

# The Dark Night and the Coming Dawn in Mexico

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*This is the second of three book reviews that will look at what Mexican intellectuals on the left have written in an attempt to understand Ayotzinapa and what it symbolizes and signifies for their country and its future. The first review appeared here. - DL*

Manuel Aguilar Mora and Claudio Albertani, eds., *La noche de Iguala y el despertar de México*. Mexico: Juan Pablos Editor, 2015. Pp. 382. Photographs. Illustrations. Maps. Tables. (Available only in Spanish at this time.)

*The Night of Iguala and the Awakening of Mexico* (as we translate the title of this book), like Sergio Aguayo's *From Tlatelolco to Ayotzinapa*, deals with the horrifying killing of six people and forced disappearance of 43 students of the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers College in the town of Iguala, Guerrero on September 26, 2014.

How and why did this massacre occur? What interests does it serve? Who does it benefit? And what will be its impact on the Mexican people and movements for political change? Those questions are the subject of this tremendously informative, interesting, and important book edited by two Mexican leftists and with contributions by more than a dozen others who attempt to understand both the historical context for these terrible events and how those events have changed Mexican society and politics.

The book is also an interesting experiment in political collaboration between the editors, both university professors: Manuel Aguilar Mora, a long-time Trotskyist intellectual and political activist in Mexico, and Claudio Albertani, an anarchist teacher, writer, and activist.[1] The authors introduce the book from their shared revolutionary opposition to Mexico's violent authoritarian political and economic system. In their introduction they argue, as others will in several essays in this collection, that while Mexico has a long history of extreme violence, the current explosion of tens of thousands of murders, can be correlated to the investments of the great multinational corporations, particularly those involved in the extractive industries, above all mining, and is not simply due to the drug cartels. (This is an argument similar to that of Dawn Paley's *Drug War Capitalism*.)

Aguilar Mora and Albertani adopt Raúl Zibechi's argument that "the massacre is a form of domination" and a way to expropriate social wealth while crushing all resistance. They also argue that the night of Iguala represents a turning point in Mexican history, having led to the "radicalization of broad sectors of society" and destroyed any further illusions in the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the party that governed both the State of Guerrero and the city of Iguala at the time of the massacre. They recognize that the protest movements that arose afterwards, having failed to unify, remained dispersed, and that the Mexican left will be challenged to unify both rural and urban protests into a radical movement for social change.

The book poses several important political questions about the movement as it has existed so far and about its future. But let's take those up after describing the components of this very valuable book.

*The Night of Iguala* is divided into three sections: the first deals with the crime, the second with the context, and the third with the movement. In the first section we find:

- Carlos Fazio's essay "About the Facts of Ayotzinapa/Iguala" provides a thorough and detailed account of the events of the night of the murders and forced disappearances, making the case that this was a state crime.
- Professor Román Munguía Huato's contribution, "The Disappeared: Violence, Impunity, and State Terror," discusses the significance of disappearance as a form of repression and traces the history of disappearances in Mexico from the first—the teacher Epifanio Avilés Rojas who was disappeared in 1969—to the tens of thousands that have taken place in recent years.
- Journalist Luis Hernández Navarro, contributes two stories he wrote, one that suggests the involvement of the Mexican Army in the Iguala events and another from the point of view of the parents whose children were disappeared as they deal with the government officials and their explanations.

In the second section dealing with the context we have:

- Investigative journalist Flor Goche provides an account of the history of Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Normal School of Ayotzinapa (the teachers college where the disappeared students had all studied) from its founding in the post-revolutionary era in 1926 to today, discussing various government's attempts to starve the school to death.
- Ramón Espinosa Contreras, a graduate of Ayotzinapa and with a doctorate in Social and Political Sciences at the Ibero-American University in Guerrero, and now a researcher at the Autonomous University of Guerrero, writes a fascinating essay, "My Life in Ayotzinapa," that discusses the history of the school, his early life as a child of a poor family, his entrance into Ayotzinapa in 1960, and his association with future guerrilla leader Lucio Cabañas, and involvement with social movements.
- Ramón Espinosa Contreras also writes an essay, "Guerrero Between Violence and Poverty," that provides a statistical account of the state's poverty and deals with issues from forced sterilization to other occasions of mass murder such as Aguas Blancas in 1995 when 17 peasants were massacred.
- Falviano Bianchini's essay on "Mining and Violence" explores the role of the drug cartels in mining districts in several states.

Part three dealing with the movement contains:

- Manuel Aguilar Mora's essay "The Collapse of a Certain 'Left'" dealing with the devastating

impact of the Night of Iguala on the Party of the Democratic Revolution, placing the Mexican political situation in the broader context of the current state of the left in Latin America. (We return to say more about this essay below.)

- Claudio Albertanti's piece "In Defense of the Anarchists" presents a panorama of anarchism from its origins in the nineteenth century to the Battle of Seattle, the black bloc, and contemporary protests.
- Journalist Luis Hernández Navarro writes in this section an essay on "Anarchism, Provocation, and Protest," dealing with the anarchist protestors in Mexico, as well as police infiltration and provocation.
- Enrique González Rojo Arthur, teacher, writer, and activist, contributes essays entitled "Capsules to Get Out of the Labyrinth," a series of short essays with a political program calling for combining election boycott, with a general strike, and the calling of a constituent assembly.
- Finally, Rafael Miranda Redondo, a doctor of philosophy at the Complutense University in Madrid, in her "Ayotzinapa and the Society We Want," provides a long essay of situationist inspiration, with elements of Cornelius Castoriadis and Antonio Negri among many others, that looks back to 1968 as a way out for the left today.

The essays are followed by three very useful chronologies put together by Albertani, one on the return of the dirty war to Mexico; one dealing with the history of the normal schools, and one dealing with the events of September 26, 2014 to March 26, 2015. In addition to the many essays, there are also the photos of Mario Marlo, photojournalist and director of *Somos el Medio*, drawings by Omar Reséndiz (Chirín) and muralist Norberto Hernández, and poems by David Huerta and Rojo Arthur. (A drawing by Norberto Hernández, "I think, then they disappear me," accompanies this review.)

The book ends with an Afterward by the editors in which they suggest that the election boycott of June 2015 represented a key turning point. They ask, paraphrasing, is this the awakening we were waiting for? They answer, "Yes and no." As a result of the many protests and the boycott, they argue, "In the Federal District, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and in some other parts of the country there now exists a mass base with a clear consciousness of what is meant by a truly revolutionary struggle." Yet at the same time they recognize that the radicalization of some sectors of society principally in the south of Mexico is not sufficient to create a new revolutionary movement.

While this is without a doubt an extremely useful, interesting, and engaging book, still it has some weaknesses. The book's introduction argues that capital investment, especially mining, is at the center of the upsurge in violence we have witnessed in Mexico, and yet the short chapter on "Mining and Violence" does not provide much information about mining in Mexico and is not convincing. Bianchini argues that Canadian and U.S. mining companies end up working with national drug cartels at the local level and in rural areas where it is possible to pressure governments and communities to accept their deals. Yet, while several mining states are mentioned, it is really only in Guerrero and Michoacán that we have seen the most extreme violence. The drug cartels seem more important than the mining interests.

Aguilar Mora and Albertani point out that many disappointed PRD intellectuals and activists have turned to the new political party, the Movement for National Regeneration (MORENA). The authors warn us, quite correctly it seems to me, that, based as it is largely on the charisma of López Obrador, MORENA is likely to repeat the unfortunate experience of the PRD, rounding up working class and middle class people who want a more democratic and egalitarian society and corraling

them in a party with a reformist rhetoric and even some reformist intentions, but that is fundamentally committed to capitalism and in reality the existing political order.

The authors' case for a new awakening in Mexico rests largely on the boycott. Aguilar Mora and Albertani argue that the election boycott was a turning point for the movement, but that was true only in Guerrero and Oaxaca, or perhaps one might include Michoacan and Chiapas at most. But in Guerrero and Oaxaca, when the Ayotzinapa protestors and the teachers union movement failed to convince their fellow citizens to boycott the election, they decided to peremptorily impose the boycott on other citizens, closing polling places, burning ballot boxes, sometimes alienating local communities. The organizers never succeeded in taking the boycott movement to a national level and it remained isolated in just a few states. In retrospect it seems that the boycott may have served not to create a vanguard that could lead a movement, but to isolate the vanguard and separate it from any potential national movement.

Certainly we can agree with the closing lines of the book, that we still await the rise of a new Mexican workers movement to throw itself into the balance and begin to halt the many injustices—economic, legal, and political—and create a new Mexico.

Editors Aguilar Mora and Claudio Albertani have produced a book that should be in every university library, in every major public library, and in the hands of those who are concerned about human rights in Mexico.

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[1] I should mention that I am friendly with one of the editors, Manuel Aguilar Mora, and with one of the contributors, Román Munguía Huato, though we also have our political differences.