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## “They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s

### Abstract

This article addresses the insurgency and counterinsurgency Mexican phenomenon in the 1970s by studying “rumor” and “distrust” as strategies for dismantling insurgent organizations. It is methodologically grounded in triangulation of interviews with militants, hemerographic archives, and official documents of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS). Also, it generally outlines the relationship of militants who participated in the founding generation of the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre in northern Mexico and examines the nature of the most recurrent political violence actions in its early years. Finally, it thinks through political repression procedures in the decade under study.

**Keywords:** Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre; Insurgent Organizations; Counterinsurgency; Political Repression; Political Violence.

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“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
Alicia de los Ríos Merino

## “Matavam uns aos outros.” O rumor e a desconfiança: duas armas na contrainsurgência do México dos anos 1970

### Resumo

Este artigo aborda o fenômeno insurgente e contrainsurgente do México dos anos 1970 tomando por base o estudo do “rumor” e da “desconfiança” como estratégias de desarticulação de organizações insurgentes. Apoia-se metodologicamente na triangulação de entrevistas com militantes, arquivos hemerográficos e documentos oficiais da Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS), do México. Traça, também, de modo geral, a vinculação dos militantes que compuseram a geração fundadora da Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre no norte do país e analisa o caráter das ações de violência política mais recorrentes em seus primeiros anos de existência. Por fim, reflete sobre os processos de repressão política na década em estudo.

**Palavras-chave:** Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre; Organización Insurgente; Contrainsurgência; Repressão Política; Violência Política.

## “Se mataban entre ellos.” El rumor y la desconfianza: dos armas en la contrainsurgencia del México de los años 1970

### Resumen

Este artículo aborda el fenómeno insurgente y contrainsurgente del México de los años 1970 desde el estudio del “rumor” y la “desconfianza” como estrategias de desarticulación de organizaciones insurgentes. Se sustenta metodológicamente en la triangulación de entrevistas a militantes, archivos hemerográficos y documentos oficiales de la Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS). También traza de forma general la vinculación de los militantes que compusieron la generación fundadora de la Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre en el norte del país y analiza el carácter de las acciones de violencia política más recurrentes en sus primeros años de existencia. Por último, reflexiona sobre los procesos de represión política en la década estudiada.

**Palabras clave:** Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre; Organización Insurgente; Contrainsurgencia; Represión política; Violencia Política.

The 1970s are a time of turning on the sophistication of counterinsurgency strategies in Mexico. Security agencies (at the head of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad, DFS) designed a series of mechanisms that fostered distrust and rumor within opposition political organizations. In order to grasp such strategies, this article examines the collective action of militants of the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre in a predominantly urban setting and it pays special attention to the most recurrent political violence practices of this organization in the 1970s and the implication of those actions on specific population sectors.

“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
Alicia de los Ríos Merino

The way how these actions were interpreted by public opinion, security agencies, and the political and economic elites in northern Mexico are analyzed. Likewise, the subjects who participated in the founding generation of the Liga in the northern country are characterized, the procedures linking them to the organization are outlined, and their primary and most usual forms of interaction with the State’s Fuerzas Armadas. Then, I focus on rumor and distrust as weapons to dismantle insurgency and the main resort for physical and psychological torture of political prisoners. Finally, there are my conclusions, where some general reflections on political repression procedures aimed at the Mexican counterinsurgency are exposed.

### Retention as a recurrent practice of political violence

Among the political violence practices proposed by insurgent organizations<sup>1</sup>, kidnapping businessmen, politicians, and diplomats was usual in the early 1970s. For instance, on May 5, 1973 in Guadalajara, Jal., a commando of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias del Pueblo (FARP) kidnapped Terrance Leonhardy, U.S. consul in this city. After give in to the demands of the FARP, the Mexican government paid four million pesos and facilitated the transfer of about thirty political prisoners to Cuba. The consul was released two days later.

Following this achievement, militants of the newly created Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre (LC23S)<sup>2</sup>, specifically those belonging to the group known as “Los Macías”

<sup>1</sup> Resume the category *insurgent organization* proposed by historians Jorge Holguín and Miguel Reyes in *La Insurgencia urbana en Colombia: accionar colectivo del M-19 en Cali, 1974-1985* (in press), in order to characterize the collective actions of the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre in Mexico. The authors make a restrictive use of the term “guerrilla,” which they regard as: “a fundamentally descriptive category of a specific collective action form within a broader repertoire of political violence.” This allows advancing towards a comprehensive understanding of collective armed and unarmed actions taken by these organizations, ranging from offensive actions, such as military attacks on security forces and kidnapping of wealthy people, to nonmilitary work aimed at their internal and external structures, such as the politicization and radicalization of potentially revolutionary population sectors, in order to advance towards taking over State power. I presented an early version of this text in the II Coloquio de Movimientos Sociales, Dirección de Estudios Históricos, INAH, in November 2014; I thank Eduardo Flores Clair for encouraging the existence of this text, as well as Gerardo Necoechea and Jorge Albeiro Holguín for their observations, suggestions, and continuing reading.

<sup>2</sup> The LC23S was formally founded on March 15, 1973, when representatives of about a dozen armed political groups clandestinely met in Guadalajara to constitute this national organization. There was consensus among them regarding the main purpose of its political activity: establish socialism through armed

“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
*Alicia de los Ríos Merino*

from northeastern Mexico, suggested within the organization to kidnap Eugenio Garza Sada, president of the Grupo Monterrey’s Consorcio Industrial Cervecería. In the first foundation meeting, they made a number of decisions to politically and militarily harass the Mexican State and the bourgeoisie. Among the actions to this end, kidnapping characters who would ideally be exchanged for money and political prisoners stands out.

One of those chosen was Eugenio Garza Sada, from Monterrey. This entrepreneur was born on January 11, 1892, in Monterrey city, one of the most industrialized in the country. He was the second son of a family that went into exile in the USA in the beginning of the revolutionary armed conflict in 1910. He studied engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and came back in 1917 to work in Cervecería Cuauhtémoc, a company which had his father as a shareholder and decades later it would become the parent company in a business group belonging to the same Garza family.

Precursor and ideologist of progress in northern Mexico, he created the civil society “Enseñanza e investigación superior” (EISAC), which would later become the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM). Sponsor of baseball teams both of the Red Cross, firefighters, and students in Monterrey, he became a symbol among northern entrepreneurs (CERUTTI, 2000). His role as industrial patriarch of the Grupo Monterrey and social conservative leader influenced so heavily that he was chosen in 1973 by militants of the LC23S as a subject who could be exchanged with the Mexican government.<sup>3</sup>

The members of the Liga who prepared the action planned to demand 5 million pesos in ransom and the release of a group of political prisoners. On the morning of September 17, 1973, a commando of six young individuals attempted to kidnap Garza Sada when he was heading to the office. The operation went out of control due to a shootout between the entrepreneur’s bodyguards and the militants. Caught in the

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struggle and create a proletarian party. All of them were young people under thirty years of age. Most of them were men and belonged to small groups from cities across the country, mainly in the northern region and the Federal District.

<sup>3</sup> Various biographical texts were read, and this article was based on information online from the ITESM <http://www.pegs.com.mx/semblanza.htm>, accessed on May 20, 2015.

“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
Alicia de los Ríos Merino

crossfire, Garza Sada –then aged 81 years–, and his bodyguards and driver died, as well as Anselmo Herrera Chávez and Javier Rodríguez Torres, members of the Liga.

The condemnation of this insurgent organization was quick. Tens of thousands attended his funeral. The industrial group in Monterrey, the Church, and politicians required that the then president Luis Echeverría Álvarez took prompt action against those responsible, accusing his government of failing to be tough on the “radical fanatics.” The national newspaper *La Prensa* characterized those responsible for the entrepreneur’s murder as “alienated fanatics (...) a minority of eternal protesters who want to solve everything by violence, as they are unable to use reason” (GAMIÑO, 2011, 108-109).<sup>4</sup> In the same note it is suggested to the authorities to punish in an exemplary manner by court rulings.

However, it is noteworthy that along investigations the existence of the LC23S was not referred to as an organization opposing the regime. According to Gamiño, such an omission had a primary purpose:

(...) pretend to be unaware of the armed phenomenon. The strategy consisted in denying the existence of a new organization operating at the national level and managed to amalgamate various unconnected groups. Unawareness and denial had two goals: reducing the operational capacity of the organization and apologize the deployment of police-military and intelligence systems to fight the threat that this organization represented nationally (GAMIÑO, 2012).

Given this demand for exemplary punishment, police investigation –publicly disseminated by the press– pointed out as responsible some members of a radical group associated with the Liga Comunista Espartaco and formed in 1967 by Mónico Rentería and Salvador Corral. In this eligibility of culpable individuals there was one exception: the arrest of Elías Orozco Salazar, who participated in the attempted kidnapping, whose capture occurred on 6 October in Popo Park, a location near Mexico City, under circumstances that were seemingly unrelated to the investigation of the case Garza

<sup>4</sup> Gamiño takes a note from the newspaper *La Prensa*, published on September 19, 1973, as well as an opinion column entitled “Editoriales,” with no author specified, published on the next day.

“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
 Alicia de los Ríos Merino

Sada.<sup>5</sup> Ten days later, Mónico was arrested by federal judicial police officers in a location in Durango, accused of masterminding the kidnap and murder of Garza Sada. Even confirming that most of those accused were not involved in the attempted kidnapping, they were sent to jail.

### Los Macías before and after the LC23S

Salvador Corral García and Mónico Rentería Medina met in Mexico City in 1967. Salvador was attending the second year of medical school at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Mónico was an elementary school teacher. They participated in popular movements and political organizations, inspired by the theory of the Cuban guerrilla board to create a revolutionary group. A year later they were joined by Edmundo Medina Flores; the three men were from the northern Mexico. At first, the group had no name, but they were later identified as “Los Macías.” Soon there were divisions.

In 1970, Salvador knew Elías Orozco Salazar, agricultural engineer and member of a guerrilla group operating in Monterrey. This group carried out a robbery at the General Electric offices. Corral García said he had not participated in that action, but received sixty thousand pesos, half of them were given to Mónico. After the robbery at the General Electric plant in Monterrey, Los Macías went up again to the mountain region of Durango, where they decided to expel Mónico from the group he had formed, due to differences that seemed irreconcilable back then.

Edmundo took leadership of the group. Mónico settled in the region of Comarca Lagunera to engage in teaching and management among peasants while Salvador and Edmundo strengthened relationships with young people in Monterrey, who acted in a coordination named as La Partidaria, forerunner of the LC23S. Salvador said that in 1972 and a part of 1973 lived in the cities of Monterrey, Chihuahua, and Durango, recruiting and politicizing new members for the organization.

<sup>5</sup> Military committees of the LC23S were assembled in the Popo Park camp, in the state of Mexico. The meeting was discovered on October 5, 1973, some individuals managed to escape and others were arrested. During the confrontation, the safety officer of the meeting was killed, Alfonso Rosas, alias “Arturo.” The arrival of police forces to the meeting resulted in a series of allegations, accusations, and distrust among the participants who belonged to various state or regional groups.



“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
Alicia de los Ríos Merino

According to survivors’ accounts, Salvador Corral did not participate in the commando that attempted to kidnap Garza Sada. Only a record of the DFS has a reference to *Juan Corral* as a participant in the murder of the northern entrepreneur. In a newspaper clipping kept by Salvador’s family there is a poster with the legend “*Prófugos de la justicia*.” There are photos of militants of the LC23S: Salvador Corral García, Miguel Ángel Torres Enríquez, Maximiano Madrigal Quintanilla, Edmundo Medina Flores, and Hilario Juárez García, all allegedly responsible for the triple homicide. The authorities warned the public: “Caution, dangerous and armed. They change their appearance with a beard and mustache. Any information should be provided to the local, state, federal authorities to the direction of the judicial police in Nuevo Leon.” This release coincides with the correspondence of Luis de la Barreda Moreno, director of the DFS, to a general of police inspector:

Send photos of Edmundo Medina Flores (to) Ricardo y Salvador Corral García (to) Juan Corral o Roberto, requesting cooperation for arrest, as they are related to the attempted kidnap and murder of Mr. Eugenio Garza Sada and his companions. They are highly dangerous individuals. (Expediente clasificado sobre Salvador Corral 11-235-73, octubre)

The repercussions of the failed kidnapping reached Ciudad Juárez. Rigoberto Ávila was a student at the Instituto Tecnológico Regional de Ciudad Juárez, where he participated as a striker in the spring of 1972. Invited by Luis Miguel Corral to join the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre, he was one of its forerunners in the border. Rigoberto recalls that during this foundational process, “what disrupted our pace so much was Garza Sada, from then on Boom! All the time, everything changed, completely, and then we came there in the house (Corral’s family), things got harder, we did not arrive and never went back.” Rigoberto refers to a search in the Corral García’s family home (Entrevista a Rigoberto Ávila, 07. Nov. 2009).

On October 17, a day after the judicial police in Nuevo León arrested Mónico Rentería, people came to Ciudad Juárez looking for Salvador. Luis Miguel, hiding in the same border town, warned his brother Roberto they would arrest him (as a clandestine man, Salvador called himself “Roberto”). The latter asked him to go home and get rid of



“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
*Alicia de los Ríos Merino*

books, family photos, letters. He had no time. About fifteen judicial police officers from Monterrey and elements of the DFS arrived there 2 p.m. and took him to the first infantry battalion in Juárez. He recalls the threats: “if you do not give us information about Salvador, you will be thrown into the sea, and your entire family is going to be killed right now.” He asks himself: “Is it torture, right? there is no blow, but it also hurts.” What worried him was the fact they managed to make him talk about what he knew, his militant brothers. Thus, he said the answers were repetitive. They showed photos where he only recognized Mónico Rentería. After twenty-four hours he was released (Expediente L-1, 80-57-73, F. 128, 15 de octubre de 1973).

Concepción, García Corral’s family mother, recalled this fact that:

(...) when they came looking for Salvador and took Roberto, Luis Miguel also left Juárez (...) I think the man more markedly detached from the movement was José de Jesús. People knew about them, but he was working by himself, however, they went for him there. I think it all was due to the fact that Mónico betrayed everyone [...] I suffered a lot when they came with that intent and when they left, because I knew they got exposed to such a danger (Entrevista a Concepción García, 25. Sep. 1997).

His three children went to the guerrilla. Salvador, after escaping arrest in October 1973, never returned to Ciudad Juárez. In late 1973, he moved to Culiacán, where most militants of the Liga in Sinaloa belonged to the radical fraction of the student movement in the early 1970s. Since then they were nicknamed “Los Enfermos.” In late 1973 the leaders were imprisoned or they were persecuted. Partly because of this, foreign Héctor Escamilla Lira and Salvador Corral García took charge of a general strike test, *el Asalto al cielo*, held on January 16, 1974: urban and rural guerrilla commandos of the LC23S would coordinate in Valle de Culiacán the largest planned action until then. The objective of this civil insurrection test: “Educate the masses in armed action, launch a tactical and offensive strategy to wear down the bourgeois State and gathered forces for further action” (CASTELLANOS, 2007, 218).

According to the national leadership of the Liga itself, the participation of thousands of agricultural workers was spontaneous, stopping their work in the fields with demands for better wages. Although the Liga defined the day as successful –local

“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
Alicia de los Ríos Merino

and national newspapers described it as a chaotic situation, a mutiny– an inner balance pointed out that the actions were not properly driven, since the original plan to enter downtown Culiacán was disobeyed, and this avoided increasing casualties from three militants and the arrest of about forty. Just hours after, the city was occupied by military and police men (CASTELLANOS, 2007, p 219; Comparecencia de Guadalupe Llanes Ocaña, 05. Mar. 1975; Madera No. 3, Abr. 1974, p 66).

### The Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre: between political violence and counterinsurgency

In January 23, 1974, Salvador traveled from Culiacán to Mexico City to meet with Ignacio Salas Obregón, top leader of the LC23S. Salvador, through the latter, established contact with Ignacio Olivares Torres, member of the Buró Político de la Dirección de la Liga and responsible in the state of Jalisco. Olivares Torres was born to a middle class family from Torreón, attended the undergraduate course in Economics at the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (UANL), where he was president of the students’ society in 1967. With his wife Hilda Dávila, he traveled to New York to pursue a master’s degree at the New School for Social Research, with a scholarship granted by the OAS. Without completing the graduate course, he returned to Monterrey after accepting the academic secretariat of the School of Economics. In the early 1970s, he had to choose between being a university employee or a Marxist militant, and the latter was chosen. His photograph was published in local and national newspapers when arrested with his wife Hilda as they were related to bank robberies in January 1972, where they did not participate, but they were members of the organization responsible: Los Procesos. They were released forty-eight hours later. The next step was secrecy, combined with parenthood the hard way. The Buró Político de la Coordinadora Nacional de la LC23S appointed him as responsible for the state of Jalisco (*Semanario Milenio*, 7. Oct. 2002, 36-40).

After the unsuccessful attempt to kidnap the industrial businessman Garza Sada it was believed that the Liga would refrain from taking another action like this, in part because the demands of the northern private sector to apply the full rigor of the law and

“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
 Alicia de los Ríos Merino

the coercive measures needed –legal or not– to stop what they observed as the communist and foreign wave in our country. However, in less than a month, in October 10, 1973, commandos of the LC23S from the Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario (FER), in Guadalajara city, kidnapped the British Consul Anthony Duncan and the businessman Fernando Aranguren. They demanded 200 thousand dollars in ransom and the transfer of 51 political prisoners to North Korea through Cuban consular intermediation. Some of the prisoners included in the list who were imprisoned, such as Lecumberri, Santa Marta, and Chihuahua, rejected the kidnapping and joining the negotiation list. There were internal conflicts between imprisoned and free militants. Attorney Pedro Ojeda Paullada refused to comply with the conditions of the LC23S in exchange for the hostages' freedom. In response, militants freed the consul Duncan in October 14, Aranguren would be executed three days later.

Olivares Torres was held responsible for the execution as local leader of the LC23S. Much has been written about the case, pointing out a number of possible suspects. However, little information has been provided to facilitate understanding the reasons for execution. In a statement signed by the Comando Juanito del FER it was disclaimed that the industrial businessman tried to disarm a militant and he was killed due to this fact, but this is somewhat unlikely. Everything indicates that it was a decision made by members from the FER rejected by Olivares Torres. The killing of the industrial businessman caused Olivares Torres to be transferred to Sinaloa in the last days of 1973, and he traveled there with his wife Hilda. There, people called him to attend the meeting where he met Salvador Corral. They traveled together back from the Federal District to Sinaloa; Ignacio was heading to Mazatlán, Salvador was going to Culiacán. They did not arrive, on January 30 they were arrested on the road by the Policía Judicial Federal.

Salvador’s family never knew of the transfer of the two young men on the same day of his arrest to the DFS headquarters in Mexico City, as reported by Captain Luis de la Barrera, then director of that institution. The head of the Departamento Jurídico of the DFS was also present during the interrogation, Julián Slim H., as recorded in files stored in the AGN (*Semanario Proceso*, 31. Dic. 2011), where the affiliation forms of the two detainees were found, dated January 31, 1974.

Both of them have a photograph, Ignacio and Salvador, black and white, front and side photo, gaunt and tired appearance. Salvador’s hair had grown, had long sideburns, mustache, and trimmed beard. His image is different from the photos kept by the family. It seemed that he became an adult that night, as if he was older than 28 years, his age at the time of arrest. Ignacio’s image, a year older than Salvador, gives a similar impression. At the bottom of the documents fingerprints of both hands are observed.

In the case of Salvador, it is noticeable that he said to be engaging in commerce. This way, it seemed as if he was along with the rest of the family, and he had not interacted with them for at least one year. Also, he answered to follow the Catholic faith, have completed military service, have a passport, a voter registration record, federal records of prior conviction, i.e. he had a *public* and *legal* life. On the form there were the reasons for his arrest: “for disseminating Marxist propaganda,” under the alias “Robert,” “David,” and “John,” and belong to the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre. In the report signed by Luis de la Barreda, it is stated that Salvador was carrying a gun.

Meanwhile, Ignacio Olivares said he had no fixed home or occupation, as well as that he agreed to participate in the Buró Político of the LC23S. In the statement, he allegedly narrated how and with whom he formed two commandos under his orders, to kidnap the consul Williams and the businessman Aranguren; and when realizing that the conditions to release them would not be met, he called a meeting in which they agreed to release the consul and retain Aranguren changing demands. However, he noticed that after the meeting Pedro Orozco (a) “Camilo” and Tomás Lizárraga (a) “El Tom de Analco” decided to execute the businessman “because he was a bourgeois” (Expediente 11-235-74, Legajo 6, Foja. 35 a 42).

Two days later, the bodies of Salvador and Ignacio were found in colonies in Monterrey and Guadalajara, respectively.

### From the DFS to the press: Rumors

In print media, news about the death of Corral and Olivares Torres began to be published as related to unidentified bodies. In the archives of Corral’s family<sup>6</sup> there is a

<sup>6</sup> Family members, just as in other cases, formed a file with the news of Salvador, mostly from the red note.

note from the weekly *Semanario Alarma*, undated and entitled: “*CRIMENES LLENOS DE CRUELDAD Y QUE SON VENGANZAS ENTRE GRUPOS DE EXTREMISTAS.*” The note is accompanied by two photos of Salvador’s corpse. It refers to a settling of disputes whose proof is the visible violence on dead bodies. “[...] *It is allegedly vengeance among members of the various groups of ‘extremists’ who have long been causing problems for the government,*” said Carlos G. Solana Macías, head of the judicial police in the state.

Otherwise, *Alerta de Guadalajara* did identify Torres Olivares. The cover bears the title: “*MATAN AL CEREBRO DE LUCIO CABAÑAS*” with the photograph of Ignacio’s corpse, naked, with eyes and mouth half open. It is worth highlighting in this note the relationship established between Lucio Cabañas and Olivares Torres, the latter as an ideologist, the townsman under study, and the first as one of the few peasant guerrilla leaders recognized by both the State and the media. The allusion to Cabañas also confirms concealment of the LC23S as an opposition organization and the use of false information provided by the DFS, whose agents knew the conflict since 1973 and the impossibility of cooperation between militants of the Liga and Cabañas.

On the same note, there is in a small box a side photo taken when he was arrested in February 1972. In addition to the main title, other statements read: “Author of Aranguren’s kidnapping and death,” “The leader most wanted by all policemen.” Beneath the photo of Olivares’ corpse the caption reads: “[...] a graduated lawyer, he was ‘silenced’ by his own people, those whom he once captained. Blows that destroyed him [...].” With a biography reconstructed and filtered by the Dirección Federal de Seguridad itself, Jorge Pacheco Preciado, author of the note, proposed the following hypothesis: “he was a victim perhaps due to revenge or settling of disputes with his own followers, who call themselves guerrillas.” The weekly continues the narrative where it reported that the causes of Olivares Torres’ death were due to “blows to the head that caused fracture in the skull base and intense blood bleeding from both ears.” The thesis of revenge or settling of disputes was derived, according to the note’s author, from the poor conditions of Olivares Torres’ corpse.

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Commonly they cut the news, with no date and name of the various print media.

[...] there were leg injuries from sharp-edged instrument, which may reveal that he was a victim of torture or brutally killed. The biblical maxim that who kills with iron to iron dies is fulfilled once again, as it is established that José Ignacio masterminded the kidnap and murder of the wealthy industrial businessman Fernando Aranguren Castiello and he also planned the kidnapping of Terrance G. Leonhardy and Anthony Duncan Williams. José Ignacio’s corpse was located at the intersection of the streets Metalurgia and Altos Hornos, in El Álamo colony. The blue terlenka pants were dropping to his knees; he wore an orange shirt with white squares, green socks, and no shoes (*Alerta Guadalajara*, S.F).

Since February 3, newspapers in Monterrey reported finding Salvador’s body in the area and identified him as allegedly responsible for the death of Garza Sada and his bodyguards.

The dead man found was *identified as one of the murderers of Don Eugenio...* blindfolded, gagged, bound, and tortured, he was found dead in Fuentes del Valle colony, last Saturday. The deceased man may be Salvador Corral García (a) Roberto, who along with Miguel Ángel Torres Enríquez (a) Ulises, Maximiano Madrigal Quintanilla “El boticario” or Max, Edmundo Medina Flores (a) Héctor, Hilario Juárez García, and those also dead in action, Javier Torres Rodríguez and Anselmo Herrera Chávez, failed to kidnap the industrial businessman Don Eugenio Garza Sada, killing him and his fellows Bernardo Chapa Pérez and Modesto Hernández, on the previous September 17 (*Tribuna de Monterrey*, S.F).

Comparing notes in the press with the reports prepared by the Dirección Federal de Seguridad allows us to identify the data filtration model used to publish the news. For instance, Captain Luis de la Barrera wrote on February 4 about Salvador Corral’s corpse recognition by some prisoners in Topo Chico: “Dirección Federal de Seguridad, state of Nuevo Leon. Gustavo Hiraes said he does not recognize that person. Mónico Rentería said he looks like Salvador Corral García. Elías Orozco said he was likely to be Salvador (a) Roberto, who had not been seen for about eighteen months.” On day seven this was published:

Two guerrillas were found dead. Police identified the corpse of an extremist in Monterrey. The judicial police identified the body, found in the aristocratic area of Fuentes del Valle, as Salvador Corral García, one of the most wanted men by the northern Republic. Through facial composites that were shown to several terrorists imprisoned in the state. The terrorists who identified the now deceased Salvador Corral García



“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
Alicia de los Ríos Merino

are: Adolfo Hiraes Morán, a participant in several bank robberies. Mónico Rentería, mastermind of the robberies and direct participant in the failed kidnapping of the industrial businessman Eugenio Garza Sada; Elías Orozco Salazar, killer of the industrial businessman (*La Prensa*, 07. Feb. 1972).

Both the DFS report and the note show a relationship between the press and the Mexican State named by Gamiño as a celebration of *loyalty pacts*, not signed but agreed by politicians and businessmen, where some print media promoted “denotative judgments; this took an informative nature from a police perspective; sensationalism has been favored and justified repression all the time” (GAMIÑO, 2011, 18).

## Distrust

In order to weaken and break the silence commitments that prevented obtaining information about the structure of the organization, location of brigades, identification of people, distrust was adopted as a fragmentation strategy. In the case of Olivares Torres and Corral García, the purpose was diagnosing among militants the degree of credibility regarding the version of a possible internal settling of disputes. Gustavo Hiraes recalls that came to Topo Chico people of the DFS asking: “Who do you believe to have killed him? Do you believe it has been a settling of internal disputes or was Garza Sada’s family involved?” Hiraes points out that he and his imprisoned fellows did not hesitate to claim State’s responsibility, but he did not know details of the arrest, “afterwards, it became very clear they were to blame, according to communications by the DFS. Did not it?” Confirmation of State’s responsibility came in the year 2002 (Entrevista a Gustavo Hilaes Morán, 25. Sep. 2012).

An example of the generalization of this practice by security forces of the State are the murders of Joel Rojo Hernández, librarian at the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, and Rodolfo Garza Montemayor, from the Sindicato de Trabajadores of the same university, who, according to the news, might have been executed in a situation similar to Salvador, i.e. by their own fellows. However, neither Rojo Hernández nor Garza Montemayor were members of the LC23S.



“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
Alicia de los Ríos Merino

On February 10, 1974, a week before Corral García’s corpse was found in Monterrey, the revolutionary committees of students and workers developed and disseminated a document addressed to the working class where they distinguished two kinds of violence: *reactionary*, exerted by the bourgeoisie and the State, and *revolutionary*, by the exploited masses. Militants from Monterrey said:

The national press and particularly the local one attempt to claim that acts of violence qualitatively different, contradictory, and antagonistic are equal. They want to make it seem like the assassinations of revolutionary leaders José Ignacio Olivares Torres (a) “Sebastián” and Salvador Corral García (a) “Roberto” were equal to the murders of the political police officers Antonio Joel Rojo Hernández and Rodolfo Garza Montemayor.- The first ones are acts of reactionary violence and the latter ones of revolutionary violence (Expediente 11-235- 74, Legajo 6, Foja. 176 a 182).

In the six-page document they argued the difference between the kinds of violence and claimed to have killed two allegedly *political police officers*. They refused to provide information, because in Monterrey “fortunately, they were widely known as traitors to the interests of the proletariat, as well as political police officers.” Therefore, their *murders* might be a strategy to erode and dismantle the political police. Regarding the participation of Rojo and Garza in political police works, we did not find historiographical or primary sources other than the document mentioned above and brief declarations of Héctor Escamilla to the press in Monterrey on April 27, 1974, where he answered that Jesús Piedra Ibarra (a) “Rafael” informed him that “Rodolfo Garza Montemayor (a) ‘el Perro’ and Antonio Joel Rojo Hernández (a) ‘Rojo,’ dead on February 3 and 17 January this year, were killed because they were political police officers” (Expediente 11-235-74, L-11, Foja. 142).

The murders of Garza Montemayor and Rojo Hernández occurred during a so-called *struggle against opportunism and the union at all costs*, because “it would not be possible to advance the revolutionary movement without dividing lines, i.e. isolating opportunists from the true revolutionaries.” The reasons given for this purge were little or no theorizing through Marxism, *deviations* and *vices* of previous militancy, attempts to

“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
Alicia de los Ríos Merino

link with other *reformist* political forces, among other arguments (*Madera*, May. 1974). Given the diversity of origin of the various groups that formed the LC23S, we may assume the heterogeneity of its members, as well as the possibility that some of them kept personal relationships arising in previous militancy.

During the interviews, it is interesting to notice how survivors react when asked about these accusations, mostly against leftist student, trade union, or peasant leaders who did not participate in the militancy of the LC23S. They usually answer that those threats were not intended to be put into practice. Meanwhile, some of the people threatened said to believe in the respect, affection, or companionship prior to the stage of radicalization that prevented an attack to them (Entrevista a Miguel, Abr. 2011; Comunicación con Jaime García Chávez, Mar. 2012). The same did not happen to Garza Montemayor and Rojo Hernández.<sup>7</sup> Trust in others has vanished. The spectrum of the enemy broke the margin of State institutions. The foundation stage was followed by a period of demarcation and distrust.

### “Yo ya me voy a morir a los desiertos...”<sup>8</sup>

The morning of February 2, 1974, in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Don Telésforo Corral was having breakfast while his wife Concepción worked in the business “La Industrial,” Roberto’s auto parts. Concepción warned Roberto: “those who brought you the other day want to talk to you.” They announced: “You know what? We have already found your brother. He was found in Monterrey, in one of the most populous colonies. He was found lying, perhaps his own fellows have killed him. But we came here to tell you, if you want to pick him up there, let us know.”

<sup>7</sup> Rodolfo Garza Montemayor was a member of the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, close to union leader Fabián Navarro. On July 15, 1972, they were taken along with other members by students of the college of mechanical and electrical engineering who invaded the dean’s office because they believed people might try to dislodge them. This time, Garza Montemayor was beaten to confess in writing that the then dean Héctor Ulises did not have the required majority in the university board. See: FLORES, Oscar (S.F).

<sup>8</sup> A popular Cardenche song from a region between the states of Durango and Coahuila.

“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
Alicia de los Ríos Merino

At the level of Corral García’s family, the death of Salvador was the first violent episode they have experienced, an outcome his brothers and sisters felt that could happen *overnight, as they knew what he was doing*. It seemed that the family had two opposing sides in mind: their brother’s and the counterinsurgency forces. They, as a family, did not belong to either.

Roberto recalls he was afraid to go by car to Monterrey because of Salvador’s body. He was sure to find the police officers who arrested him. Upon arriving at the morgue, he met them. Roberto dared to ask: “What do you want, what are you asking him? Where are he going? No, they said, believe it or not, we are here waiting for Mr. Palma, who was killed in Sinaloa on the same grounds. It was one of the law they had killed there. Here we are, at the same morgue. And nobody was comfortable about that.” Roberto perfectly remembers the moment they recognized Salvador’s body, “his mandible had been broken with forceps, as well as his teeth, arms, then a man dragged him out by one foot on the floor. And he said: Is this one? Such a powerless man seems to be brave.”

Roberto also recalls that in a previous trip to Monterrey he met a merchant named Francisco Pérez, a man whom he did not see again until February 1974, someone attracted there by the news:

That man came to us and said: I want you to do me the favor of accepting this suit for Salvador. And also: wait in the truck outside of the morgue, I handle this, because there comes the press, they are like this (an expression with the hand means they are many). I did not see him again, I do not know if he is still alive, but that was his description, I will never forget it (Entrevista a Roberto Corral, Ago. 2009).

On the death certificate, issued by the Registro del Estado Civil in the state of Nuevo León, it is registered that Salvador died of traumatic shock secondary to brain skull fracture due to a firearm wound. The family did not filed a complaint related to the murder of Salvador and an official investigation was not opened.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> In 2002, when Concepción García denounced the execution of Salvador to the Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado, no record was found in the archives of the Procuraduría de Justicia de Nuevo León.

Roberto recalls they immediately went to Ciudad Juárez: “We had to prepare his funeral there, in Juárez. We talked, we told people to prepare because we did not want to have many watching over him, in short, we arrived at 3 and buried him at 5.” When Salvador’s body arrived in Ciudad Juárez, a family member took a photo. They had not seen him for over a year. He was buried on February 7. The next day, the local press reported the murder referring to the same hypothesis of a settling of disputes within the guerrilla.

Ciudad Juárez is full of guerrillas. They are in a great number not because seeking refuge here or meeting to plan their actions, but because those guerrillas or extremists, as they have been named, are from Ciudad Juárez. They were born here, studied here, their girlfriends, wives, or parents are here and people even believe they were instructed to become rebels here. Yesterday, at 5 p.m. at the Tepeyac pantheon, there were at least 12 of the most active guerrillas operating throughout the country and those who were from here came just to attend the funeral of Salvador García Corral (sic). It had been about two years since we have seen Salvador. He had studied in this city until completing high school and pre-college program. He went to Mexico City and when he was about to become a Ph.D., dropped out of studies to join a group of young people, most of them professionals who said they were going to engage in the fight to bring injustice to an end among the Mexican people. Young individuals who treated Salvador here said that he, at least at the border, was not the head of any group. Students at the Parque pre-college program, the evening high school, and the normal school at this border were members of the groups, but they usually headed people coming from other locations (*El Mexicano*, 8. Feb. 1974).

This note gives the impression to have been written with excessive imagination on the part of its author, Apolinar Ochoa, announcing the presence of twelve guerrillas at the funerals. But talks with relatives of the militants killed, people usually refer to police presence to register those attending the funerals. Although the note resorts to adjectives such as extremists who meet to plan their actions, with an implicit condemnation of illegality, it is noteworthy how Salvador is identified as a young man from Juárez, whose immediate past had no criminal record, as a proof of decent life, and his destiny changed after receiving “an instruction to become a rebel.” All of the author’s assumptions were derived from interviews he has conducted –as stated in his note– both with Salvador’s classmates and Roberto Corral, the latter via telephone. Who wrote the news, beyond

“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
*Alicia de los Ríos Merino*

reporting on a meeting of militants in a border pantheon, tried to explain why someone who had a family, classmates, friends dropped out of his legal life to become a guerrilla.

### Conclusions

During this essay we have tried to analyze, through the case Corral - Olivares, the ways how a generation of young people believed they could make real a socialist revolution in Mexico in the 1970s. The young individuals newly organized in the LC23S tried to harass the national bourgeoisie by kidnapping two of its members for ransom as a tribute of war, forcing the Mexican State to negotiate the release of political prisoners. Thus, they would achieve public visibility, but above all, in face of working men and women, in order to make people aware of their existence and the revolutionary project, and at a given time, they joined the proletarian army.

However, after kidnapping the British consul Duncan Williams and the businessmen Garza Sada and Aranguren Castiello, as well as killing the latter ones, the deep differences between the business groups –especially the northern– and the federal government, which had been regarded as allies and alike by the young revolutionaries. The media impact deployed by business chambers, condemning and demanding legal and illegal actions against the young rebels, led to a wave of solidarity with the businessmen’s families, as well as immediate counterinsurgency action, headed by former President Echeverría.

In the text, it is noticeable that while we address the early days of the LC23S, the DFS had at least two decades working as an investigative agency aimed at opposition movements. On the other hand, it seemed that the investigation of tens of groups that emerged in the 1970s took them by surprise, although some recent investigations based on records of the DFS assign a prominent and successful role to the alleged infiltration of armed organizations –in the case of Garza Sada, they played a particularly leading role. Based on these records, we dare to suggest that actions of espionage, monitoring, arresting, torturing, and executing political opponents were performed by a manly, vertical, structure, run by people related to senior government managers, including military men, with whom they established deep relationships of loyalty. Much of their

agents –hired through recommendations and fellows’ networking– did not conducted professional studies, something which hindered their ability to analyze the information obtained from prisoners by torture in most cases.

Regarding the political opposition, security forces obtained the cooperation of State and local institutions, such as in the case of Garza Sada, where the judicial police of Nuevo León participated, and there are also signs that the private security of the Cervecería Cuauhtémoc played a role, however, until today it is publicly unknown whether they were involved in the investigation and if, at some point, they knew about the decision to kill Corral and Olivares in Monterrey and Guadalajara, respectively (Entrevista a Manuel Saldaña, 2002).

The DFS deployed a series of counterinsurgency measures, such as bringing to Justice those not involved in the murder of Garza Sada, as in the case of Mónico Rentería. As well as arresting and killing Salvador Corral García and Ignacio Olivares Torres by way of a symbolic message to both guerrilla groups and business groups. We believe that the regional leaderships of Salvador Corral and Ignacio Olivares made them white to hold them accountable for the deaths of the northern octogenarian man and the young Aranguren. Those errors and determinations, as the causes taken from LC23S were named, were also interpreted by the DFS as collective crimes of the enemy side. Therefore, through the terrible tortures and executions of Corral and Olivares, they punished the organization.

The fight against insurgent organizations in the 1970s resorted to the cooperation of communication enterprises. The latter, according to Gamiño, tended to “assist the State to show the armed movement as an atypical crime phenomenon in the country’s history” (GAMIÑO, 2011), in the text we tried to illustrate a model where the DFS investigations, immediately filtered, were published almost identically as the news disseminated in various media by way of rumor. The scene or assembly in which the corpses were publicly exposed, both in Monterrey and Guadalajara, showed the ways how militants of the LC23S would be fought. The hypothesis created by government institutions and the media about Corral y Olivares pointed out an internal settling of disputes between militants of the LC23S. *They killed each other*, that was the conclusion.

“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
Alicia de los Ríos Merino

Apart from the stories of survivors and relatives regarding the violence adopted by counterinsurgency agencies against militants of the LC23S, there is an uncomfortable edge in the murders of Rodolfo Garza Montemayor and Antonio Joel Rojo Hernández within the context of the crusade undertaken against the opportunism of the LC23S. The silence about this fact makes clear a conflict of memory and justice caused by the lack of explanation by the then militants. These omissions or silences show the difficulty to critically analyze radical militancy. There is still a need to investigate the history of these red passages and make it possible to bridge such gaps. This may make it possible to put a comparative exercise into practice, addressing differences between both methods of the Mexican State and the 1970s’ young rebels, thus providing greater meaning to the armed process employed by the latter ones with expectations of transformation.

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“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
Alicia de los Ríos Merino

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“They killed each other.” Rumor and distrust: two weapons in Mexico’s counterinsurgency in the 1970s  
Alicia de los Ríos Merino

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