of facilities had escalated to the disappearance and illegal detention of students and teachers (Vaughan, 1977).

In this context of socio-political instability and tension, the relationship between the university and the guerrillas was complex; although formally non-existent, the diversity of ideological stances within the university evidenced its validity and demonstrated the seriousness of the State's political situation, it provided a credible basis for the government's accusations against the educational institution. Repeatedly, at the height of the conflict, the governor or a government official made public allusions to this relationship. In September 1975, Governor Figueroa Figueroa insisted that "ever since the time of Rosalío Wences [former UAG dean] to date, the university has been used to indoctrinate young people and transform them into guerrillas" (*Punto Crítico*, 1975, p. 17), referring to the dean's statements a couple of years prior.

In 1973, a group of judicial agents violently entered university facilities. After the kidnapping of future Governor Rubén Figueroa Figueroa by the Party of the Poor, then-governor Israel Noguera Otero led a rally in the "Plaza Cívica" in Chilpancingo, in front of the university, to condemn the actions of the group led by Lucio Cabañas. Some

students tried to read a manifesto simultaneously with the governor's message, taking advantage of the fact that the national press media were witnessing the event (Rojas Delgado, 1973a).

Guerrero's police chief ordered a group of judicial agents to arrest the students and occupy university facilities, where they beat the students, and even the dean, Rosalío Wences Reza. University authorities responded by convening a University Council meeting; the Council demanded the disappearance of powers in the State, which meant demanding the dismissal of Governor Nogueta. The dean informed reporters and commentators of the Council's decisions and mentioned a telegram sent to President Luis Echeverría denouncing the actions of Guerrero's government, but also stating the human right to take up arms by Lucio Cabañas in a country in which the ruling elite failed to respect laws and rights (Rojas Delgado, 1973a). The relevance of this event was that the journalistic coverage allowed the university authorities to report directly on the university's situation, as well as its position on the political situation in the State, which involved the guerrillas, and to challenge the exercise of power in Mexico appealing to the Constitution, and mentioning the official crimes committed by the governor.

The previous was one of the strongest complaints by the UAG in recent years. However, indications about government decisions also included the use of public resources. In an interview that dean Rosalío Wences Reza granted the magazine *Punto Crítico*, he asserted that "people within the state government" were behind the attacks on the university and that he had learned that more than "a quarter-million pesos" had been spent in just a few months paying for displays several times per week in local and national newspapers such as *Excelsior* and *El Universal*. Wence Reza considered that only groups supported by the state government could pay these amounts for political propaganda. The media campaign, which also had some episodes in the television news, combined with the university authorities' interrogation and attacks on autonomy, allowed the dean to state that there was "a desire on the part of the state government authorities to harm the University" (*Punto Crítico*, 1974, pp. 36-37).

Even moderate journalists considered Governor Figueroa Figueroa's objective of controlling university policy "almost impossible to achieve;" they constantly warned about the harmful effects of this permanent confrontation. In the opinion of some journalists, such as Miguel Arroche, the issue came down to a power struggle between two actors who sought to extend their responsibilities beyond their limits. Others, such as Rodrigo de la Huerta, acknowledged the causes of violence, especially justice system omission and vices, but considered this confrontation as one of the causes of political instability in Guerrero (De la Huerta and Peguerros, 1976).

Miguel Arroche Parra saw the dispute in a national political context and criticized the university's attempt "to project itself not as the institution that it is, but as a center of political decision, like a political party because it lacks censors" (Arroche Parra, 1977,

pp. 259-260), a clear allusion to the university's autonomy that allowed it to act as the axis of political dissidence, as a space for interaction and, above all, because of the economic resources at its disposal. Concerned about restoring constitutional order in Guerrero, Arroche Parra points out that instability was a firm basis for the guerrillas, but also for the cultivation of drugs, that justified the army's presence, which in his opinion "would not lead to a democratic solution, but an aggravation of all kinds of problems" (1977, p. 259-260).

As we have seen throughout this section, whether in favor or against, it was clear to public opinion that one of Guerrero's most important political and social actors was the university.

### CONCLUSIONS: THE *UNIVERSIDAD-PUEBLO* AS A DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC SPHERE

In the 1970s, the socio-political situation in Guerrero was so complex and violent that even a press limited by the authoritarianism of the Mexican government had the opportunity to follow the events in that State. Academics became involved in journalistic tasks in 1976 due to the offensive by the Guerrero government against the university, and they tried to take full advantage of the traditional role of journalism as an examiner of government actions, working hard to counter the State's strategies to manipulate public opinion.

Deans and academics repeatedly mentioned that the university was a space for "serious criticism" inclusive within the parameters of democracy, which it considered the ideal government system. However, this democratic ideal required dialogue and information. Given that the government was opposed to this possibility, academics and journalists focused on two of the elements necessary for its construction: communicating directly with the population through assemblies and rallies and publishing press releases to avoid distorting information.

On the other hand, the written press sought allies to provide the population more accurate reports on the situation in Guerrero, accompanied by editorials that clarified confusing points in the events and urged people to ponder the information about the events, and in the best of cases, join the university's struggle. By presenting facts and reasons as widely as possible, academics, both from educational institutions and from the press, hoped to educate the population not only on reflective practices but, above all, on civic responsibilities (Dzur, 2002).

The insistence of Guerrero's government to equate the university with the guerrillas as a means to justify attacks on its autonomy and to eliminate the idea of the university as a space for social transformation was done with such animosity that they allowed local events to remain within the scope of the national press. The experience of 1968 and 1976 caused journalists to follow the State-University conflict. Some of them took on analyzing

the actions and statements of the local government, pointing out the lack of consistency and evidence in the attacks against university students and the UAG in general.

Despite internal divisions, the university aspired to transform society by involving citizens in criticizing excesses of power and demanding justice and legality, among other actions. Although the university sought to create an environment conducive to students acquiring the skills to argue and demand respect for the Constitution and to denounce injustice, access to information by ordinary citizens was a fundamental task. The purpose of the demonstrations, assemblies, and the decision of academics and journalists to keep publishing news articles was to represent the university community before the Mexican public; they also sought “to educate members of society who doubted the value of their interests, objectives, and perspectives or that were scarcely aware of them“ (Dzur, 2002, p. 329).

As pointed out by Albert W. Dzur, the role of journalism is limited in democratic practice. However, it is very relevant concerning the monitoring and criticism of public affairs. The participation of the press was especially notable in Mexico because it was almost the only arena together with autonomous institutions of higher education that was able to oppose government decisions systematically.

The university’s strongest and most active groups considered themselves agents of social transformation and democratization of political life. This opinion was shared by the local government and by commentators who published their writings in nationally circulating newspapers; the local government tried to limit the influence and scope of the university as much as possible. The interrelationship between the university and print media and the exchange between journalists, academics, and the university community were part of a “public conversation” that included, albeit limitedly, deliberation, differences of opinion, and argumentation.

The exchange of ideas resulting from newspaper publication was an essential element for forming a participatory democracy and laying the foundations of deliberative democracy to guide decision-making both within the university and, more importantly, in the national socio-political environment.

In the words of an observer from that time, “the UAG influences and is influenced. Moreover, this appears as an intolerable situation, as a disdain for the deification of the rulers” (*Ovaciones*, 1976a, p. 228). The decision of the UAG community to take the dispute with the local government to the national arena with the printed media opened the possibility of increased coverage and dissemination of political events in Guerrero.

Reporters and editorialists demanded the respect of the public university, arguing that it should be a space of criticism and an agent of social change. All of this occurred at a time when public affairs discussions and political dissent were beginning to be regarded as indispensable practices of democratic governments. Amid the debate, local

governments such as Guerrero opposed these ideas and defended the scope of their practice with fierce determination.

The *Universidad-Pueblo* project in Guerrero constituted a radical socio-political experiment in which citizen criticism and struggle were expressed due to the closure of public space, in which political participation through legal and democratic-institutional channels was practically impossible. Faced with a violent and authoritarian corporatist political system ruled by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the UAG and its *Universidad-Pueblo* project was a relatively strong but limited democratic public sphere from which different social sectors were able to protect, defend, organize, and coordinate themselves while articulating their demands with the State and other dominant sectors. The previous was especially important considering Guerrero's traditionally authoritarian and patrimonial use of power.

The university's representation in the press was fundamental in achieving a national dimension in the diverse and old demands for justice and socio-economic distribution; through the strategy of projecting the UAG positively in Mexican society and constructing a democratic public sphere through the debate of its representations. This dispute influenced the reconfiguration of discourse and political debate in postrevolutionary Mexico, contributing to its slow democratization.

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