SELLING NARRATIVES OF A MEXICO IN CRISIS: ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING IN *EXCÉLSIOR* AND *UNO MÁS UNO*, 1983-84

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving wife Jessica. Without her support I simply would not have had the time to write it.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the diverse environmental narratives found in more than 200 stories published by two Mexican national newspapers, *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno*, in 1983 and 1984, a period of economic and environmental crisis. It argues that the popularity of environmental issues permitted column space for journalists, environmentalists, researchers, rural peasants, the urban poor, and government administrators to present their many different environmental narratives for the reading public's consideration. Focusing on how journalists and their sources described air pollution, forests, and water crises in the pages of *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno*, this thesis brings out many of the common themes and persuasive tactics these narrative crafters utilized in their efforts to imprint an environmental perception on the national population. While environmentalists, researchers, and the poor contributed narratives which illuminated environmental crises and blamed them on Mexico's industries and federal government, a smaller number of government spokespeople constructed narratives which promoted an environmentally-friendly image of a government that was attuned to these crises and best suited to address them.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)
SARH	Secretario de Agricultura y Recursos Hidrálicos, (Ministry of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources)
SEDUE	Secretario de Desarrollo, Urbano y Ecología, (Ministry of the Environment and Urban Development)
UAM	Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, (Metropolitan Autonomous University)
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, (National Autonomous University of Mexico)

INTRODUCTION

The Many Environmental Narratives of Mexico

Armed with machetes and clubs, 2,000 campesinos (peasant farmers) from southwest Tabasco established blockades near the town of Chontalpa in the autumn of 1983 in order to deny Mexico's national oil company, Pemex, access to 300 of its oil wells. The campesinos claimed that repeated oil spills over the last twenty-five years had rendered their once rich lands unproductive, and that Pemex had failed to deliver on promised compensation for damages of 4,123,000,000 pesos (about twenty-eight million 1983 US dollars). One of these campesinos, Isaac De la Cruz Arévalo, told *Excélsior* reporter A. Sepulveda I., "we are not willing to put up with any more tricks from Pemex, or from anyone else. We will fight for the payment of the compensation even at the cost of our lives."[1]

As a reporter covering the blockade, Sepulveda played a critical role in explaining the campesinos' struggle to the nation. The blockaders could relate their side of the story to the reporters covering the blockade, but reporters wrote the stories read by the nation. Any personal biases or ulterior motives held by reporters shaped their telling of the story.

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[1] A. Sepulveda I., "Bloquean labriegos 300 pozos de Pemex," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Oct. 1, 1983; In this thesis, all of the translations from Spanish to English are my own.

Therefore, reporters reshaped the narrative of the crisis to the nation at large in writing the stories.[2] While Sepulveda chose to criticize Pemex for damaging the land, another reporter covering this story might have written off the peasants as unreasonable agitators. For those who read the explanation of events printed in *Excélsior*, Sepulveda's description contributed to the understanding of the reality of the Chontalpa blockade. Newspaper reporters, therefore, played an outsize role in crafting the many national narratives on pollution, conservation, and other environmental issues.

In analyzing the environmental narratives published in two national newspapers, *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno*, several major themes appear: blaming some entity for an environmental problem, linking environmental problems to health risks, and defending the federal government's handling of environmental issues. Environmentalist reporters frequently blamed industry or the government for causing pollution or failing to regulate it.[3] They also criticized government policies that permitted the unsustainable use of natural resources like forests. Government-friendly reporters, on the other hand, frequently criticized Mexican society for lacking environmental awareness. Many of these reporters blamed campesino subsistence-logging for the loss of forest resources or the urban poor for contaminating water resources. Government-friendly reporters also tended to promote the federal government as the appropriate channel through which

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[2] In 1980s Mexico, and in many countries today, the media plays a large role in defining which issues are social problems and which are not. For more analysis on the implications of this phenomenon see: Mark Neuzil, *The Environment and the Press: From Adventure Writing to Advocacy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 192.

[3] This is a common theme in Latin America. See: Silvio Waisbord, "Contesting Extractivism: Media and Environmental Citizenship in Latin America," in *Environmental Conflict and the Media* ed. Libby Lester and Brett Hutchins (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2013), 107-09.

environmental problems could be redressed, and often touted current government policy as environmentally-friendly.

These two newspapers, therefore, served as a platform from which reporters and their sources sought to convince the public of the accuracy of their environmental narratives, which included attempts to shape Mexicans' perceptions of the current condition of the environment. Analyzing common themes in these national environmental narratives permits a more comprehensive understanding of how *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* journalists presented these issues for public debate. The prevalence of environmental stories in these papers in 1983 and 1984 suggests that environmental issues were popular enough among readers for editors and journalists to deem them worthy of coverage. This popularity permitted column space for the proliferation of the many environmental narratives competing for public attention. *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno*, therefore, in using the environment to sell papers, also encouraged a discourse on environmental issues which added, in turn, to readers' understandings of Mexico's environment.

This thesis examines the discourse on Mexico's environmental narratives through an analysis of more than 200 environmental news stories from two national newspapers, *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno*, in the years 1983 and 1984. The stories in this sample came from an archive of around 8,000 environmental news stories assembled by political scientist Stephen Mumme for his research into environmental politics in Mexico during the 1980s and early 1990s. By focusing on a smaller sample within the archive, this thesis conducts a deeper analysis on the selected articles than would be permitted if the sample size was larger. Furthermore, by delimiting the analysis to two newspapers within a

narrow time frame, this thesis provides a richer characterization of the content it does cover than could be conducted on the entire archive, given the constraints of this project. The sample used for this thesis includes 216 stories in chronological order, and displays a breadth of topics and styles.[4] Journalists covered many different environmental topics, including agricultural problems, conservation efforts, erosion and desertification, problems with garbage dumps, illegal animal smuggling, dangers from pesticides, air pollution, forests, and water crises. This thesis focuses on the final three topics listed because journalists covered them more frequently in this sample than any other topics.[5] The stories from *Excélsior* span from August 2, through October 28, 1983, and the stories from *Uno Más Uno* span from April 1, through October 12, 1984.

Newspaper Name	Date Range	Number of Articles
Excélsior	Aug. 2 – Oct. 28, 1983, January 10 – Feb 3, 1984	92
Uno Más Uno	Apr. 1 – Oct. 12, 1984	124

The sample covers a period between an important international summit on pollution between Mexico and the United States in the summer of 1983 and the first Mexican National Congress on the Environment held in the summer of 1984. Mexico faced a succession of environmental crises during this period, and the government-orchestrated environmental meetings demonstrated a need for the federal government to

[4] The sources are chronological with the exception of a 14-series editorial by Raul Olmedo entitled "Our Lost Forests which ran in *Excélsior* in January-February 1984.

[5] In categorizing articles into topics, I read the article and categorized it based on its content. Sometimes articles covered multiple topics. In these instances I placed the article into multiple categories.

respond to these crises. This period nicely exhibits the lively discourse surrounding Mexico's environmental narrative.

Mumme's archive presents different challenges than would a Mexican newspaper archive. For one, Mumme may have missed some articles, or ignored certain issues that were not of interest to him. However, in a correspondence, Mumme indicated he was able to "achieve complete coverage" of environmental issues in 1983 and 1984 in *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno*.[6] Regardless of whether his claim is legitimate or merely an exaggeration, the diversity of articles Mumme assembled still provide enough examples to understand which environmental issues appeared most frequently in newsprint, and the quantity of articles he collected still demonstrate a journalistic concern over environmental issues. In the sample used for this thesis, for example, *Excélsior* averaged about eight environmental stories a week while *Uno Más Uno* averaged fourteen.

An analysis of *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* during this period showcases environmental reporting from both a pro-government (*Excélsior*) and an independent (*Uno Más Uno*) newspaper. Because *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* represented different ends of the ideological spectrum they serve as great contrasting examples by which to analyze the different ways in which Mexican reporters covered environmental issues. In the early 1970s, *Excélsior* had been an independent paper, and a vocal critic of government policies. But in 1976, the federal government expelled the chief editor and many other top editors and installed a government-friendly team. More than 200 employees quit in solidarity, and many of them helped to establish *Uno Más Uno*, which

[6] Stephen Mumme, e-mail message to author, August 28, 2015.

started publishing news stories on November 14, 1977. In 1983 and 1984, *Excélsior* operated as a government-friendly newspaper, and *Uno Más Uno* prided itself on fact-based investigative reporting.[7]

Communication scholar Sallie Hughes argued that in the 1980s Mexican journalism was in a period of transition, in which the role of journalists shifted from being mouthpieces of the state to becoming servants of the public. Before this transition, the majority of Mexican journalists viewed themselves as honorary government employees – even though they officially worked for a newspaper – and they in turn churned out stories echoing the government line. Hughes argued that this arrangement protected the government from criticism while providing the journalists with job security. Hughes labeled this model "authoritarian journalism" and the emerging model "civic journalism."[8] Although this thesis reveals that *Excélsior* tends to fit Hughes's authoritarian model by supporting the government's environmental policies, and *Uno Más Uno* tends to fit Hughes's civic model by criticizing the government, the bias in either paper is not absolute. Stories bucking the respective trends exist in both *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno*, demonstrating that some reporters, at least, had the freedom to assert their own opinions even if they conflicted with the newspaper's philosophy.

Reporters who wrote frequently for these papers, however, generally fit well with their respective papers' ideological orientations. Teresa Weiser, for example, covered environmental issues for *Uno Más Uno*, and wrote twenty-three of the reports in this

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[7] Chappell Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of a Free Press in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 66-68;

[8] Sallie Hughes, *Newsroom in Conflict: Journalism and the Democratization of Mexico* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 4.

sample. She frequently used descriptive, creative writing to generate a dystopian image describing victims of pollution. Weiser also criticized those she believed guilty of environmental transgressions, often listing the names of polluting corporations in her stories. Fernando Césarman was a psychoanalyst, ecologist, environmentalist, writer, editor, and columnist who made frequent contributions to *Uno Más Uno* promoting environmentalism. Like Weiser, Césarman used creative writing to persuade readers of the dangers of pollution and the need for meaningful government action, but his style was less confrontational in that he did not name names. Instead, Césarman's writings encouraged Mexicans to recognize the importance of a clean environment and to do what they could to help improve environmental conditions across the country. Raul Olmedo was a political scientist specializing in public administration who wrote editorials for his column called "La Crisis" for *Excélsior* from 1977 through 1984.[9] He wrote about Mexican policies and, in January 1984, included a lengthy series on the state of Mexico's forestry industry. Olmedo generally supported the ruling party's plans for forestry development and used his column to convince readers of the efficacy of government policy. The writing styles of these three journalists, and those of all the others included in this sample, showcase the diverse perspectives environmental reporters contributed to the many environmental narratives competing for the attention of *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* readers.

Because *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* were national papers, their reporters covered environmental issues spanning the diverse terrain, climates, and ecosystems

[9] 1977 was the year after *Excélsior* became a government-friendly paper and the year that Olmedo started writing for it.

across all of Mexico. The Baja California peninsula extends for 775 miles along the west coast, and is typified by arid deserts and rugged mountains, except for the far north where coastal cities like Tijuana and Ensenada experience a Mediterranean climate similar to southern California. The rest of northern Mexico is defined by two major mountain ranges, the Sierra Madre Occidental which rises in Sonora along the Arizona border and parallels the Pacific coast south to Jalisco, and the Sierra Madre Oriental which rises in Coahuila near the Texas border and runs southeast to Veracruz. Both of these ranges collect enough moisture due to their higher elevations to support vast temperate forests of deciduous and coniferous trees, but the lower elevations near the two ranges are marked by hot deserts whose cities frequently suffered from water shortages in the early 1980s. The exception to this are the lowlands east of the Sierra Madre Oriental, where ample moisture from the Gulf of Mexico supports the northernmost tropical rainforest in the Americas, the Huasteca in northern Veracruz and southern Tamaulipas.

The Sierra Madre ranges run into the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt, which extends along an east-west axis from Jalisco to southern Veracruz encompassing the traditional heartland of Mexican society. This is the most populous region of the country, with large cities like Guadalajara, Mexico City, and Puebla lying in high-elevation basins and valleys surrounded by the even higher volcanic peaks that extend throughout the region. The Valley of Mexico (technically an endorheic basin that now has a manmade outlet to the Gulf of Mexico via the Tula and Pánuco Rivers) dominates this region both politically and demographically – although it only occupies 0.03 percent of Mexico's

territory, it was home to twenty-three percent of its population in the early 1980s.[10] At more than 7,000 feet above sea level, the Valley of Mexico also serves as the headwaters for many of central Mexico's major rivers. Due to the industrial runoff and lack of sewage treatment from a metropolis with thirteen million people, these rivers were severely polluted right from their sources in the early 1980s. The climate in the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt is typified by wet summers and dry winters. Air pollution can be especially bad here in the winter season when stagnant temperature inversions trap pollutants in these valleys and basins. The mountains of the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt historically held vast temperate forests similar to those of the Sierra Madres, but centuries of forest harvesting had left much of this region eroded and degraded by the early 1980s.[11]

Southern Mexico is marked by a transition from temperate forests to tropical forests. The Sierra Madre del Sur branches off of the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt, running through Michoacán, Guerrero, and Oaxaca before tapering off at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. This range is typified by temperate forests in higher elevations and dry tropical forests in lower elevations. On the eastern side of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the Sierra Madre de Chiapas rises in the state of Chiapas and continues southeast into Central America. The Lancandon rainforest grows along the northern slopes of the Sierra Madre de Chiapas and continues north into the southern Yucatan Peninsula. The

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[10] Exequiel Ezcurra, "The Basin of Mexico," in *The Earth as Transformed by Human Action: Global and Regional Changes in the Biosphere over the Past 300 Years* ed. B.L. Turner II, William C. Clark, Robert W. Kates, John F. Richards, Jessica T. Mathews, and William B. Mayer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 577.

[11] Ibid, 580-81.

Lancandon experienced rapid deforestation for much of the twentieth century due to logging corporations, and to a smaller extent, slash-and-burn agriculture.[12] The heavy, drenching rains of this region easily wash away the poor tropical soils of deforested areas, which means that once the jungle is gone it is nearly impossible to reestablish.[13] The northern Yucatan Peninsula is marked by flat, karst topography, with dry tropical rainforest. Many news stories in this thesis's sample cover deforestation and erosion problems in the forests of Oaxaca, the Lancandon rain forest, and the dry tropical forests of the Yucatan.

While Mexican environments may be quite diverse, in this thesis, Mexican environmentalism is defined rather narrowly. When this thesis uses the term "Mexican environmentalism," it refers to any Mexican articulation of concern for: 1) the ecological health of an environment or any species thereof; 2) the health of people living in an environment in which the resources needed for life are contaminated; and 3) the quality or quantity of a natural resource deemed important to the national economy. While others may define Mexican environmentalism differently based on the period and sources under research, this definition derives from the pattern of environmental discussions structured and shaped by Mexican reporters and their sources in 1983 and 1984 in the two newspapers used for this thesis.

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[12] For insight into the extent of the damage and how it has altered the cultures of its residents see: Lourdes Arizpe, Fernanda Paz, and Margarita Velázquez, *Culture and Global Change: Social Perceptions of Deforestation in the Lancandona Rain Forest in Mexico* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996).

[13] Perhaps no one has explained more eloquently the vulnerability of tropical rain forests to deforestation than Warren Dean, see: Warren Dean, *With Broadax and Firebrand: The Destruction of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 4-5.

Mexican environmentalism fits in with a recent wave of environmentalism, one in which the meaning of the word is acutely tied to contamination and pollution in ways that earlier articulations were not. Lane Simonian defined this Mexican environmentalism in *Defending the Land of the Jaguar*, describing the environmental movement there as first and foremost an attempt to prevent pollution from making people sick.[14] Recent American environmental historians have expanded the connection between pollution and people, linking environmental contaminants and human bodies in increasingly intimate and scary ways.[15] Civic environmental action centered around advocacy for causes like safe drinking water, breathable air, industrial accountability, and the protection of soil for peasant farmers. These were the issues that propelled Mexican environmental reporters to action.

The environmental reporting of the early 1980s arose in a larger political context shaped largely by the course of Mexican history in the decades following the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). Many different factions fought for political control of Mexico both during and after the Revolution, with frequent assassinations throughout the period. In 1929, former President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928) established a political party that would become Mexico's ruling party for the rest of the century, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI.[16] The new party succeeded in appropriating the social ideals

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[14] Simonian. 203-18.

[15] See: Christopher C. Sellers, *Hazards of the Job: From Industrial Disease to Environmental Health Science* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Nancy Langston, *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[16] The PRI had different names in its early years. Calles called it the National Revolutionary Party (PNR). President Lázaro Cárdenas renamed it the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM) in 1938. President Miguel Ávila Camacho gave the party its current name in 1946.

of the Revolution during the 1930s, effectively returning political stability to Mexico.[17] One of its more popular policies was to establish ejidos, land held communally by peasants for use by the community from generation to generation. The party consolidated its hegemony during the economic boom known as the Mexican Miracle (1940-1970), in which the PRI's policies of import substitution and industrialization sustained a period of impressive economic growth. The PRI had an authoritarian streak, however, and party leaders often conducted violence against Mexicans who demonstrated against the party in the mid-twentieth century. But most Mexicans enjoyed the thriving economy and social benefits seemingly guaranteed by the PRI, so the ranks of dissenters remained small enough that PRI leaders could effectively repress them or buy compliance by redistributing income and resources plentiful in the booming economy.[18]

The PRI started to lose hegemony in the 1970s due to a combination of social protest and mounting economic crisis, a process that accelerated in the 1980s. The Mexican economy cooled off during the global 1970s recession, but money from large oil reserves discovered in Veracruz and Tabasco in 1976 helped to mask many of Mexico's systemic economic problems.[19] Wishing to avoid foreign ownership of Mexican resources, the PRI had nationalized many of Mexico's industries in the 1930s and 1940s, but this lack of competition often gave rise to unproductive, inefficient companies funded

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[17] Rogelio Hernández Rodríguez, "Strongmen and State Weakness," in *Dicta Blanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968*, ed. Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 120.

[18] Jo Tuckman, *Mexico: Democracy Interrupted* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 14.

[19] Brian R. Hamnett, *A Concise History of Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 262.

and run by the federal government.[20] President José López Portillo unwisely leveraged this new anticipated oil revenue to acquire numerous foreign loans with high interest rates in order to keep the bloated federal government funded.[21] In 1981 the price of oil plummeted, and Mexico could no longer meet its loan payment obligations. From 1983 through 1988 about seven percent of the nation's gross national product went to servicing the debt, more than what Mexico spent on education and health services combined.[22] Harvard-educated economic technocrat Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982-1988) assumed the presidency amidst this economic crisis, and started embracing neoliberal reforms as a way to decrease government expenditures and increase foreign capital infusion. De la Madrid's new neoliberal state brought flexible labor market laws, cuts in social welfare programs, and increased privatization.[23] These changes, pushed by foreign lenders in the United States and Europe, allowed Miguel de la Madrid to reschedule debt payments, but the austerity measures left many millions of impoverished Mexicans without a social safety net of support. Ejidos, with their land and resources restricted from sale by the need for community consensus, were threatened by the move to privatization, and many government-friendly reporters in this thesis's sample described them as backwards and unproductive. While Mexican neoliberalism was in its infancy in 1983 and 1984, several articles among the sample covered in this thesis demonstrate how

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[20] Ibid, 241, 263.

[21] Ibid, 266.

[22] Alicia Hernández Chávez, *Mexico: A Brief History*, trans. Andy Klatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 308.

[23] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 29.

the federal government was trying to implement the privatization of Mexican forests and promote the policy as environmentally-friendly.

As De la Madrid's government debated the future of Mexico's economic policies in 1983 and 1984, most Mexicans were simply trying to survive the present economic slump. Many scholars have argued that the economic collapse of 1982 provoked the loss of long-held single-party PRI hegemony over Mexico and sparked the rise of autonomous civic action groups opposing government policy on a number of issues, including the environment.[24] Voices of opposition to the PRI started to play a significant role in the national conversation, and the kinds of stories told by environmental reporters reflect this change. In short, Mexicans lost confidence in the federal government's ability to manage Mexico, and autonomous social movements and non-governmental organizations challenged the government's role as sole guarantor of social justice.

In response to these non-governmental environmental actors, President De la Madrid launched a campaign to convince Mexicans that the federal government was both cognizant of environmental problems and proactive in addressing them.[25] Stephen Mumme labeled this effort "preemptive reform," arguing that the primary motive for

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[24] See for example: Jordi Díez, *Political Change and Environmental Policymaking in Mexico* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 13; Paul Lawrence Haber, *Power From Experience: Urban Popular Movements in Late Twentieth-Century Mexico* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 62; Neil Harvey, "The Difficult Transition: Neoliberalism and Neocorporatism in Mexico," in *Mexico: Dilemmas of Transition,* ed. Neil Harvey (London: British Academic Press, 1993), 4; Hughes, 7; Oscar J. Martínez, *Troublesome Border* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988), 110; Stephen P. Mumme, "System Maintenance and Environmental Reform in Mexico: Salinas's Preemptive Strategy," *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (1992): 125.

[25] This phenomenon of environmental groups forcing environmental issues into the public and political arena is not limited to Mexico. For more discussion of the relationship between non-governmental environmental organizations, media, and the government, see: Alison Anderson, "Source-Media Relations: The Production of the Environmental Agenda," in *The Mass Media and Environmental Issues,* ed. Anders Hansen (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), 62.

embracing environmentalism was to head-off any non-governmental environmental action that might lead to government criticism or protests.[26] Upon assuming office in 1982 De la Madrid created Mexico's first environmental protection ministry, SEDUE. In the summer of 1983 he met with President Ronald Reagan in Baja California to sign an environmental protection border agreement with the United States. Furthermore, President Miguel de la Madrid devised, and then spoke before the first National Environmental Congress, held in Mexico City in June 1984. It is against this backdrop that the environmental reporters of 1983 and 1984 wrote their stories and shaped their environmental narratives.

Several authors have discussed the environmental crises and subsequent rise of civic environmental action in Mexico in the 1980s, but unfortunately, most of them have neglected to incorporate the important role of the newspaper into their argument. Many Mexican and American ecologists, environmental sociologists, economists, and historians have argued that the massive population growth of the Valley of Mexico in the second half of the twentieth century gave rise to many environmental problems both inside and outside the valley.[27] Mexican scholars Enrique Torres Lopez, Mario A. Santoscoy, José Luis Lezama, and Victor Alejandro Payá Porres have described spontaneous urban uprisings or demonstrations as responses to these serious environmental threats to the health of the citizens.[28] Several historians and political scientists have argued that

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[26] Mumme, 127-128.

[27] Ezcurra, 577-588; Luis Lezama, 23; Ortiz Monasterio, 231-34; Joel Simon, *Endangered Mexico: An Environment on the Edge* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1997), 77-90; Garza Villarreal, 269; Beatriz A. Albores Zárate, *Tules y sirenas: el impacto ecológico y cultural de la industrialización en el Alto Lerma* (Zinacantepec: El Colegio Mexiquense, A.C., 1995), 368-369.

[28] Enrique Torres Lopez and Mario A. Santoscoy, *La historia del agua en Monterrey: Desde 1577 hasta 1985* (Monterrey: Castillo, 1985), 89-91; José Luis Lezama, "Metropolitan Environmental

government attempts to channel these environmental movements into official state structures, Mumme's "preemptive reform," only encouraged further nongovernmental environmental advocacy.[29] Sallie Hughes and Lane Simonian have suggested the important role newspapers played in propelling this movement forward, but neither of them attempted a thorough historical analysis of environmental newspaper reporting.[30] In 1983 and 1984, *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* directors viewed environmental issues as popular enough to warrant frequent column space. Their efforts to sell newspapers with environmental issues exposed a diversity of environmental narratives to the reading public. In analyzing these narratives, this thesis presents a clearer understanding of the specific strategies those involved with environmental issues employed in order to compete for public attention among the many environmental narratives on display in Mexico's newspapers.

Water crises, forests, and air pollution were the top three most discussed topics in the sample of papers used for this thesis, and therefore make up its three chapters.[31] Aside from being important simply because they were the most discussed issues, water crises, forests, and air pollution had social relevance. Mexico City in the 1980s suffered from the world's worst air pollution and it worsened throughout the decade. Many other cities like

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Management: The Case of Air Pollution in the Valle de México," in *Population, City, and Environment in Contemporary Mexico*, ed. José Luis Lezama and José B. Morelos (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2006), 505; Victor Alejando Payá Porres, *Laguna Verde: La Violencia de la Modernización: Actores y Movimiento Social* (México City: Instituto Mora, 1994), 73-75.

[29] Díez, 30; Velma García-Gorena, *Mothers and the Mexican Antinuclear Power Movement* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1999), 17-18; Mumme, 125.

[30] Hughes, 4-6; Simonian, 205.

[31] Of the 216 newspaper articles researched, sixty-two discussed water crises (twenty-nine percent), forty-three discussed forests (twenty percent), and twenty-eight discussed air pollution (thirteen percent). Other popular topics included twenty-two stories about agricultural issues and eighteen stories about problems with oil. See Table 1 in the appendix for more detail.

Coatzacoalcos in the south and Ensenada in the north also suffered from unhealthy air. The first chapter explores the narrative surrounding air pollution – which groups took part in the discussion, how they explained the dangers, and who they tried to blame for creating it. The analysis reveals a national debate over culpability and government policies as well as concern for human health.

Chapter 2 transitions from the smoggy cities to the deforested countryside, where environmental protection advocates tried to quantify the damage while sustainable logging promoters argued over the best way to extract more wealth from Mexico's forests. Here the national narrative centered around finding a way to use forest resources in a way that did not lead to environmental crisis, even as rampant deforestation left large swaths of the country ecologically damaged and agriculturally unproductive. Deforestation wreaked havoc on ecosystems, farmland, rivers, and the campesinos who depended on the health of all of these elements for their subsistence. As the destruction of Mexico's forests accelerated in the early 1980s, the federal government introduced a new forest policy that encouraged the privatization of forest resources, and newspapers reveal efforts by the federal government to convince Mexicans that this policy was the right move.[32]

Chapter 3 examines the national narrative surrounding water pollution and water shortages. Millions lacked access to clean water, and were subjected to frequent outbreaks of water-borne diseases affecting tens of thousands. These water crises proved to be the most acute environmental threat. Mexicans were much more likely to die from

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[32] Christopher R. Boyer, *Political Landscapes: Forests, Conservation, and Community in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 232.

water contaminated with sewage or industrial waste than from any other form of pollution.[33] In addition, many regions of the country faced water shortages in 1983 and 1984 which threatened their economic prosperity.[34] Newspapers carried the efforts by many different social groups to describe the problems, to blame those they believed guilty for causing them, and to present reasons why those who had access to clean water should care.

The frequency with which environmental stories appeared in these two Mexican newspapers throughout 1983 and 1984 reflects both the severity of the environmental crises facing the nation and the loss of faith in the federal government to address it. Even many who did not define themselves as environmentalists took part in the battle to control the narrative evolving in the newspapers in an attempt to secure access to clean water and air. Newspaper reporters led the way in pressuring the federal government to respond to environmental problems. Sometimes these responses resulted in a cleaner environment, such as the reduction in air pollution over the Valley of Mexico starting in the 1980s, and dramatically improving in the early 1990s. In other cases, government-friendly reporters merely tried to put an environmental spin on policies the PRI wanted to implement anyway, such as the campaign in the 1980s to describe the privatization of forests as an environmentally-friendly action. That reporters mentioned the environment at all is a testament to the penetration of environmental advocacy within Mexican society

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[33] Fernando Ortiz Monasterio, *Tierra profanada: historia ambiental de México* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Ecología, 1987), 249.

[34] Gustavo Garza Villarreal, *El proceso de industrialización en la ciudad de México (1821-1970)* (México D.F.: El Colegio de Méxcio, 1985), 269; Ortiz Monasterio, 236.

in the 1980s, a process that newspapers facilitated and sustained. The drive to clean up the air was one of the most successful, and so this thesis begins there.

CHAPTER 1

"We Would Flee to the Mountains Desperately Looking for Breathable Air": *Excélsior, Uno Más Uno,* and the Battle for Clean Air

In April 1984, award-winning Mexican author Fernando Césarman wrote an editorial condemning the lack of government action to effectively deal with Mexico City's chronic air pollution. He noted that the city did not need special scientific equipment in order to see how bad the problem had become; the smog was plainly visible with the naked eye. Yet, Césarman observed, most people went about their lives just the same, everyday inhaling the dangerous chemicals while doing nothing to fight for cleaner air. In order to convince readers of the absurdity of this situation, Césarman proposed a thought experiment, "If the air typical of the region was more clear, and we awoke one morning to suddenly find the gray cloud of smog, the shock would be of such magnitude that we would either not come out of our houses or we would flee to the mountains desperately looking for breathable air."[35] Césarman argued that the slow increase of air pollution over the years permitted Mexicans to become accustomed to it, and this is what allowed for such complacency in the face of a deadly threat.

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[35] Fernando Césarman, "El lento aumento del *neblumo*," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 9, 1984.

The doom and gloom in Césarman's style was not unusual among Mexican reporters covering air quality throughout the 1980s, and journalists had reason to be concerned. Air quality was especially poor in the Valley of Mexico where a combination of topography, climatology, and shortsighted national development policies had given rise to an environmental nightmare. Mexico City lies in a large basin surrounded by high mountain ranges that hinder the dispersal of air to surrounding regions. Furthermore, thermal inversions – in which a cooler layer of air at the surface becomes trapped below a more stable, warmer layer above – typically occur in the valley more than 250 days a year. The Valley of Mexico's location ensures that regions of high pressure – typified by dry, sunny days and light winds – dominate the city's weather pattern. Finally, the valley's 7,380 foot elevation means there is twenty three percent less oxygen in the air than exists at sea level, which causes combustion engines to burn less efficiently, thereby releasing more pollutants into the atmosphere.[36] Policies aimed at centralizing industry brought government and commerce into the Valley of Mexico in the decades after the Revolution. Mexican political leaders encouraged a prodigious population increase in the valley, which grew from nearly three million in 1950 to thirteen million by 1980.[37] As the number of vehicles (more than two million in 1980) and industrial complexes increased in the valley, Mexico City residents soon found themselves inhaling some of the world's most unhealthy air.[38] However, air pollution was not limited to the Valley of Mexico. Cities in the northwest, like Ensenada, Baja California, also suffered from inversions that

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[36] José Luis Lezama, *Medio ambiente, sociedad y gobierno: La cuestión institucional* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2006), 24.

[37] Lezama, 23.

[38] Lezama, 85.

trapped air pollutants for long periods of time. In Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, in southeast Mexico, a large oil refining industry ensured that skies stayed polluted no matter what the weather did.

Mexican journalists churned out reports on air quality more frequently than reports on erosion, pesticide risks, or the depletion of natural resources. Unlike these other crises, urban Mexicans of all social classes experienced air pollution in a very tangible way; they awoke to its smell in the morning, their sinuses burned and their eyes watered as they inhaled industrial particulate emissions, and many suffered from pinkeye infections just from going outside.

Throughout 1983 and 1984, *Uno Más Uno* and *Excélsior* reporters published news stories and editorials on air pollution that generally presented one or more of the following approaches: blaming poor air quality on a specific group; linking air pollution with other phenomena such as poor health or deforestation; or applauding government efforts to improve air quality. The quantity and content of these stories suggests that Mexican journalists were concerned about the dangers poor air quality posed. Furthermore, the frequent blaming of Mexico's government and industry for air pollution suggests that many reporters viewed their own society as broken and incapable of addressing serious problems surrounding public health. Meanwhile, in the very same newspapers, government administrators exuded confidence in the government's ability to improve the nation's air quality, thus providing readers with an alternative environmental narrative. News stories from this sample, then, demonstrate that most reporters covering air pollution served as public watchdogs and educators, but about twenty percent worked to deflect criticism aimed at the federal government and to promote policies supported by

the PRI. Furthermore, the reporters who played the roles of watchdog and educator placed Mexico's air pollution in the spotlight, pressuring government administrators to finally take meaningful action to improve air quality in the 1990s.

The rest of this chapter will be divided into three sections that analyze the tactics of reporters serving as watchdogs, educators, and government defenders. "Affixing Blame" examines the watchdog role environmental reporters and various sources played, and the tactics they used to shame polluters and pollution-enablers into action. "Linking Air Pollution with Other Problems" examines the educator role reporters and their sources played in making connections between air pollution and other phenomena like human and ecological health problems. "The Government is the Solution" analyzes those reporters and government administrators who presented an alternative air pollution narrative in Mexico's newspapers, one in which President De la Madrid and his *priístas* were already leading Mexico to an environmentally friendly future.[39]

Affixing Blame

By blaming different entities for Mexico's air pollution and explaining the physical characteristics that contributed to it, reporters helped Mexican readers understand why their air was so unhealthy and thus provided figures on which Mexicans could focus their anger. For example, journalist Teresa Weiser described the existence of a garbage dump on the periphery of Mexico City as such: "the authorities have set up an enormous landfill at the foot of La Caldera hill, on the edge of the highway, whose filth is

[39] Because Mexico's government was so thoroughly dominated by one political party in 1983-1984, the Institutional Revolutionary Party *(PRI)*, I consider the terms "federal government" and "PRI" to be interchangeable and will treat them as such throughout this chapter. *Priístas* is a Spanish word that means supporters of the PRI.

dispersed in a radius of hundreds of meters and passers-by breathe in a fermented stench that warns visitors that they have arrived in Mexico City."[40] In this case Weiser blamed the foul air emanating from the garbage dump on the government, but other stories highlighted different guilty figures. The complexity of understanding all of the various factors that contributed to air pollution – such as industrial emissions, automobile exhaust, government policies, and weather patterns – ensured that most Mexicans could not untangle the mix of variables that made their air dangerous to breathe. Environmental reporters brought order to this tangled web, usually focusing on only one or two variables per story, which enabled readers to acquire knowledge about the problem story by story, rather than overwhelming them with too much information at once. By assigning blame, reporters also gave readers a focal point for their anger, which sometimes manifested itself in the form of civil demonstrations. Naming those responsible for air pollution exposed these entities to public ridicule and empowered Mexican readers through education.

Mexico's industries proved to be popular targets among environmental reporters, and they typically couched their stories in one of two ways: general blaming, or blaming, naming, and shaming. Many articles blamed industry in general for air pollution and drew links between emissions and environmental or human health problems. Others published lists of specific corporations or industrial complexes in an attempt to shame them or the government into action. While articles falling into the general blaming category helped readers understand why air pollution was a problem, articles that also

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[40] Teresa Weiser, "Desastre ecológico y urbano en gran parte de la zona oriente del Valle," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), June 25, 1984.

named and shamed the perpetrators confronted the problem in a very direct manner, giving readers the knowledge needed to take a stand for clean air, should they choose to do so.

Javier Cruz A. filed a story for *Excélsior* in September 1983, reporting in the general blaming style. He explained that industrial waste contaminated both the air and the water in Ensenada, Baja California, and that between ten and fifteen percent of the city's population suffered from respiratory or eye illnesses due to gases and powders from nearby industries. Cruz used the story's byline to focus attention on the scope of the problem, writing, "Every Day Some 30,000 Ensenadans Breathe in Gases and Dust Spewed by Factories."[41] While the story noted that the persistence of thermal inversions contributed to poor air quality – a problem in this coastal state as well as in the Valley of Mexico – Cruz accentuated the role played by Ensenada's industries, rather than the climate, in perpetuating the city's suffering.

An unnamed author published an article with a similar sentiment toward industrial pollution for *Uno Más Uno*, evincing a sense of hopelessness and anger with which many Mexican readers must have identified. The author wrote of a nationwide problem: "In Mexico, not only do the foreign-owned corporations pollute, but so do the domestic ones, and their harmful effects result in serious deterioration of the air…The lack of control and respect to the rules of emission and environmental quality enable industries to release their pollutants with minimal fear of being sanctioned even though transnational

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[41] Javier Cruz A., "Grave contaminación causan varias industrias en Ensenada," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 26, 1983.

corporations have been expelled from other countries for these causes."[42] In noting the "lack of control and respect to the rules of emission," the author also implicated the government in looking the other way rather than enforcing air quality regulations. In this article, industry and government were partners in crime, and everyone in the Valley of Mexico suffered from their corruption. Furthermore, the author compared Mexico unfavorably with other nations in terms of environmental protection by noting that other countries had the fortitude to remove offending transnational polluters from their borders while even Mexican companies did not seem to care about Mexico's environment.

Some reporters and sources took things a step further, targeting not just industry in general, but rather blaming, naming, and shaming specific industrial plants and corporations that polluted the air. In a story for *Excélsior* Mario Ruiz R. named twelve industries in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, that released their untreated industrial waste into the air and rivers of the city.[43] The author claimed that area residents suffered from respiratory and gastrointestinal problems due to the pollution released by these industries. Seven months later, *Uno Más Uno* published a similar story, in which co-authors Teresa Weiser and Jesús Lastra named specific industrial plants and corporations polluting Coatzacoalcos: "The atmospheric pollution comes from a multitude of industrial plants concentrated in this area and in order to give an idea of the magnitude of the smoke and

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[42] La ciudad de México, una de las urbes más contaminadas del mundo," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 25, 1984.

[43] Mario Ruiz R., "Pasividad de las autoridades federales," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 12, 1983, here is a list of the companies cited by the author: Pemex, Tetraetilo de México, Cloro de Tehuantepec, Industrias Quimicas del Istmo, Celanese Mexicana, Industrias Resistol, Fertimex, Fenoquimia, Tereftalatos, Azufrera Panamericana Liquid Carbonic, Temsa, and Iquisa.

gases they emit, here is a list of the major factories…"[44] Weiser and Lastra then listed thirteen factories, six of which were also listed by Mario Ruiz R. The authors detailed the environmental damage caused by this pollution. They also included a picture of a residential neighborhood in the foreground with thick black smoke in the background filling the horizon. Perhaps because Coatzacoalcos is 600 kilometers from Mexico City (where *Uno Más Uno* was published) the authors felt the need to include visual evidence of the environmental destruction occurring in this important port city.

Whereas Mexico's ruling party, the PRI, had responded to criticism with cooption, repression, or violence for most of its existence, in the 1980s a cascade of crises in Mexico emboldened critics. From runaway inflation and a sagging economy, to environmental issues like air pollution, journalists started challenging the official party line in increasing numbers in a plea for greater democracy.[45] Journalists like Weiser and Lastra used many techniques – reporting on the ecological damage, including visual evidence of pollution, and describing the health impacts on local residents – to gain the moral authority needed to stand in judgment of Mexico's industry and government,

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[44] Teresa Weiser and Jesús Lastra, "Desastre ecológico en Coatzacoalcos por la elevada concentración de industrias," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 16, 1984, here is a list of the factories cited by the authors: Azufrera Panamericana, Electromecánica de Veracruz, Materias Primas de Monterrey, Meseca, SA y Maíz Industrializado Conasupo, Complejo Petroquímico Cosoleacaque, Fertimex, Tereftalatos Mexicanos, Celanese Mexicana, SA, Fenoquimia, SA y Albamex, Refinería Lázaro Cárdenas (Pemex).

[45] For a further examination into the shifting variations of authoritarianism over time in twentieth-century Mexico see Víctor Alejandro Payá Porres, *Laguna Verde: La violencia de la modernización: Actores y movimiento social* (México City: Instituto Mora), 1994; Sallie Hughes, *Newsroom in Conflict: Journalism and the Democratization of Mexico* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press), 2006; Louise E. Walker, *Waking from the Dream: Mexico's Middle Classes After 1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2013; Jordi Díez, *Political Change and Environmental Policymaking in Mexico* (New York: Routledge), 2006; Neil Harvey, "The Difficult Transition: Neoliberalism and Neocorporatism in Mexico," in *Mexico: Dilemmas of Transition,* ed. Neil Harvey, 4-26, (London: British Academic Press), 1993.

which they leveraged into a public shaming undertaken by naming the perpetrators in the newspaper.

By interviewing them, reporters shared the watchdog role with their sources, giving them a platform from which they could blame industries or corporations for fouling the air. For example, in a story concerning air pollution in the eastern Valley of Mexico, Teresa Weiser interviewed Eréndira Espinoza, a spokesperson from the Committee of Ecological Preservation at the National School of Professional Studies – Zaragoza, who took aim at a nearby industrial plant: "We see the inhabitants of the Army of the East housing unit affected by the acute pollution recorded in the area, principally by the Minerales No Metálicos factory [located 12.5 kilometers away] which twenty-four hours a day emits all kinds of substances and dust with serious effects on the health of the population."[46] In linking gases and dust emitted by Minerales No Metálicos with skin, eye, and respiratory tract damage among nearby residents, Espinoza hoped to bring negative attention to this particular factory.

By 1983, Mexico's nationalized oil industry, Pemex, had essentially become an autonomous branch of the government, with few regulations and a horrendous environmental record.[47] So when two academics criticized Pemex's March 18 Refinery in an *Excélsior* story, they were also criticizing the government.[48] A 1983 study undertaken

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[46] Teresa Weiser, "Desastre ecológico y urbano en gran parte de la zona oriente del Valle," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), June 25, 1984.

[47] Joel Simon, *Endangered Mexico: An Environment on the Edge* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1997), 158-59.

[48] The refinery took its name from March 18, 1938, a proud date in Mexican history on which President Lázaro Cárdenas expropriated the nation's oil, marking the start of a government-run petroleum industry.

by New York University concluded that Azcapotzalco, Mexico (also in the Valley of Mexico), had the second worst polluted air in the world. In response, reporter Juan G. Reyes interviewed two faculty members at Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM) – Azcapotzalco to ask them why. Yolanda Falcón Briseño, from the university's Energy Department, blamed Pemex's March 18 Refinery, and suggested that it was a poor decision to build an oil refinery in the Valley of Mexico. Ruth Alvarado, the director of ecological projects at the university, also criticized this government-run industry: "Pemex should shelve its publicity campaigns as this money would be better spent taking measures that truly help to prevent pollution."[49] Both academics felt compelled to blame Pemex for the air pollution, even though doing so risked embarrassing an authoritarian regime.

Many environmental reporters confronted government policymakers more directly, calling out the corruption, cronyism, and poor decisions that gave rise to Mexico's world-famous air pollution. In general, these criticisms fell into two categories: bad government administrators, or bad government policies. Stories focusing on the former drew attention to government inaction or corruption. Journalists harped on the lack of effective measures for mitigating air pollution and traced this problem back to local, state, and federal government administrators. Other reporters focused on specific government policies that encouraged air pollution, or even worse, actively created it.

Juan Gerardo Reyes called attention to carcinogenic chemicals in the air, noting how they are especially dangerous to infants, thereby drawing a tangible link between

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[49] Juan G. Reyes, "Ocupa México el segundo lugar entre los países más contaminados," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Oct. 13, 1983.

government officials and diseases afflicting Mexicans and their children. In a report for *Excélsior,* Reyes explained, "Mexico City's air pollution had already passed the limits that humans can tolerate without danger," and that, "furthermore, the measures implemented up to this point to combat air pollution are insufficient, and frequently remain mere projects, due to changes of government and the neglect of some authorities."[50] With his story, Reyes accused government authorities of failing in their duties to protect Mexicans from poisonous pollutants. As noted in the Introduction, *Excélsior* was a government-friendly newspaper, but Reyes's criticism demonstrates that *Excélsior*'s support of the PRI was merely a trend, not a rule.

In a story written by Teresa Weiser, Dr. Humberto Bravo, director of the Department of Environmental Pollution at the Center for Atmospheric Sciences at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), criticized lawmakers for failing to establish clear standards for air quality. He explained that without standards there was no way to quantify levels of atmospheric pollutants such as carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, lead, and ozone. Weiser delved into the details with Dr. Bravo, providing readers with the numerical percentages specific pollutants constituted in Mexico City's atmosphere and what safe levels were, but her role as public watchdog was evident in the headline: "Deficient and inadequate: the air quality standards of the law to protect the environment."[51] While Weiser's article was full of scientific facts and figures for readers

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[50] Juan Gerardo Reyes, "Azcapotzalco, una bomba de tiempo por los gasoductos que la cruzan," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Oct. 13, 1983.

[51] Teresa Weiser, "Deficientes e inadecuadas, las normas de calidad del aire de la ley de protección del ambiente," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), June 1, 1984.

interested in the data, her headline summarized the underlying message – your government legislators are not doing enough to protect your air.

In other situations, reporters did not merely accuse government administrators of neglect, but rather asserted that government policies actively made air quality worse; Teresa Weiser used this approach a month after her story on the lack of air quality standards to cover the source of widespread *E. coli* infections in the Valley of Mexico. On the valley's east side, near Nezahualcóyotl, there existed a large seasonal lake called Xochiaca that consisted primarily of sewage. Every dry season the lake evaporated, allowing the prevailing winds to carry dust and *E. coli* bacteria into the Valley of Mexico where people breathed it in, suffering respiratory infections as a result. Weiser interviewed Jorge Paulat, who helped create the Health System for Nezahualcóyotl and revealed some unsettling information about Xochiaca's origins. Paulat said that starting in the late 1950s, government administrators of the Federal District (comparable to the District of Columbia in the United States) decided the basin was a convenient place to dump sewage from the city when other sewage channels proved insufficient. Furthermore, he claimed that authorities found Xochiaca to be a cheap and effective deterrent to the construction of new slums. He explained that Mexico City "is the only great human concentration where they [government administrators] not only allowed, but rather created an infectious lagoon of the magnitude of Xochiaca."[52] To help bring this cesspool to life for her readers, Weiser included three large pictures showing the lake filled with trash. She also used her descriptive writing skills to connect government

[52] Teresa Weiser, "El lago de Texcoco, gigantesco foco de infición atmosférica de microrganismos," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), July 9, 1984.

decisions with this lake of filth: "A foul odor announces its presence from kilometers away, and once it comes into view, the panorama is bleak. Amongst some green aquatic plants that manage to reproduce in this lagoon of sewage, the waste stands out: tires, bottles, plastic bags, diapers, and excrement float, defining an enormous and nauseating scum. At the same time, clouds of flies and mosquitos proliferate along its banks where, on the other side, and separated only by the asphalt ribbon for a large median, hundreds of children play soccer."[53] The article concludes with Paulat's claim that the government could drain Xochiaca in less than fifteen days, and convert the space into a park or recreation complex to impede new settlement. By including this revelation, Weiser reinforces the notion that this is a fixable problem, and that government policy is the only barrier to a cleaner environment.

Teresa Weiser also employed subtler tactics to undermine government legitimacy on environmental issues, as her coverage of Mexico's first National Environmental Congress demonstrates. When President Miguel de la Madrid spoke before the Congress in June 1984, he called on the Mexican people to change their ways. The President noted that each day every Mexican contributed to the improvement or deterioration of the environment, so the government needed to promote an ecological conscience among the people. Of course the amount of pollution emitted by government-run industries, like Pemex, or poorly regulated private industries contributed a much larger share of the nation's pollution than each individual Mexican, but Miguel de la Madrid spun the nation's environmental crisis: "The responsibility…belongs to the whole community,

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[53] Ibid.

certainly the government, but also to each and every Mexican."[54] The President, and following government speakers, went on to discuss all the bureaucratic restructuring then underway to improve Mexico's environment by facilitating improved communications between the government and the community. In short, President de la Madrid seemed to suggest that the Mexican people's callous ways were ruining Mexico's environment, but together, the nation could improve air quality under the guiding hand of the government. Teresa Weiser covered this speech, and had many possible environmental topics from the assembly on which she could have focused – like the introduction of a new air quality monitoring network in the Valley of Mexico, or the transition of fuel oil to natural gas at the March 18 Refinery. But Weiser, a longstanding environmental reporter, titled her story, "The State is not solely responsible for the environment, affirmed de la Madrid,"[55] subtly criticizing the President's rhetoric, and showcasing the government's attempt to shift the blame for the nation's pollution to the Mexican people.

Some environmental reporters, however, transmitted the idea that Mexicans really were to blame for their degraded air quality, and their motives for doing so varied from raising environmental awareness among readers to promoting the government's blame-shifting to the public. In an editorial for *Uno Más Uno*, Fernando Césarman referred to the national air pollution problem as a "chronic crisis," and noted that despite years of warnings about the dangers of air pollution, "we [Mexican society], the source of the

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[54] Teresa Weiser, "No es solo responsabilidad del Estado la ecología, afirmó DLM," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), June 10, 1984.

[55] Ibid.

danger, are not willing to listen and do something to improve the situation."[56] He went on to suggest that "It is not possible that we are so paralyzed that absolutely nothing can be done to improve the environmental conditions. It is really surprising."[57] In this sample, Césarman never blamed individuals in his environmental reporting. Instead, in addressing environmental concerns he preferred to blame Mexican society in general. This is strikingly different from the environmental reporting covered so far in that Césarman's readers were made to feel like part of the problem (and part of the solution), whereas reporters like Teresa Weiser or Mario Ruiz R. placed the blame squarely on government or industrial entities and framed their readers as victims, or at the very least, passive observers. Because Césarman was an award winning essayist, author, and poet, with a long record of promoting environmental issues, it is unlikely that he was merely parroting the government line to ensure his continued employment as a journalist. Instead, Césarman may have adopted this approach in an attempt to stir Mexican readers to action; once people recognized that they were at fault they might take steps to reduce their contribution to air pollution such as using public transit or tuning up their vehicles. Newspaper readers, therefore, found different air pollution narratives in their papers – there were stories blaming malevolent polluters, and there were stories blaming society in general.

Similarly, Ramón Ojeda Mestre, president of the Mexican Academy of Environmental Rights, also blamed contemporary Mexican society for its callous ways,

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[56] Fernando Césarman, "El lento aumento del *neblumo*," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 9, 1984.

[57] Ibid.

but targeted the nation's sixteenth-century Spanish conquerors as well. In a story covering the toxic dust storms generated by Xochiaca, an unnamed reporter explained Mestre's views: "Ojeda Mestre expanded on the history of the problem pointing out that it stems from a lack of an "environmental conscience" among the inhabitants of the Valley of Mexico dating from the arrival of the Spanish. Our country lives in almost total environmental irrationality, we are stunned trying to resolve the problems derived from the economic crisis, both at a national and household level, and we ignore the environmental disaster that accelerates more each day."[58] Whereas Césarman expressed surprise at the nation's inability to address these pressing environmental problems, Ojeda Mestre argued that Mexico's economic crisis had forced neglect of environmental problems. Although Ojeda Mestre explained the nation's unwillingness to improve air quality as a symptom of a slumping economy, his underlying message blamed the Mexican people as a whole, just like Césarman. Ojeda Mestre's position as president of the Mexican Academy for Environmental Rights suggests that he was not serving as a mouthpiece for the state, but rather wanted to inspire Mexicans to do what they could to improve air quality.

A Mexican Green Movement spokesperson also noted the lack of an environmental conscience among the Mexican people in a newspaper article, although the organization tempered this message by also singling out organizations that contributed a higher percentage of air pollution, like the government-run bus company Ruta 100, local cement factories, and the oft-blamed March 18 Refinery. The spokesperson told the

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[58] "Grave amenaza a la salud pública, las tolvaneras del oriente de la ciudad, señala Ojeda Mestre," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 9, 1984, Ojeda Mestre used the phrase "*conciencia ecológica*" which could also translate to "eco-friendly conscience."

reporter, “if the situation is in itself serious, it is further complicated by the incredible indifference maintained despite the danger of a total disaster that can not be avoided unless consciousness is raised concerning the magnitude of the pollution problem and the people and the government work immediately towards a solution.”[59] Although the story primarily focused on a seven-point plan crafted by the Mexican Green Movement to reduce pollution in the Valley of Mexico, someone at the paper decided to entitle the article, “Danger of environmental disaster in the city due to the lack of social conscience.”[60] This title reinforced the message that the people of Mexico were to blame for the dire environmental straits they were in, even though the heart of the story dealt with efforts to improve the environment.

Some journalists chose to blame air pollution on individual drivers, rather than government policies that encouraged the forty-year mass migration to the Valley of Mexico while creating a transportation system designed for the personal automobile. One reporter included Mexican vehicle owners along with greedy industries and inept government leaders in a list of chronic polluters: “every year, automobile owners prove to be more irresponsible by not maintaining their vehicles in a good state.”[61] Similarly, at a rally protesting pollution, Mexican Green Movement president Alfonso Ciprés Villarreal named the Valley of Mexico’s millions of vehicles as “one of the chief factors” of air pollution, thereby joining a notorious list that included heavy industries in the valley and

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[59] "Peligro de desastre ecológico en la ciudad por falta de conciencia social," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 23, 1984.

[60] Ibid.

[61] "La ciudad de México, una de las urbes más contaminadas del mundo," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 25, 1984.

the *e. coli*-laden dust storms originating from Xochiaca.[62] About eighty-five percent of Mexico City's air pollutants came from vehicles, so drawing attention to the biggest polluter in the valley was warranted.[63] But blaming the drivers was shortsighted and unfair, as many Mexicans were too poor to keep their vehicles in good shape, and furthermore, the government, which owned Pemex, had done nothing to promote energy conservation.

Linking Air Pollution with Other Problems

Aside from assigning blame, environmental reporters also connected air pollution with other problems, especially heath and deforestation. The frequent occurrence of these human and ecological health issues in environmental reporting reflects a desire among reporters to find order among the complex relationships surrounding air pollution. By explaining how air pollution directly caused human illnesses, reporters educated readers as to why they were sick. Knowing the cause of their illness, Mexicans could then take steps to alleviate it, such as advocating for better air quality, or protesting government inaction.

Environmental reporters endeavored to uncover health problems across the country related to poor air quality in order to convince the public of the dangers of inhaling polluted air. In an article reporting on air pollution created by a zinc processing plant in Saltillo, Coahuila, Joaquin Paredes wrote for *Excélsior* that "the emissions and discharges of chemical substances from this plant cause serious damage to the respiratory

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[62] "Subió a 97.5% el indice de contaminación en la ciudad de México, dice el movimiento ecologista," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 26, 1984.

[63] J.R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 77.

tracts and to the eyesight of the inhabitants of this city."[64] Mario Ruiz R. wrote for *Excélsior* in a similar style for a story about air pollution in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz: "The effects of the air pollution on the health of the inhabitants of Minatitlán and Coatzacoalcos reflect the high index of problems of the respiratory tracts and of gastrointestinal illnesses. In both cities the people live within an asphyxiating atmosphere."[65] In Ensenada, Baja California, Javier Cruz A. quantified the effects of air pollution on the citizens of this northern coastal city: "Between ten and fifteen percent of the population suffers from illnesses of the respiratory tract, caused by air pollution."[66] In all three examples the authors made direct connections between air pollution and illnesses in a very matter-of-fact way, and agreed that there was no question that air pollution made people sick.

Mexican journalists often relied on the testimony of environmentalists to communicate the dangers of air pollution. A news brief in *Uno Más Uno* quoted statistics from the Mexican Green Movement, noting that in Mexico City alone more than a million people suffered from respiratory illnesses, 250,000 from pinkeye, 260,000 were afflicted with asthma, and a million people dealt with allergies.[67] This particular story appeared in the City and Government news brief section and consisted of only one

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[64] Joaquin Paredes, "Requiere 14 mil millones Zincamex para dejar de contaminar el ambiente: SDUE," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Aug. 19, 1983.

[65] Mario Ruiz R., "Pasividad de las autoridades federales," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 12, 1983.

[66] Javier Cruz A., "Grave contaminación causan varias industrias en Ensenada," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 26, 1983

[67] "Alarmantes, los efectos de la infición," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), July 7, 1984.

paragraph, which suggests that journalists tried to communicate the dangers of air pollution in different formats for different types of readers.

An unnamed author for *Uno Más Uno* communicated a similar message in a story that at first glance appears to have nothing to do with air pollution. In a story about the lack of green space in Mexico City, this journalist interviewed administrators from both the Department of Preventative Medicine and the Office of Education for the Health of UNAM who explained that "air pollution, due to urban and industrial activity, causes illnesses like bronchitis, symptoms of asthma, and other respiratory distress."[68] The reporter went on to examine the connection between trees and air quality, a common narrative that is discussed later in this chapter.

As previously noted, Teresa Weiser interviewed Jorge Paulat from the Nezahualcóyotl System of Health about the creation of Xociaca, a large lake of raw sewage. She also relied on his medical expertise to communicate the health risks of the dust clouds that blew off the desiccated lagoon in the dry season, spreading fecal bacteria across the valley. He explained to her that, "the majority of Mexico City citizens have developed resistance to this type of microorganism, but very often cultures of *E. Coli* are found in the larynxes and pharynxes of patients."[69] While some people developed respiratory illnesses like pneumonia as a result of *E. Coli* in the respiratory tract, most Valley of Mexico residents had at least some resistance to the bacteria. Still, it must have

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[68] "En México, 2.38 metros cuadrados de áreas verdes por habitante; 11 en Moscú y NY," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), June 11, 1984.

[69] Teresa Weiser, "El lago de Texcoco, gigantesco foco de infición atmosférica de microrganismos," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), July 9, 1984.

been a shock for readers to learn that they were breathing in bacteria spawned from human waste.

While many of the stories examined so far detailed illnesses that could be treated, other environmental journalists explored the relationship between air pollution and more dangerous diseases. Juan G. Reyes interviewed Yolanda Falcón Briseño from the Department of Energy at UAM – Azcapotzalco about a study by New York University that found Azcapotzalco's air to be the second most polluted in the world. Briseño warned that the impacts of poor air quality went beyond reduced visibility and higher cases of asthma; the study revealed "the presence of heavy metals in the atmosphere, especially the presence of highly cancerous organic particles that cause genetic mutations."[70] In a front-page story detailing the many environmental crises facing the Valley of Mexico, Dr. Enrique Riva Palacio Chiang, a professor of Pollution and Environmental Degradation at UNAM, warned that breathing in the city's air could, "decrease one's appetite, which causes damage to the digestive tract; cause breathing difficulties, nausea, and vomiting; cause rapid heartbeat; and long-term impacts include, kidney, liver and cardiovascular system diseases. In the nervous system mental disorders, mild manias, hysterics, moodiness, and depression, as well as severe headaches have been detected."[71] Surely these maladies aroused more concern among readers than increased cases of bronchitis or pinkeye. The message was pretty clear: breathing Mexico City's air could kill you.

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[70] Juan G. Reyes, "Ocupa México el segundo lugar entre los países más contaminados," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Oct. 13, 1983.

[71] "Crece la contaminación en el DF," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Aug. 27, 1983.

If Mexico's air was dangerous for adults, then it was especially dangerous for children, whose bodies were still developing. Environmental reporters made efforts to spread this message among the populace. In Victor Manuel Juárez's frighteningly titled news story "Pollution, one of the Top Ten Causes of Death in the DF [Federal District]," the author noted, "Mexico City residents are condemned to suffer from respiratory diseases because air pollution is such – detritus, smoke, dust, and various toxic gases – that already, [it has reached levels that] turn out to be fatal." He went on to note that this pollution "causes gastrointestinal and ocular illnesses, mainly in children."[72] Another story published a month later also drew connections between poor air quality and the health of Mexico's children. The unnamed reporter interviewed the President of the Mexican Green Movement, Alfonso Ciprés Villarreal, who noted that "in Mexico City, childhood illnesses have increased by 600 percent in recent years, as a consequence of environmental pollution, and serious epidemics have occurred that have not happened anywhere else in the world."[73] The journalist highlighted the significance of this alarming increase in childhood illnesses by using the statistic as the story's byline. Environmental journalists wanted their readers to see the connection between air pollution and unhealthy human bodies, and by focusing on the impacts of children's bodies they likely hoped that Mexicans would see how detrimental the pollution was to those least guilty of creating it

Another prominent connection Mexican journalists strived to make was the relationship between air quality and deforestation. Trees remove air pollutants such as

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[72] Victor Manuel Juárez, "Infición, una de las 10 causas principales de muerte en el DF," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 23, 1984.

[73] "Subió a 97.5% el indice de contaminación en la ciudad de México, dice el movimiento ecologista," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 26, 1984.

ozone, carbon monoxide, and sulfur dioxide by absorbing them, thereby creating a cleaner atmosphere. In fact, a single tree can remove up to ten pounds of pollutants from the air each year.[74] Many reporters wrote stories lamenting the loss of Mexico's trees, especially in the Valley of Mexico, and raised concerns over the resulting degradation in air quality. In a story for *Uno Más Uno* that discussed air pollution in Naucalpan, Atizapán, and Tlalnepantla (Mexico City suburbs), local professor Francisco Manuel Carreño Pantoja explained, "it is urgent to start reforesting these towns in order to strengthen the green *lungs* [emphasis in original] that remain in these areas."[75] By comparing the respiration of trees with the respiration of people, Carreño Pantoja connected the health of the region's ecosystem with the health of individual Mexicans.

A similar connection between air pollution and trees exists in an article published to highlight the lack of green spaces in Mexico City. In it, Silvia Turpín, a professor at UAM, noted that "Mexico [City] only has two lungs of oxygenation; El Ajusco and el Desierto de los Leones [both nearby national parks], which are insufficient for the seventeen million inhabitants of the Federal District." Similar to the previous story, an academic referred to trees as the city's lungs in a metaphor intended to connect deforestation with poor air quality. Indeed, one of the major objectives cited by the Mexican Green Movement in an anti-pollution rally was their intention to plant 40,200

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[74] "Clean Air & Water," *American Forests*, accessed March 17, 2016, https://www.americanforests.org/why-it-matters/why-it-matters-clean-air-and-water/.

[75] Angel López, "Deterioro ecológico por la contaminación," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 31, 1984.

trees in the center of Mexico City, mostly near schools so that children could breathe cleaner air.[76]

The Government is the Solution

So far the sources examined in this chapter have largely been drawn from academics, doctors, or non-governmental environmental organizations like the Mexican Green Movement, but government officials and government-friendly reporters also contributed air pollution narratives to *Uno Más Uno,* and especially, *Excélsior*. Unsurprisingly, their comments often asserted that the government had the air pollution problem under control, and frequently adopted a defensive tone when questioned about the nation's poor environmental record. Throughout his presidency, President De la Madrid worked to cultivate an image of environmental sensitivity and awareness, best exemplified by the 1984 National Environmental Congress. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, political scientist Stephen Mumme labeled this effort "preemptive reform," suggesting that the president's embrace of environmentalism was merely a ploy to redirect non-governmental environmental action into government channels.[77] Whatever De la Madrid's motives, it is clear that Mexico's government made a few modest efforts to improve air quality in the 1980s, and government spokespeople used the newspapers included in this sample to promote them.

Teresa Weiser noted the ignorance surrounding a quantitative understanding of pollution levels for the Valley of Mexico by writing a story about the lack of an air

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[76] "Subió a 97.5% el indice de contaminación en la ciudad de México, dice el movimiento ecologista," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 26, 1984.

[77] Stephen P. Mumme, "System Maintenance and Environmental Reform in Mexico: Salinas's Preemptive Strategy," *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (1992): 127-128.

quality monitoring network, and interviewed a government administrator who claimed that the federal government was already taking steps to install such a network. While it was possible at the time to measure particulate concentrations at the sources of industrial emissions, there was no measuring equipment set up around the valley to measure air pollution dispersed by the weather. The establishment of an air quality monitoring network meant, for instance, that if sulfur dioxide levels climbed above seventy micrograms per cubic meter (the guideline set by the World Health Organization) in Azcapotzalco, Naucalpan, or Nezahualcóyotl, the measuring equipment could detect it and then city administrators could issue a warning to area residents to limit their outdoor exposure.[78] The Pemex Manager of Environmental Protection, Francisco Ramírez Chávez, agreed that a network of air quality measuring stations was needed, and assured Weiser, "We believe that the authorities are going to determine the air quality that should exist in the Valley of Mexico in real form and without having to take on foreign owners."[79] In other words, the Mexican government could be trusted not only to operate the network, but also to establish appropriate air quality standards. Furthermore, he asserted that Mexico was capable of building the network without the financial assistance offered by foreign capital.[80]

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[78] McNeill, 78; Mexico City's sulfur dioxide levels often surpassed 70 $\mu g/m^3$ in the 1980s, occasionally going as high as 900.

[79] Teresa Weiser, "Se desconoce la contaminación del aire del DF," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 29, 1984.

[80] Self-sufficiency was a common theme in an economically depressed 1980s Mexico. When an earthquake devastated Mexico City in 1985, President Miguel de la Madrid initially refused any foreign assistance.

One month after this story's publication, the announcement of the network's creation was one of the key talking points at the National Environmental Congress, which indicates that President De la Madrid wanted to reassure the population that environmental issues were best managed through proper government channels.[81] Other major announcements at the conference included a switch to cleaner natural gas at the March 18 Refinery, and that Pemex had made a six billion-peso investment to treat waste water and gas emissions in order to improve environmental quality. Teresa Weiser, usually a sharp critic of poor government environmental action, merely listed off the improvements the government announced at the Assembly, and refrained from any overt criticism. The majority of her story reads like a summary of the federal government's proactive battle against air pollution. It is possible that she was fearful of criticizing such a highly publicized event. As noted above, the only hint of criticism appeared with the title of her story, "DLM [De la Madrid] declares: The environment is not only the State's responsibility," which could be construed to suggest that President de la Madrid was shifting the blame for Mexico's environmental problems and the onus to improve them onto the people of Mexico.

In an article about the terrible pollution plaguing Coatzacoalcos, reporter Mario Ruiz R. contrasted the environmental efforts of Pemex with other industries in the city. He wrote, "Pemex has been the most responsible company concerning the government laws to carry out pollution prevention and control in its facilities. The spokesperson for the management of Pemex in the Southern Zone, Rafael Marquet, announced that this

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[81] Teresa Weiser, "No es sólo responsabilidad del Estado la ecología, afirmó DLM," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), June 10, 1984.

year they allocated 486 million pesos for environmental protection, environmental studies, and land restoration."[82] Ruiz then listed eleven companies in and around Coatzacoalcos, naming and shaming them in an unfavorable light compared to the government-run Pemex. While on the surface it appears that Ruiz was merely parroting the government line, the story does include criticism of the government's inability to enforce environmental regulations among private industries. Yet Pemex (hardly a shining beacon of clean energy) came out of the story looking good, and Mario Ruiz's reporting helped Rafael Marquet spread the word about the government's efforts to improve the environment.

Even as other reporters increasingly began to excoriate Mexico's oil industry for its air pollution, Pemex worked to cultivate an environmentally friendly image, appearing frequently in newspaper articles announcing new measures designed to curb air pollution. In May 1984, Pemex Manager of Environmental Protection, Francisco Ramírez Chávez, announced the reduction of sulfur and lead in gasoline sold in the Valley of Mexico. He explained that this measure would reduce the emission of atmospheric contaminants, thereby resulting in cleaner air for Mexico City and its environs. The article closes with an emphatic proclamation from Ramírez Chávez of Pemex's commitment to being green: "Pemex is ready to apply all appropriate actions to improve the environment."[83] When the Director of Pemex, Mario Ramón Beteta, addressed the first National Environmental Congress that following June, he noted this reduction of sulfur and lead among a list of

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[82] Mario Ruiz R., "Pasividad de las autoridades federales," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 12, 1983.

[83] "Reducción de plomo en las gasolinas y de azufre en el dísel, anuncia Pemex," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 14, 1984.

other steps that Mexico's oil industry had taken to improve the environment. He argued that Pemex was not the primary source of pollution in Mexico, (although the cars that ran on Pemex's petroleum were). Moreover, he reminded the audience that Pemex had allocated more than six billion pesos for environmental protection programs, and that the company had transitioned from oil to natural gas at the March 18 Refinery.[84] Teresa Weiser reported all of these announcements in a story for *Uno Más Uno*, but also included criticism espoused by Fernando Hiriart, the Director of the Federal Electric Commission, who, at the same conference, called Pemex one of the biggest polluters in Mexico and called for cleaner energy sources.[85]

Weiser's article contained two different opinions on government environmental accountability, and points to the larger debate occurring in the pages of *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* in 1983 and 1984. While the majority of environmental stories sampled in this chapter came from journalists who best fit Hughes's civic journalism model and were not afraid to criticize government and industrial administrators and policies, these same reporters often sourced government spokespeople who painted a more environmentally friendly portrait of the government. The inclusion of both points of view, often within the same story, suggests that most Mexican reporters covering air pollution made an effort to write unbiased stories. Different points of view allowed readers to judge for themselves which spokesperson best represented reality. Some journalists left this decision

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[84] Teresa Weiser, "Hay incongruencia legal sobre contaminación: Fernando Hiriart," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), June 7, 1984.

[85] At the time of the conference, about seventy percent of energy used in Mexico came from petroleum, about twenty-five percent from natural gas, and only two percent from coal. "Mexico Overview," *U.S. Energy Information Association*, last modified Sept. 21, 2015, https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.cfm?iso=MEX.

completely in the hands of the reader, while others, as demonstrated above with Teresa Weiser, had a proclivity to subtly nudge readers toward the source that best fit what they believed the truth to be.

By 1992 Mexico City had the worst air pollution in the world, and in response to international and domestic criticism, Mexico's federal government finally took measures to improve air quality for their nation's capital. It passed a law requiring catalytic converters on all cars being sold in Mexico, and provided incentives for industry to move out of the Valley of Mexico. Pemex introduced low-lead gasoline, and transitioned many of its refineries to natural gas. As a result, there is less sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and lead in the air now than in 1984, but the ever increasing number of vehicles in the city still frequently give rise to days with unhealthy levels of ozone.[86] Mexico City still has work to do in terms of providing a breathable space for its citizens, but conditions are drastically better than they were when these newspaper articles were published.

Environmental journalists placed Mexico's air pollution in the spotlight in 1983 and 1984, and although it took several years, the government did finally take action to improve the city's air quality. In the PRI's quest to modernize Mexico in the mid-twentieth century, it had encouraged the growth of industry and population in the Valley of Mexico. But the unintended side effect of this – terrible air pollution – opened the regime up to both international and domestic criticism, which eventually forced party leaders to enact mitigation policies in an attempt to maintain its modern image.

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[86] McNeill, 78-79.

By consistently reporting on air pollution, these environmental reporters kept the pressure on government administrators. They showed their readers who and what was causing air pollution, but equally important was understanding the connections between poor air quality and ecological and human health. These relationships could be quite complex, but Mexican journalists consulted experts in the field who could explain the links between ecology, pollution, and health, and in doing so empowered Mexican readers with the knowledge needed to advocate for change through civic action. At the same time, President De la Madrid's government worked to cultivate an image of environmental sensitivity and awareness, and it sometimes used newspapers and journalists to spread this message. While the means by which to improve air quality differed depending on which story one read, the underlying message in Mexico's papers reporting on air pollution in 1983 and 1984 was that something had to change. The abundance of stories about air pollution during this period demonstrate how critical the problem had become, and reveal the conflictual nature of Mexico's air pollution discourse as told by journalists. But air pollution was not the only environmental problem confronting Mexico, and newspapers reflected diverse environmental narratives on other topics as well. As the next chapter on forests will show, not all problems were as successfully managed as air pollution.

CHAPTER 2

"Long Live the Tree!.Long Live Mankind!": Journalists, Forests, and Mexico's Quest for Rational Development

During the summer of 1984, the government of the Federal District, the army, and several surrounding city municipal governments launched a campaign of reforestation to plant more than thirteen million trees across the Valley of Mexico. Award-winning author and air quality advocate Fernando Césarman used his editorial column in *Uno Más Uno* to praise the effort, and encouraged the seventeen to twenty million Mexicans living in the valley to add to this total by each planting one tree. He wrote that, "[This citizen planting] would be a task in the direction of life…To the motto of Long live the tree! we should add Long live mankind!, that ultimately is what really matters."[87] But Césarman's editorial concluded with an alarming note: The Central Light and Power utility was planning to clear cut a strip of forest in the hills surrounding the Valley of Mexico thirty meters wide for forty kilometers in order to construct high tension power lines. To this he sarcastically exclaimed, "Who cares [about the loss of all those trees]! We will not have air but we will have plenty of electricity."[88] For Césarman, trees could best serve

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[87] Fernando Césarman, "La reforestación, en dirección a la vida," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jul. 9, 1984.

[88] Ibid.

Mexicans as air filters, and cutting them down – even in the service of electrification – was a foolish mistake.[89]

Political scientist Raúl Olmedo Carranza provided a very different opinion on the future of Mexico's forests in his thirty-five editorial series special entitled "Our Lost Forests" for his daily column "The Crisis" in *Excélsior*. This author, who also worked as a professor of political science and public administration at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), repeatedly called for a more efficient and active national logging industry. In the first editorial of this series he lamented, "Each year, thirty million cubic meters of wood is transformed into dust, disintegrated, to return in a cycle of reincarnation in which it is converted into another thirty million cubic meters of wood unexploited by man, that will once again be converted into dust."[90] In referring to decomposing wood as dust, Olmedo described a nutrient replenishment cycle that had sustained the forests for millions of years as merely a wasteful process that helps no one. Pointing out that Mexico has more forest acreage than Norway, Sweden, or Finland, Olmedo argued that harvesting Mexico's forests would bring in much needed money for more than ten million Mexicans. In contrast to Césarman, Olmedo thought his nation's trees would best serve the people as rationally-harvested wood and paper products that could fuel a slumping economy. But his call for lumber products came with the warning that the logging must be conducted carefully, "The harmful exploitation of forests and jungles is evident in the fact that each year we lose 400,000 hectares. Erosion already

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[89] For more analysis on Césarman's editorials against air pollution, see chapter 1.

[90] Raul Olmedo, "Nuestros bosques perdidos I: Gran riqueza potencial," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jan. 10, 1984.

affects sixteen percent of the national territory."[91] Olmedo believed that forests could bring great wealth to Mexico, but only under the careful guidance of a rational federal forestry policy.

As Césarman's and Olmedo's editorials demonstrate, newspaper articles from *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* in 1983 and 1984 expressed concern over the nation's forests, and environmental narratives presented different opinions over which factors constituted the biggest threats, and over what role Mexico's trees should play in its economy, ecology, and society. This is not surprising given the economic restructuring, environmental crises, and increasing criticism of the government occurring throughout the decade.[92] Due to the soaring national debt, the federal government reexamined its role in operating the nation's logging industry, and transitioned to privatization in an effort to cut costs. Campesinos (rural peasants) also felt the pinch from the slumping economy and pushed for more control over lumber resources on their communally held land.[93] Environmentalists recognized the widespread erosion, desertification, and ecological

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[91] Ibid.

[92] Books that provide analysis on Mexico's economy, society, environmental state, and political system in the 1980s include the following. For the environment, see Fernando Ortiz Monasterio, *Tierra profanada: historia ambiental de México* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Ecología, 1987); Joel Simon, *Endangered Mexico: An Environment on the Edge* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1997); For a look at how Mexico's Federal Government approached environmental issues in the 1980s, see Stephen P. Mumme, "System Maintenance and Environmental Reform in Mexico: Salinas's Preemptive Strategy," in *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (1992): 123-143; Jordi Díez, *Political Change and Environmental Policymaking in Mexico* (New York: Routledge, 2006); For campesinos and their struggles with the PRI in the 1970s to obtain what the Revolution promised them, see Arturo Warman, *Ensayos sobre el campesinado en México* (México City: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1984); For a look how PRI officials tried to manipulate campesinos to secure their votes, see Neil Harvey, "The Limits of Concertation in Rural Mexico," in *Mexico: Dilemmas of Transition* ed. Neil Harvey (London: British Academic Press, 1993); For a look at how the implementation of neoliberal policies started to change Mexico in the 1980s, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 98-104.

[93] Christopher R. Boyer, *Political Landscapes: Forests, Conservation, and Community in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 232.

problems resulting from unchecked logging and called for more forest protection. At the same time, logging corporations endeavored to turn a profit from Mexico's trees. Thus, many conflicting forest narratives appeared in the newspapers included in this sample, rendering a lively national dialogue concerning the future of the nation's trees and forestry policy.

Mexico's forests existed within a diversity of climates and ecosystems – from the cool, dry, temperate conifer stands of northern and central Mexico to the hot, lowland tropical rain forests in the southeast – and these different forests held a variety of resources and logging-recovery capabilities. The drier northern forests included species that had evolved within a periodic fire regime, and therefore were accustomed to re-growing every few decades. This made the ecosystem relatively adaptable to periodic logging, provided the loggers replanted new trees after a felling. However, wildfires were very rare in the tropical rain forest, so most tree species inhabiting them were not evolved to grow well in large open spaces. Instead, the seedlings depended on the thick forest canopy to protect them and their soil from the region's frequent torrential rains. If a tropical rain forest is clear cut, the soil is quickly washed away, leaving behind hardpan, which only weeds can colonize. Erosion was a serious problem in Mexico's tropical regions, but due to the country's mountainous terrain, even the temperate regions suffered from the affliction wherever loggers failed to harvest responsibly.[94]

While severe erosion had afflicted some regions of Mexico since the sixteenth century when Spanish colonialists leveled forests to fuel silver mines, forest destruction

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[94] Fernando Ortiz Monasterio, *Tierra profanada: historia ambiental de México* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Ecología, 1987), 240-47.

accelerated erosion under the political stability of Porfirio Díaz (1884-1911) and increased further with the rise of industrialization throughout the twentieth century. By 1984, thirty percent of Mexico's forests were seriously damaged from erosion with the southeast in particularly bad shape – for instance, ninety percent of the state of Oaxaca was eroded.[95] Mexican newspaper articles from *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* in 1983 and 1984 addressed these issues, and presented an environmental discourse on how to best obtain the wealth growing in the forests without further degrading the country's environment.

Reporters and their sources filled these two newspapers with a variety of forest narratives, but upon close analysis, three general arguments emerge: valuable forest resources were going to waste due to unsustainable harvesting; logging caused ecological problems with detrimental impacts for humanity; and the federal government was working to develop an environmentally-friendly, sustainable forest policy that would benefit more Mexicans. In many stories these arguments overlapped. Articles that focused on ecological damage due to frequent logging blamed unsustainable harvesting for causing the problem, while articles that focused on the loss of forest products due to unsustainable harvesting often noted the ecological damage that accompanied it. Unsurprisingly, articles extolling government efforts to protect forests frequently cited unsustainable harvesting and ecological damage as the reason the government needed to take action in the first place. So while three separate arguments appear, they are in many ways complimentary, with one providing evidence to support another.

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[95] "Graves daños en el 30% de los bosques por la tala," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 30, 1984; Carlos Duayhe, "Oaxaca, zona de desastre ecológico," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 22, 1984.

Although similarities exist between environmental reports on air pollution and forestry, the rural quality of Mexico's forests generated some key differences in the way reporters told their stories. Similar to the trend noted with air pollution in chapter one, government spokespeople and government-friendly journalists assured readers that the federal government knew about the environmental problem, and was taking steps to alleviate it. Likewise, as with air pollution, environmental journalists and their sources targeted corporations and the federal government for causing the problems associated with logging. However, there existed a vibrant discussion over what role campesinos played in environmental destruction, and what role they should play in the future of the forest industry. Therefore, forest narratives contained discussion over a particular rural social group that was lacking in air pollution narratives discussing urban spaces

Mexicans viewed forests as critically important to the environmental health of the nation, as well as vitally important to Mexico's economic strength at a time when the economy was struggling. Stories about the damage caused by logging focused on the health of ecosystems, rather than the health of humans as did the stories about air pollution. This fact makes it all the more surprising that among the sample of 216 environmental news stories in *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* from 1983 and 1984, reporters wrote more stories about rural forests than they did about urban air pollution in the Valley of Mexico (which impacted eighteen million people).[96] Environmental reporters and their sources struggled to sort out the complex processes giving rise to the

[96] In fact, among my sample, reporters discussed forests more frequently than any other environmental issue besides water crises. The numbers break down as such: out of 216 total articles, sixty-two were about water crises (29%), forty-three were about forests (19%), and twenty-eight were about air pollution (13%). See Table 1 in the appendix.

destruction of Mexico's valuable forest resources even as they simultaneously tried to catalogue the extent of the environmental damage and promulgate a sustainable forest use policy. Their efforts educated readers, many of whom were urban and far removed from the crisis, about the importance of using forest resources in a way that did not lead to environmental crisis. The lack of consensus on a specific policy among the many environmental narratives demonstrates the complexity of striking a balance between environmental and economic concerns during a period of both environmental and economic crisis.

The rest of this chapter contains three sections that support this argument. Section one, "Irrational Forest Use," examines stories from the many different types of sources that attempted to describe forest-use in Mexico as irrational; this complex word "*irracional"* best translates to "unsustainable" in this context, but exactly what *irracional* meant changed from one story to the next. While government administrators frequently used this word in referencing campesino subsistence logging, university biology researchers used the same word to describe massive clear cutting by logging corporations, and some reporters simply used it to describe poorly-regulated Mexican forestry policy as a whole. Although the meaning of *irracional* varied, most of those sources or reporters who used it for news stories attempted to describe the waste they saw in it, and blamed those they thought responsible for its persistence. Section two, "Logging and the Environment," analyzes articles that focused on qualifying and quantifying environmental damage caused by logging, and articles that celebrated efforts to reverse this damage. Most of the stories in this section emphasized cataloguing environmental damage in forests rather than discussing a balance between environmental

and economic interests. Section three, "Government as the Solution to Irrational Forestry," considers the federal government's messages concerning the development of a national, rational forest-use policy, and examines what sort of promises they made and to whom.

Irrational Forest Use

Throughout the 1980s, newspapers conveyed a sense of incredulity at the rampant, often unregulated, destruction of Mexico's forests, frequently using the phrases "immoderate tree felling" (*tala inmoderada*) or "irrational exploitation" (*explotación irracional*) to describe the complex factors that gave rise to this destruction, and frequently called for "rational exploitation" (*explotación racional*) as a solution to economic, social, and environmental problems. While these three phrases appeared often in articles, there was no specific definition for them upon which all reporters could agree. Many journalists (and sources) described the logging practices of corporations as *tala inmoderada* or *explotación irracional*, while a smaller number blamed government corruption, collusion, or disorganization for giving rise to irrational forest use. Newspapers also discussed the role of the campesino in forest destruction, with some authors blaming their tree-felling subsistence practices for preventing the implementation of *explotación racional* while others exonerated the campesino in favor of blaming the socio-economic system that encouraged their behavior. While opinions differed as to who was at fault, the newspapers from this sample communicated to the reading public a message that Mexico desperately needed a rational forest use policy that would both bring the nation economic wealth and preserve the nation's environmental wealth.

In June 1984, Congress attempted to define and address the irrational use of Mexico's forests with a proposed reform to the Federal Forestry Law. Environmental reporter Teresa Weiser covered the hearing for *Uno Más Uno*. She reported that lawmakers viewed the forests as a source of great national wealth that was being wasted due to poor policies, bad transportation networks, industrial overexploitation, and campesino subsistence needs that required the felling of trees every few years to create new agricultural plots. The Director of the Ministry of Agriculture (SARH), Horacio García Aguilar, announced, "we want to introduce the concept of multiple use of the forest and its rational exploitation," which he later explained as establishing effective systems of forest harvesting that would bring campesinos into the forest economy and share the wealth with them.[97] Interestingly, based on what Weiser wrote for the article, the legislators devoted most of their speeches to explaining how bad everything was, but left the specificities of their reform vague.[98]

Failing to specify forestry reforms was a common theme among proponents of adopting a more rational forest use policy; rather than describing a plan to remedy the situation, most sources merely described the problems. For example, the President of the Environmental Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, Oscar Cantón Zetina, referred to the Lancandon Jungle in the state of Chiapas to illustrate what irrational forest use looked like, but failed to offer a solution: "The tropical forests have been sacked as if

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[97] Teresa Weiser, "Proyecto de ley forestal, al Congreso," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jun. 3, 1984.

[98] The article's description of the reform as incorporating more campesinos into forestry policy and harvesting, while vague, does fit with Christopher Boyer's argument that throughout the 1980s, "an increasingly influential line of reasoning held that rural people, rather than logging companies, held the key to environmentally friendly forestry"; Boyer, *Political Landscapes,* 232; The reforms to the Federal Forestry law and their impact on campesinos will be revisited in more detail later in this chapter.

they were mines. One obvious example is the Lancandon Jungle, which fifteen years ago was more than thirteen thousand square kilometers, now more than half has been destroyed, and if this trend continues, in less than ten years all of the area will be deforested."[99] By using the phrase, "sacked as if they were mines," in describing the destruction of the Lancandon, Zetina simultaneously conjured up images of both a plundering army and the non-renewable mineral resources collected in the mining industry. Such harvesting practices were irrational in the mind of Zetina, but aside from a few vague references to campesinos harboring the solution, he failed to elucidate what a rational forest use policy would look like.

National concern over the felling of tropical forests in Mexico's southeast corresponded with a growing international fear of biodiversity loss in the tropics popularized in the 1980s, and most authors who wrote about this destruction placed the blame on corporations.[100] An unnamed reporter covering a SARH review about the state of Quintana Roo, on the Yucatan Peninsula, noted, "more than one-hundred thousand hectares of jungle have been razed in Quintana Roo due to the irrational exploitation of companies like Industrialized Wood of Quintana Roo, which, by means of a twenty-nine year concession extracted 580,000 cubic meters of precious wood, principally cedar and mahogany."[101] The reporter expressed outrage at this loss, and was especially upset that Industrialized Wood kept most of the profits while the campesinos who lived in the

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[99] Teresa Weiser, "Proyecto de ley forestal, al Congreso," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jun. 3, 1984.

[100] Emily Wakild, *Revolutionary Parks: Conservation, Social Justice, and Mexico's National Parks, 1910-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011), 151-52.

[101] "Una empresa maderera destruyó más de 100 mil has. de selva en Quintana Roo," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jun. 4, 1984.

newly-ruined environment received a meager two-thousand peso annual income from selling their rights to the forestland. The reporter felt that the campesinos' ignorance and poverty allowed Industrialized Wood to take advantage of them.

Carlos Duayhe, another reporter for *Uno Más Uno*, also blamed the callous ways of industrial logging for simultaneously ruining the environment and impoverishing the peasants with its "*explotación incontrolada*." In a front page news story about the deforestation and subsequent erosion problems in the southern state of Oaxaca, Duayhe revealed that ninety percent of the state was eroded and ninety-three percent of the state's original forest had been logged in what he called "hit and run exploitation."[102] Duayhe interviewed Rodolfo Ramírez, a researcher from the School of Biological Sciences at the National Polytechnic Institute, who explained that "much of this damage comes from too much desire for wealth, the greed of a few who felled trees and eroded soils; with the exception of those who did it out of necessity." Ramírez also lamented the loss of an entire way of life due to industrial logging: "We have verified that the forest has been destroyed, generally at the hands of companies. In this way, the land remains either abandoned or at the disposal of its original owners and they make poor use of the soil."[103] Ramírez went on to lament the destruction of culture caused by this unsustainable logging: "The people without technical capacity, the marginalized, abandoned indigenous groups have totally forgotten that which their ancestors knew, this is the most sobering, because in the trips that we have made to Oaxaca we have seen soils totally destroyed

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[102] Carlos Duayhe, "Oaxaca, zona de desastre ecológico," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 22, 1984.

[103] Ibid.

where pre-Hispanic remains of works are still seen of structures directed to impede erosion, terraces, constructed about the slopes of the mountains; a culture almost disappeared."[104] For Ramírez, the definition of irrational forest use was the actions of a few industrial logging corporations who not only damaged the environment beyond repair, but also endangered a rich historical tradition predating the arrival of the Spanish.

Reporters tried different approaches to bring irrational forest use into the national spotlight. Whereas the examples noted so far were all longer news stories, Gustavo Rodríguez filed a news brief for *Uno Más Uno* which noted the links between poor forestry practices and erosion in the northern state of San Luis Potosí.[105] This paragraph-long story was a useful way to quickly inform readers about the importance of good forestry, without their having to invest the time it would take to read a full-feature story.

A common theme among the examples analyzed so far is their focus on specific locations, but some reporters described irrational logging on a national scale, therefore putting the entire country into the same dire straits. José Ignacio Navarro González, the General Director of Soil and Water Conservation for SARH and a member of the National Commission of Arid Zones, communicated this national crisis to an unnamed reporter for *Uno Más Uno*, noting that "thirty percent of the nation's forests and jungles, that is some fifteen million hectares, has been greatly damaged by erosion caused by immoderate felling (*tala inmoderada*) and negligence with respect to reforestation shown

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[104] Ibid.

[105] Gustavo Rodríguez, "Erosionada, 50% de la superficie: UASLP," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 12, 1984.

by logging companies."[106] While a story highlighting problems stemming from irrational logging in Oaxaca may not have been of interest to a resident of Mexico City who had never visited southeast Mexico, the same resident might have been stirred to action by a story that described irrational forest use in Mexico as a whole. Different approaches likely yielded different results for different readers; good reporters knew this and diversified their reporting styles accordingly.

Reporters also described the actions of Mexicans opposed to irrational forest use. This was the case in October 1983, when 1,700 people rose in protest in the state of Jalisco to demand an end to current forestry practices. As reporter Eduardo Chimely reported for *Excélsior*, "members of the Revolutionary Campesino Alliance demanded that Governor Enrique Alvarez del Castillo prevent businesses and individuals from exploiting 54,000 hectares of forest in the municipality of Cuautitlán, and demanded the retirement of the Rural Police which has threatened them so they will abandon their lands."[107] Chimely interviewed Aurelio Hernández, a commissary member of the Ayotitán Ejido, who specifically named mayor Durán Legaspi and two logging companies, *Compañia Industrializadora* and *Cultivadora de Bosques, S.A.*, as the primary perpetrators of the plundering. For these campesinos, government and corporate figures conspired in the irrational forest use that left them impoverished and persecuted, and publicly naming their persecutors was a way to fight back. Hernández argued that the

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[106] "Graves daños en el 30% de los bosques por la tala," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 30, 1984.

[107] Eduardo Chimely, "Protestas en Jalisco por el saqueo de 54,000 has. de bosques," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Oct. 7, 1983.

campesinos were ready to form communal cooperatives to exploit forest resources, and that this was the most rational way to convert trees to wealth.

When reporters for *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* interviewed campesinos about sustainability, the campesinos frequently explained irrational forest use as a by-product of government and industry corruption. As noted above, campesinos in Jalisco demonstrated against state and local government figures who they claimed were actively conspiring with two logging companies to acquire what belonged to the campesinos, but an article documenting the irrational logging of a forest in the Valley of Mexico known as Magdalena Contreras made similar claims against the federal government. Once again, representatives for these communal land holders named names in an attempt to bring their nefarious actions to wider public attention: "the lack of a communal commission to organize the exploitation of [the forest's] resources, and the presence of 'corrupt pseudo-leaders' like Rosendo Bautista and Auraliano Velazco, who traffic in communal lands, are the most serious sources of conflict in this zone."[108] These sources went on to link Bautista's and Velazco's corrupt activities with the paper factory *Loreto y Peña Pobre* to whom they licensed the exploitation of the wood, the Federal Commission of Electricity whom they permitted to clear forest in order to install power lines against the wishes of the locals, and the Ministry of Agrarian Reform with whom they colluded to traffic in communal lands.

That these accusations came from campesinos speaks to the contempt the rural poor held for government accountability and egalitarianism, and the presence of such

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[108] "Tala inmoderada, incendios y plagas, causan la deforestación del bosque de Contreras," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 12, 1984.

articles in two of Mexico's major newspapers suggests that by 1984, some environmental journalists were willing to listen to, and publish, the opinions of the poor, even concerning issues as far-reaching as national forest use policy. Several weeks later, Alicia Ortiz filed a story for *Uno Más Uno* with many of the same claims from campesino spokespeople alleging links between government corruption and irrational forest use in Magdalena Contreras. In addition to naming Rosendo Bautista and *Loreto y Peña Pobre* as perpetrators of corrupt logging deals, *Unión de Comuneros* member Gabriel Juárez accused the Ministry of Agrarian Reform of refusing to convene elections for legally recognized communal representatives, thereby permitting the illegal exploitation of the forest to continue. "Their lands will be set aside for the construction of houses for the employees of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform. There are very strong interests that cause the civil servants to oppose the naming of representatives."[109] These examples implicated the government as a direct player in the irrational logging of a popular recreation spot in the Valley of Mexico.

Campesinos themselves were a popular topic in newspaper articles from this sample discussing irrational forest use. While reporters and sources frequently accused campesinos' subsistence logging practices and communal land holdings of standing in the way of rational forest development, reporters focused blame on the social and economic structures of Mexico rather than the campesinos themselves. Raul Olmedo, the author who wrote thirty-five editorials for the *Excélsior* series "Our Lost Forests," devoted several of them to discussing the relationship between campesinos and forestry. In "Our

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[109] Alicia Ortiz, "Devastación de bosques en Magdalena Contreras," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 27, 1984.

Lost Forests IV: A Benefit not Taken Advantage Of," Olmedo quoted extensively from a speech delivered by future President Carlos Salinas de Gortari delivered on December 3, 1981, while he was the director of the Institute of Political, Economic, and Social Studies, in which he argued that it was unfair to blame campesinos for the rampant destruction of Mexico's forests. "We should accuse the socio-economic system of being irrational, because it prevents the campesino from earning a sufficient salary with permanent employment, and he has to resort to cutting trees and shepherding for survival."[110] For Salinas de Gortari, the actions of campesinos did indeed amount to irrational forestry, but rather than blame the individuals, he blamed the social and economic system that led them to their destructive actions.

Raúl Correa, a reporter for *Uno Más Uno*, wrote a story about the "great backwardness" in Mexico's forestry sector, and once again the campesino played a prominent role in the discussion. He interviewed León Jorge Castaños, the Forest Undersecretary for SARH, to learn what was preventing the rational use of Mexico's forests. Jorge Castaños explained what he saw as one of the biggest problems, "in Mexico, the country with the fourth largest oil reserves in the world, there are nearly four million homes that use firewood to cook food; a vital factor in the deforestation of the country."[111] The Forest Undersecretary blamed the actions of the campesinos for contributing to irrational forest use, but he did not scold them for their behavior, rather, he argued that they were merely victims of an inefficient system. The following week

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[110] Raul Olmedo, "Nuestros bosques perdidos IV: Un privilegio no aprovechado," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jan. 13, 1984.

[111] Raúl Correa, "Hay *enorme rezago* del sector forestal, reconoce la SARH," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 12, 1984.

Correa wrote a story about deforestation, and discussed the connections between economics, campesino subsistence, and the felling of trees. “Of every million inhabitants that live in the forested areas (ten million in total) of the country, only 95,000 find permanent employment in the exploitation of the resource. The economic revenue for the rest depends, generally, on the gathering [of wood] and the felling [of trees] to complement their subsistence.”[112] Correa’s characterization of the campesino’s relationship to the forest is yet another case in which the campesino is both blamed and exonerated for the destruction of Mexico’s forests. In his opinion, the campesino was indeed responsible for unsustainable logging, but poverty gave rise to this action rather than greed or malice.

Raul Olmedo, and some of the sources from whom he quoted, found the nation’s communal land system to blame for preventing a rational forest policy from being implemented. Across the countryside, especially in central Mexico, villages owned much of the landscape in common for the campesinos who lived there. This land ownership pattern, known as the ejido system, provided land for agricultural use and small-scale resource exploitation, but it made the large-scale transfer of land – and the forest resources on it – more difficult to process than if the land were owned privately. For Olmedo, such a system was terribly wasteful since technocrats could not direct a rational harvest of trees. In an editorial for his “Our Lost Forests” series he wrote of the ejidos: “In these areas live almost ten million campesinos that remain in the worst marginalization, despite being possessors of the rights to a resource that under efficient

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[112] Raúl Correa, "400 mil has. de bosques y selvas mueren cada año," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 20, 1984.

forms of organization could be the basis of their development. When the campesino does not see in the forest a source of permanent work that permits a life with dignity, he is converted into an enemy to control."[113] The Director of Forestry Development for SARH, Carlos Valdés Sandoval, agreed with Olmedo, "Land ownership in our country is primarily ejidal and communal. If the campesinos themselves do not take over the production of raw materials in an organized and productive manner, we cannot have rational exploitation."[114]

Campesinos had used forest resources for their subsistence for much of the twentieth century, so rural communities held a strong belief in their right to these resources in 1983 and 1984. A growing campesino population had been relying on dwindling forests in some areas as early as the 1930s.[115] Their traditional use of these forests imbued many campesinos with the notion that these forest resources belonged to them, to be used in whatever manner they saw fit. Therefore, policy analysts supporting the privatization of ejido forest resources frequently presented narratives which emphasized the ways in which this policy would benefit campesinos.

In a follow up editorial, Olmedo once again interviewed Sandoval, who claimed to be working on a plan in which campesinos on ejidos could harvest their forests and keep most of their wealth. He told Olmedo: "They [campesinos] should be the true beneficiaries of the rational development of forest resources. The forest should be a factor that contributes to the creation of a more egalitarian society. You need to consider that

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[113] Raul Olmedo, "Nuestros bosques perdidos V: Evaluación del sistema," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jan. 14, 1984.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Wakild, 99.

the forest should be in the service of humanity and the nation, and not for the usufruct of a few."[116] While the Mexican Revolution had established the ejido system specifically to benefit the nation's campesinos, these articles demonstrate a shift in beliefs in the early 1980s among policymakers, who started to reframe ejidos as structures of impoverishment.[117] Therefore, although these articles discussed primarily forest policy, they matched the perspective of Mexico's contemporary technocrats and political elites, who believed the ejido system needed to be modernized by allowing ejido members to deal directly with outsiders for the exploitation of their lands.[118]

In all of these stories, newspaper reporters, government administrators, university researchers, and campesinos endeavored to describe the irrational forest use they believed to be happening across Mexico. Although opinions changed as to who was most responsible for causing this unsustainable exploitation, all of these champions of rational forestry viewed newspapers as a way to garner support for their causes. It was important to them that their countrymen understand the processes and villains that threatened a rational forest policy. The varying environmental narratives concerning forests suggests that Mexicans who cared about forests (or the raw materials they contained) in 1983 and 1984 viewed the period as a time of crisis, and they used newspaper stories to spread a

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[116] Raul Olmedo, "Nuestros bosques perdidos VI: La mayoría, en propiedad ejidal," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jan. 16, 1984.

[117] The contradictory notion of the campesino as both living an idealized rural life and needing modernization existed long before the 1980s. See: Wakild, 9.

[118] David Yetman, "*Ejidos*, Land Sales, and Free Trade in Northwest Mexico: Will Globalization Affect the Commons?" *American Studies* 41, no. 2 (2000): 211-13, accessed April 25, 2016, https://journals.ku.edu/index.php/amerstud/article/view/3109/3068.

sense of urgency about the need to act to secure the future of Mexico's trees and the resources they represented.

Logging and the Environment

While some journalists discussed a rational forest use policy in the pages of *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno*, others focused on the environmental problems caused by *tala inmoderada* and *explotación irracional*.[119] Environmental journalists worked to uncover links between irresponsible logging and some of the biggest environmental problems Mexico faced in 1983 and 1984. The major issues on which they focused included the impact of deforestation on rivers and groundwater, its connection to erosion, its contribution to ecological degradation, and its impacts on air quality. While authors lamented the loss of forests, they expressed equal passion in celebrating reforestation campaigns, announcements for which frequently appeared in the newspaper. Among the sources analyzed for this section, there was a good mix between urban and rural forests. Mexico City had several forest reserves within and surrounding the city, and reporters covered threats to these urban green spaces with vigor. The scale of deforestation was much higher in rural areas, and through their articles, reporters notified urban readers about forest exploitation in regions many may have never before seen. By explaining the links between logging and environmental problems, environmental journalists helped readers to understand the complexity of consequences arising from irrational logging.

By 1984, there were few forests remaining in the Valley of Mexico, so when deforestation threatened the forest of Magdalena Contreras on the southwest rim of the

[119] See Table 3 in the Appendix for a numerical breakdown of these stories.

valley, reporters explained to readers why the logging threatened more than just some trees. In a story for *Uno Más Uno,* ejido representatives from Magdalena Contreras told an unnamed reporter that "deforestation has caused the appearance of varieties of little plants that consume great quantities of water. This in turn causes the springs to generate less liquid for the river that provides water to the town of San Andrés and others of the Magdalena [River]."[120] The felling of trees would have simultaneously disrupted the soil and provided more light for the surface, perfect conditions for both terrestrial and aqueous invasive plants to gain a foothold. Using the newspaper, these ejido representatives drew a direct connection between deforestation and a reduction of water flow for villages along the Magdalena River. Two weeks later, reporter Alicia Ortiz returned to Magdalena Contreras for *Uno Más Uno* and repeated this theme, explaining, "The Magdalena River, which in past eras was two meters deep, is almost dry, and the waters that do arrive are found totally contaminated with the organic wastes that are poured into them."[121] While both of these stories focused primarily on blaming industrial and government interests for irrational exploitation (as noted above), they also included these important warnings about how logging can damage rivers. As a way to show readers why deforestation should matter to them, Ortiz and these ejido representatives described this relationship between logging and river flows as an example of what happens to water supplies after unsustainable exploitation.

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[120] "Tala inmoderada, incendios y plagas, causan la deforestación del bosque de Contreras," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 12, 1984.

[121] Alicia Ortiz, "Devastación de bosques en Magdalena Contreras," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 27, 1984.

Raul Olmedo devoted much of his column space to discussing the need for a rational use of Mexico's forests (as noted above), and he referenced hydrologic problems resulting from irrational logging as an argument for changes to be made. In an evaluation of the current forestry system, he noted environmental problems surrounding irrational logging, explaining how "a lack of legal protection for large areas of forest vegetation has contributed significantly to environmental pollution, the scarcity of water in periods of low water, and floods in wet periods."[122] Olmedo placed his analysis of environmental problems in between analyses of economic and social problems resulting from irrational forest use. For him, environmental damage was merely another unfortunate consequence of his nation's inability to efficiently utilize its forest wealth.

Environmental journalists working for *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* in 1983 and 1984 also connected logging with erosion, a nationwide affliction that degraded agricultural lands and forced campesinos to find other means of subsistence in order to avoid poverty. As noted above, erosion was especially bad in Oaxaca, and reporter Carlos Duayhe consulted an academic researching the region in order to contextualize the issue for his readers. Rodolfo Ramírez, a researcher from the National Polytechnic Institute, explained "the principal problem of Oaxaca is that the eroded soils do not retain water; and once denuded, if the vegetative cover has been destroyed, the erosion is more violent, because the rainfall is very abundant."[123] Alarmingly, Ramírez warned that the problem was getting worse: "while the deterioration of Oaxaca dates back to Colonial [times], the

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[122] Raul Olmedo, "Nuestros bosques perdidos V: Evaluación del sistema," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jan. 14, 1984.

[123] Carlos Duayhe, "Oaxaca, zona de desastre ecológico," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 22, 1984.

truth is that the deterioration has accelerated in recent decades."[124] Duayhe and Ramírez also discussed the unique problems that uncontrolled logging causes in tropical rain forests, so that readers in the very different environment of Mexico City could understand why deforestation in Oaxaca was much more serious than deforestation in temperate regions.[125] By simultaneously alerting readers about an environmental crisis in a state more than 400 kilometers away, and explaining why its unique attributes rendered it more vulnerable than other regions of Mexico, Duayhe clearly made an effort to convince readers to confront a distant, unseen threat to their nation's patrimony.

Mexico's political leaders discussed some of these same threats in June 1984 as they attempted to reform federal forestry policy, and reporter Teresa Weiser wrote up parts of their discussion for *Uno Más Uno*. Oscar Cantón Zetina, the President of the Environmental Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, argued that both erosion and desertification were "grave phenomena" in Mexico, and that these crises seemed to have reached "apocalyptic" levels.[126] In this case, Zetina described the connection between irrational logging and ongoing ecological crises to garner political support for a reform to federal forestry policy. Weiser, in turn, used his quote in the newspaper, which, coming from a government expert, lent an air of legitimacy to the links between logging, erosion, and desertification that she was trying to establish.

Reporter Roberto Vizcaíno wrote a story about the impacts of the deforestation of the Lancandon Jungle in Chiapas with dire warnings similar to those noted above, but he

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[124] Ibid.

[125] See the introduction of this chapter for a more detailed analysis of these differences.

[126] Teresa Weiser, "Proyecto de ley forestal, al Congreso," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jun. 3, 1984.

expounded on some of the other ecological damages to which the destruction of the rain forest gave rise. Similar to Duayhe, Vizcaíno received his information from scientists conducting research in the area, but in this case, two of three researchers were Americans and one was Mexican. This demonstrates that Vizcaíno trusted foreign sources to describe environmental issues in his country. In his story he wrote: "The denunciations and efforts to rationalize the exploitation of the jungle have failed and with this Mexico exchanged – say the researchers – 'its treasure of vegetation and animal species for livestock, utilities, and a desert of pasture.'…Quickly, they say, this will be a desert because the layer of workable land is minimal and the crops will consume this final wealth, which only served to sustain this impressive and rich jungle that already today no longer exists."[127] Once again, the author drew upon scientific expertise to describe environmental destruction occurring in a distant location in an attempt to raise awareness about a problem with which urban readers most likely had no personal experience. If Vizcaíno could not make his readers care, he could at least inform them of what was happening to their country.

Alicia Ortiz wanted readers to know how deforestation impacted a forest much closer to the heart of Mexico, the Magdalena Contreras growing along the mountains that defined the Valley of Mexico. Claiming that commoners were selling off the forest to paper mills because the Ministry of Agrarian Reform was in chaos, Ortiz's source, Gabriel Juárez, a member of the Union of Commoners, complained that "the forest fauna had been practically eradicated" and also that "tourism, one of the principal sources of

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[127] Roberto Vizcaíno, "Más de 100 años de brutal explotación en la lacandona," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 20, 1984.

employment in the area of Los Dínamos, had decreased notably."[128] While most of the stories that expressed concern over logging cited links to diminished water supplies, erosion, or desertification (things that impacted humanity), Ortiz and Vizcaíno represent a smaller, but important group of reporters lamenting the loss of biodiversity due to logging. These two examples demonstrate that there was a contingent of reporters arguing on behalf of those species who could not speak against unchecked logging for themselves.

As noted in chapter one, reports about air pollution frequently noted the links between trees and better air quality and, unsurprisingly, stories focusing on deforestation also made this link. In a story for *Excélsior* reporting on a protest over unregulated logging at the Desierto de los Leones park in Mexico City, members of the Coyoacán Environmental Association demanded that President Miguel de la Madrid put a stop to the destruction of "the most important 'lung' of the Valley of Mexico."[129] Many forest advocates around Mexico City called forested areas lungs, a reference to the ability of trees to remove pollutants from the air, thereby generating cleaner air for the city. These protestors clearly saw the link between poor air quality and deforestation, and wanted their fellow citizens to see it too.

Fernando Césarman also saw this link, and used his editorial column in *Uno Más Uno* to spread the news. In it, he lamented humanity's unwillingness to protect the planet's forests: "We find ourselves in a process of destruction of the forests, which are

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[128] Alicia Ortiz, "Devastación de bosques en Magdalena Contreras," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 27, 1984.

[129] "Acto de protesta por la tala en el Desierto de los Leones," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Oct. 10, 1983.

the sites where oxygen is processed, where the air is recycled which is indispensible for breathing. According to the experts, by the year 2000 the planet's forested area will be reduced by one-tenth. The ecological vision of the future is pessimistic because all the projections are negative. To be able to continue with life, our conduct toward nature must change radically."[130] While addressing Mexico's forestry problems was a big enough problem for most Mexican forest advocates in the 1980s, Césarman adopted a global perspective, and encouraged Mexicans to think the same way.

While Césarman's dire warnings may have come off as depressing, many stories reported reforestation campaigns across Mexico as events to be celebrated. *Excélsior* reported in October 1983 that SEDUE had launched a program to plant trees along a forty-five kilometer stretch of highway in the state of Puebla. The author noted that the effort will "recuperate areas damaged by pollution, as well as the soils, [it will] protect the roads from washouts, diminish noise and permit the recharging of aquifers in agricultural areas."[131] Many of these notifications appeared in the newspapers in news brief form, more like announcements than actual stories. Such stories included the planting of 2,000 trees in the tourist district of North Beach in Playa del Carmen, 500,000 trees in Iztacalco, 50,000 trees in the Desierto de los Leones, 30,000 shrubs in Santa Cecilia Tepetlapa to celebrate the Day of the Tree, and an investment by the Iztapalapa delegation of 107 million pesos to reforest riparian areas and road medians in

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[130] Fernando Césarman, "Perdemos bosques," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 28, 1984.

[131] "Puso en marcha la Sedue un programa de reforestación en zonas federales," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Oct. 10, 1983; Interestingly, a look at the satellite picture of this road today reveals a treeless stretch of highway.

Iztapalapa.[132] The sheer number of these types of stories suggests that Mexican readers liked reading about the planting of trees, and that the local or federal governments undertaking the reforestation campaigns used newspapers to promote them.

Environmental reporters, government administrators, and university researchers contributed forest narratives describing links between deforestation and environmental damage extending beyond the obvious loss of trees. By explaining to readers problems like the loss of water resources, erosion, reduced ecosystem diversity, and increased air pollution, these environmental advocates urged their fellow citizens to value the forest rather than the trees. Likewise, stories describing reforestation activity established links between forests and environmental renewal. And as the following section argues, some government-friendly reporters frequently promoted the government as the organization leading the charge for environmental solutions.

Government as the Solution to Irrational Forestry

Mexico's federal government also contributed to the national conversation unfolding in the newspapers concerning the fate of Mexico's forests, with PRI spokespeople consistently promoting the idea that the solution resided within official government channels. Furthermore, the De la Madrid administration cultivated a paternalistic, peasant-friendly image that claimed Mexico's forests could simultaneously lift campesinos out of poverty through rational harvesting and still be safeguarded against environmental destruction. This response resonates with that of government reactions to

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[132] Marcelo Tejero, "Reforestarán Playa Norte de Campeche," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Oct. 8, 1983; "Programa de protección ecológica en Iztacalco," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 12, 1984; "Plantan 50 mil árboles en un bosque," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jun. 23, 1984; "Plantarán 30 mil árboles en Tepetlapa," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jul. 7, 1984; "Reforestación en la delegación Iztapalapa," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jul. 9, 1984.

air pollution, which also promoted the federal government as the environmentally-friendly arbiter, a champion of clean air. However, the government's effort to explain the privatization of ejido-owned forests as an environmentally driven decision – rather than a revenue-generating measure consistent with the neoliberal turn – assumed a degree of deception not seen in its campaign to persuade Mexicans that it was improving air quality.

Convincing Mexicans that the federal government could prevent future irrational logging was one narrative used to establish government environmental credibility. A report issued in 1984 by León Jorge Castaño, the Forest Undersecretary for SARH, warned that more land was deforested in 1983 than in any other year of Mexico's history. Despite the grim news, Jorge Castaño explained that Mexicans need not worry because, "that which occurred last year would not happen again, since one billion pesos will be allocated from the federal budget…in order to prevent these problems."[133] Jorge Castaño did not reveal the details of how this money would translate into forest protection, he simply noted that since the federal government was throwing money at the problem, the issue would be resolved.

A similar narrative came from a different administrator at SARH when asked about the threat erosion posed to Mexican forests. José Ignacio Navarro González, the General Director of Soil and Water Conservation, explained that previous government policies failed to address soil conservation in logged regions, but now the federal government "has allocated six billion pesos to the conservation of soil and water and two

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[133] Macario Lozano, "En 83, los daños forestales más cuantiosos en la historia del país afirma la SARH," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 12, 1984.

billion more to the rehabilitation of arid regions."[134] Once again, the government spokesman failed to specify how this money would be utilized in the fight against logging-induced environmental degradation, but he assured the reader that federal money would solve the problem.

While the previous examples were vague, SARH provided a more detailed description of a rational forest use plan in Quintana Roo, describing their Pilot Forest Program as a solution to illegal logging both from campesinos and corporations. After describing the destruction of tropical forests in Quintana Roo over the last thirty years, an unnamed reporter for *Uno Más Uno* explained that the Pilot Forest Program "aims to end irregularities in the concessioning of forest areas and in the monitoring and surveillance of activities."[135] Furthermore, the program "had incorporated ten thousand campesinos from eleven ejidos" who would be instructed in rational forest use for the harvest of "mahogany, cedar, and twelve other forest species considered common."[136] In other words, not only was the federal government going to prevent future ecological damage in this already environmentally degraded state, but it would also instruct campesinos in how to sustainably harvest their forests so that they could continue to generate wealth from them for years to come. Implicit in this plan was the idea that dry tropical forests could be sustainably logged at all, a dubious notion considering the physiographical characteristics of the jungle. In any case, this story clearly presented the future of logging in Quintana

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[134] "Graves daños en el 30% de los bosques por la tala," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 30, 1984.

[135] "Una empresa maderera destruyó más de 100 mil has. de selva en Quintana Roo," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jun. 4, 1984.

[136] Ibid.

Roo as a win-win scenario, aiming to please both environmentalists and those concerned with social justice. In fact, the only losers in this article were the logging corporations, who were now going to face more oversight from SARH.

While government spokespeople promoted cash infusions and increased government oversight for forest crisis management, *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* also communicated the federal government's forest privatization plan as the key to a rational, environmentally-friendly forest policy. In 1986, the Federal Government introduced a new forestry code that authorized ejidos to consult private logging firms to harvest their trees, rather than forcing them to go through the Mexican National Forest Service as they had in the past.[137] The idea of transferring more control to campesinos appeared in a Congressional discussion (and a newspaper article covering it) two years prior, intermingled with visions of ecological sensitivity: "We want to introduce the concept of multiple use forests and their rational exploitation, in order to avoid such strict closures, that were established politically in the actual law, that are conducive to forest destruction."[138] This statement, made by Horacio García Aguilar, the director of SARH, argued that forest service regulations that limited campesino forest use (such as forest closures that prevented harvesting) actually encouraged forest destruction, and that more campesino control would give rise to more responsible forest management among the peasants who owned the forests.

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[137] Boyer, *Political Landscapes*, 232.

[138] Teresa Weiser, "Proyecto de ley forestal, al Congreso," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jun. 3, 1984.

García Aguilar went on to tie the future of rational forest management to more campesino input, claiming, "the results of these formal consultation meetings on environmental legislation should be fully complemented by meetings with authentic campesino organizations across the country."[139] Although the specifics of the forestry reform being discussed at this congressional hearing in 1984 were not revealed in the article, a clear link exists between the themes under discussion and the 1986 forestry law giving campesinos the power to deal with private corporations. Therefore, this progression of increasing campesino agency regarding forestry decisions dovetails into the forestry privatization efforts introduced in 1986 as President De la Madrid's administration embraced neoliberal reforms in an attempt to reduce government costs.

A follow-up story written a week later (also by Teresa Weiser) revealed some of the details of the proposed reforms to the forestry law, and once again, a government spokesperson couched increased privatization and campesino control as the environmentally conscious decision. León Jorge Castaños, the Forest Undersecretary for SARH, explained that the reforms to the forestry law "anticipate that the technical studies for the use of forest resources may be developed by SARH personnel, but also by professionals or by the owners or possessors of the resource, provided they have proof of an evaluation of its exploitable capacity."[140] In other words, the law would make it easier for campesinos to contract private logging corporations to harvest their forest resources. Jorge Castaños continued with an assurance that SARH would also address "forest

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[139] Ibid.

[140] Teresa Weiser, "Reformas a la Ley Forestal para el aprovechamiento integral de bosques," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jun. 11, 1984.

vigilance" in the new law: "state and local governments should contribute, regarding audits, environmental strategy and the assessment of results in the ecological efforts."[141] The reform essentially delegated environmental oversight to local and state governments, further reducing federal expenditures. While Jorge Castaños argued that these reforms would provide for environmental protection, in reality many municipal and state government budgets were ill-equipped to handle the extra expenditures.[142] As a result, neoliberal decentralization policies like this one turned out to be a net loss for the quality of Mexico's environment. Nevertheless, these articles demonstrate that government administrators presented forestry reform as a way to safeguard the environment while simultaneously enriching the poor.[143]

These articles from *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* demonstrate that in 1983 and 1984 the federal government's longstanding complex relationship with forests was becoming even stranger. Its desire for neoliberal land reforms clashed with the PRI's traditional patrimonial role as protector of the forests, and so a contradictory message of environmentally-friendly privatization appeared as a way to wed the PRI's patrimonial past with its neoliberal future. So the government's environmental narrative promoted its handing over of forests to local power brokers as the right choice for the environment and the campesino. Administrators also promoted federal financial investments into forest

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[141] Ibid.

[142] Luis Aboites Aguilar, "The Illusion of National Power: Water Infrastructure in Mexican Cities, 1930-1990," in *A Land Between Waters: Environmental Histories of Modern Mexico,* ed. Christopher R. Boyer (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2012), 235.

[143] Christopher R. Boyer, "Cycles of Mexican Environmental History," in *A Land Between Waters: Environmental Histories of Modern Mexico,* ed. Christopher R. Boyer (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2012), 12-13.

protection programs, like the Pilot Forest Program in Quintana Roo, to boost its credibility as champion of the forest.

In the sample analyzed for this thesis, reporters wrote stories about forests more frequently than any other topic besides water crises, and the quantity of these stories suggests that *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* directors thought readers wanted to read them. This belief permitted a diverse discourse of environmental narratives concerning forests. Environmentalists, represented in newspapers by journalists, researchers, and campesinos, contributed forest narratives which tried to make the case that deforestation was out of control and the negative impacts associated with it damaged both economic prosperity and ecosystems. Wise-use conservationists, such as Raul Olmedo, and federal government administrators, argued that Mexico's forests held valuable resources that could be exploited in a way that was sustainable or *racional*. Furthermore, they argued that the ejido land-holding system prevented sustainable use, and that the privatization of forest resources could better contribute to the national economy while also lifting campesinos out of poverty and providing better environmental protection of forests. Both sides connected the future of forests to the future of Mexico in a visceral manner, and promoted their particular philosophy as the best path forward.

While it is difficult to quantify the impact these narratives had on the development of Mexico's forest policy, and on efforts to protect forest environments, it is possible to suggest some of its effects. By consistently reporting on issues like deforestation, corporate and government collusion to log forests illegally, and the proper role of the campesino in forest management, environmental journalists kept the pressure on government administrators to address the destruction of the nation's forests. At the

same time, government spokespeople used newspapers to persuade readers that permitting campesinos to deal directly with private forest managers and companies was the correct way to address these very issues.

Today, forest destruction continues apace as the Federal Government's decentralization of forest management cleared the way for logging by drug cartels and environmentalists from all social classes continue to fight against illegal logging.[144] Although the federal government succeeded in passing its forest reforms, the economic crisis limited its ability to fully fund campesino community forestry programs. So while environmental reporting did not prevent unsustainable deforestation, it did raise awareness among Mexicans about the dangers of disrupting an environment, even if it was far away from where most people lived. In the next chapter we will explore the environmental narrative of a much more tangible resource for the people of Mexico: water.

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[144] "Veracruz el estado más deforestado de México," *e-consulta.com*, last modified May 26, 2016, http://e-veracruz.mx/nota/2016-05-26/ecologia/veracruz-el-estado-mas-deforestado-de-mexico ; "Mexico: Jailed anti-logging activist named 'prisoner of conscience,'" *Amnesty International UK*, last modified May 6, 2016, https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/mexico-jailed-anti-logging-activist-named-prisoner-conscience

CHAPTER 3

"The Neglect is Criminal:" Water Crises and Environmental Reporting

Life was already challenging for the residents of Los Reyes Iztacala neighborhood in Tlalnepantla (located in the Valley of Mexico), many of whom lived outside – either under the branches of the local pirul trees or in dwellings along the railroad tracks constructed from whatever could be scrounged – but the persistent inundations of industrial wastewater and city sewage into their living spaces proved to be the breaking point in the summer of 1983. The frequent downpours of the wet season overwhelmed the city's sewer system, and the excess water not only flooded out these squatters, it also contaminated the drinking water of 125,000 people in Los Reyes. Tired of the persistent inundations and fearful of an epidemic, residents turned to their local grassroots organization, the Board of Citizen Participation, to appeal to Alfonso Olvera Reyes, their mayor, to stop the flooding. In response, residents claimed, Olvera Reyes hired shock brigades (*brigadas de choque*) to make death threats in an effort to shut them up. With nowhere else to turn, the Board of Citizen Participation took their story to *Excélsior*. On 5 September, 1983, Mexicans across the country could read the tale of corruption and neglect centered around water pollution, subtitled "The neglect is criminal."[145]

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[145] Alfredo Ramos Ramos, "Contaminadas, las redes de agua potable en Los Reyes," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 5, 1983.

Journalists wrote more stories about water than any other environmental topic, and the geographic scope of these stories encompassed every region of Mexico.[146] Based on the sheer number of stories reporting on events which jeopardized the purity or supply of water, it is clear that environmental journalists viewed water crises as some of Mexico's most pressing environmental issues, and that *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* directors believed these issues to be popular among readers. Journalists served as public educators by informing readers of threats to their health and quality of life caused by water crises. Furthermore, they served as public watchdogs by blaming water crises on those entities they believed responsible for causing them. At the same time, government spokespeople and government-friendly journalists crafted narratives which served to defend the federal government and convince the public that it was working to mitigate the numerous water crises across the country.

Just like with air pollution, then, news stories from this sample demonstrate that most reporters covering water crises served as public watchdogs and educators, but about twenty percent of these environmental narratives worked to deflect criticism aimed at the federal government and to promote policies supported by the PRI. The first section analyzes narratives fitting the educator role used by environmentalists to link water pollution or water shortages with unpleasant phenomena, such as illness or a reduced quality of life. By drawing these connections and explaining the proximate causes behind water crises, they hoped to educate readers about what they saw as an acute national

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[146] Of the 216 newspaper articles published in *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* from 1983, and 1984 researched for this thesis, sixty-two focused on water issues, which means that nearly thirty percent of the environmental reports from this sample dealt with problems surrounding water usage. Forests (twenty percent) and air pollution (thirteen percent) rounded out the top three most reported-on environmental issues. See Table 1 in the Appendix.

crisis – the security of their water. The next section analyzes narratives fitting the watchdog role, in which reporters and their sources blamed some entity for causing a water crisis. In blaming someone, the denouncer aimed to focus public anger onto specific groups of people, either to encourage action against them or to deflect anger away from oneself. The final section analyzes narratives which defended the federal government's handling of water crises.[147] These stories promoted the government as the champion of the people, and tried to convince readers that government administrators were the best route for the redress of environmental water crises.

Describing Mexico's Water Problems

While most readers likely understood that water pollution and water shortages could have negative impacts on their lives, environmental journalists endeavored to describe in detail the litany of maladies brought about by a compromised water supply. Chief among them was the increase in disease caused by contaminated water, but journalists also described the loss of revenue driven by dwindling aquifers, and garbage-filled tourist areas. Other journalists described how water pollution threatened non-human species. Taken as a whole, the description of Mexico's many water crises by environmental journalists demonstrates an attempt not just to educate, but also to advocate for environmental responsibility.

Outbreaks of gastrointestinal diseases were frequent across the country, and journalists filed many stories documenting these epidemics and linking them with water

[147] Of the sixty-two articles from my sample that focused on water issues, fourteen (twenty-three percent) of them defended efforts by the government to address water problems. See Table 5 in the Appendix.

pollution from sewage or industrial wastewater.[148] Reporter Gustavo Rodríguez consulted representatives from Project Green (*Proyecto Verde*), a non-governmental environmental organization, to connect an outbreak of skin and gastrointestinal diseases in the San Luis Potosí community of Rascón with the industrial wastes flowing through the city's main drinking water canal.[149] Similarly, reporter Joaquín Paredes relied on the medical expertise of Dr. Raymundo Verduzco Rossan to link an outbreak of salmonella in Saltillo, Coahuila, with vegetables irrigated with sewage from two local industries, Zincamex and Cibiosa.[150] On August 4, 1983, Maximino Rodríguez filed a story about how a shipwreck loaded with spoiled tuna and sardines contaminated the Gulf of California, causing those who caught fish in the vicinity of the shipwreck to get sick.[151] These three examples demonstrate the variety of ways in which contaminated water sickened Mexicans (either directly from the canal, by washing vegetables with contaminated water, or by leaving spoiled food in a shallow sea near a city), but they also show how reporters educated their readers of the wide-ranging circumstances by which polluted water could find its way inside their bodies.

Polluted water also found its way across the country. Thanks to a man-made drainage canal, the raw sewage from thirteen million people living in the Valley of

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[148] In fact, gastrointestinal diseases were one of the biggest causes of infant mortality throughout the decade; Exequiel Ezcurra, "The Basin of Mexico," in *The Earth as Transformed by Human Action: Global and Regional Changes in the Biosphere over the Past 300 Years,* ed. B.L. Turner II, William C. Clark, Robert W. Kates, John F. Richards, Jessica T. Mathews, and William B. Mayer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 582.

[149] Gustavo Rodríguez, "Alta contaminación en la Huasteca potosina," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 3, 1984.

[150] Joaquín Paredes, "Veinte enfermos de salmonelosis en Coahuila por comer hortalizas contaminadas," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 2, 1983.

[151] Maximino Rodríguez, "Veinticinco intoxicados con pescado, en La Paz," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Aug. 4, 1983.

Mexico drained to the Gulf of Mexico via Hidalgo, and reporter Rodolfo Wong wrote a story about how this export of waste impacted the small town of Mixtiahuala, Hidalgo. He interviewed Rafael Aguirre, an ejido member who told him that decades of Valley of Mexico waste had saturated the soil and drinking water, and explained that "many children come to bathe in this place [the Tula River, the primary drainage for the Valley of Mexico], because of that we fear epidemics of skin and gastrointestinal illnesses. [We] have also recorded isolated deaths."[152] Wong's story encouraged Valley of Mexico residents think about the consequences of not properly treating the city's waste.

Other reporters educated the public about water pollution through shorter news briefs. Usually no longer than a paragraph, these quick descriptions gave readers the basic information about a problem without requiring the longer investment of time needed to read a full story. Reporter Alfredo Ibarra wrote a news brief in September 1983 about an outbreak of typhoid and other gastrointestinal illnesses in Cuernavaca, Morelos, in which 90,000 people, sixty percent of the city's population, were ill. Although the story was short, he made sure to note that doctors blamed the epidemic on the contamination of drinking water due to the deterioration of the city's water pipes.[153] In May 1984, 11,627 people, most of whom were children, suffered from gastroenteritis in Guerrero due in part to contaminated water. Reporter Salomón García filed the news brief, noting that nine cities (Acapulco, Chilpancingo, Taxco, Iguala, Huitzuco, Zihuatanejo, Tlapa, Chilapa, and Ciudad Altamirano) reported instances of the

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[152] Rodolfo Wong, "Nada hace SSA por remediar la contaminación de aguas negras," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 12, 1983.

[153] Alfredo Ibarra, "Por contaminación, 90,000 enfermos en Morelos," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 6, 1983.

epidemic.[154] Another news brief in that same month warned residents of Naucalpan, Atizapán, and Tlalnepantla (the city where residents of Los Reyes neighborhood faced death threats from their mayor) that eight polluted streams in the northwestern Valley of Mexico threatened to spark epidemics of infectious diseases due to their high levels of pollution.[155] With concise stories like these, reporters kept the dangers of water pollution on the radar for time-pressed readers.

Unfortunately for Mexicans, organic pollutants were not the only water-borne threats. Environmental journalists in this sample also wrote stories about the risks posed by industrial chemicals like lead, chromium, or mercury, and communicated to readers just how deadly they could be. Two environmental reporters, Teresa Weiser and Jesús Lastra, teamed up for a pair of stories covering what they called an "environmental disaster" in the Coatzacoalcos River in Veracruz in April 1984. They explained that the river was contaminated with hydrocarbons, lead, mercury, cyanide, ammonia, detergents, fecal residue, and gypsum, resulting in great health risks for those who drank or ate anything from it.[156] In the second story they focused on lead in the blood of citizens of Coatzacoalcos, of which over half had elevated levels. The reporters interviewed medical doctor Aura Judith Pérez Zapata, who explained that lead in the blood "produces a high number of miscarriages, as well as weakness, [and] physiological deformations. Also, it has been confirmed that it affects the central nervous system, the cerebellum, the spinal

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[154] Salomón García, "Más de 11 mil casos de gastroenteritis," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 4, 1984.

[155] "Alto índice de contaminación en 8 arroyos," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 17, 1984.

[156] Teresa Weiser and Jesús Lastra, "Desastre ecológico en Coatzacoalcos por la elevada concentración de industrias," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 16, 1984.

cord, and motor and sensory nerves."[157] After listing these terrifying lead poisoning maladies, Weiser and Lastra revealed that a recent biochemical analysis found that forty-three percent of the species in the Coatzacoalcos River tested positive for lead. The alarming tone of their article encouraged Coatzacoalcans to fear their own rivers. Such was the power of descriptive environmental reporting.

Several reporters educated readers about the tendency for industrial wastewater problems to spring up along the margins of the country. One reporter for *Excélsior* focused on the oceans, noting the pollution problem from industries, cities, and even tourism. This unnamed reporter interviewed José Luis Calderón Bertheneuf, the Director of Water Pollution Control and Prevention for SEDUE, who explained that lead and mercury flowing in Mexico's rivers changed the characteristics of the ocean and the creatures who lived in it.[158] Reporter Fausto Fernandez Ponte wrote a story about the dangers posed by maquiladoras along the United States border. Based on a study conducted by researchers from the College of Mexico in Tijuana, Baja California, the article described how these poorly regulated industrial complexes dumped very dangerous toxic wastes into rivers along the border. Fernandez Ponte noted that some of these chemicals were known to cause cancer.[159] Both of these articles demonstrated a desire to bring attention to the nation's frontiers, and made a special point to describe the difficulties of regulating toxic pollution in regions far from the capital.

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[157] Teresa Weiser and Jesús Lastra, "Elevado índice de contaminación de plomo en la sangre de los habitantes de Coatzacoalcos," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 17, 1984.

[158] "Cada día más contaminado el mar," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Oct. 24, 1983.

[159] Fausto Fernandez Ponte, "Alto indice de accidentes y enfermedades en plantas maquiladoras de Estados Unidos," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 23, 1983.

While some regions suffered from disproportionate water pollution due to their remoteness, some social groups suffered undue water pollution because of their low status in society, and environmental journalists educated readers of their plight. In an exposé, reporter Mario García Sordo described cases of intoxication from pesticides in the water supply among migrant workers in the Culiacán Valley of Sinaloa.[160] In the article Sordo wrote that the workers "suffer from poisonings because the employers deny them potable water and they must resort to the canals in order to satisfy their basic needs. It is precisely the water of the irrigation canals that carries the toxic waste from the various pesticides that come together to cause serious harm to humans…In the canals they wash their children, their dishes, and their clothes, and they also go to the canals to fill up their pails of drinking water."[161] This was not a water issue that directly impacted most readers. Instead, García Sordo's report documented for his readers the exploitation of their fellow citizens, living on the margins of society.

Describing illnesses or epidemics was not the only method environmental journalists undertook to educate their readers about water crises, they also reported on water problems that reduced Mexicans' quality of life. Foremost among this approach were stories warning of dwindling water supplies across the country. Just as Mexico City exported its sewage to other regions of the country (as we saw in the case of Mixtiahuala, Hidalgo), it also imported clean water (essentially exporting water shortages to the Lerma

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[160] Covering many of the same health, environmental, and social problems popularized by Angus Wright's now classic *The Death of Ramón González* (1990), García Sordo demonstrated a Mexican-based concern for Mexican workers in Mexico, six years before Wright's tome against the overutilization of pesticides in Culiacán.

[161] Mario García Sordo, "Ocurre un caso de intoxicación por plaguicidas cada minuto en el Tercer Mundo, señala la OMS," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jul. 4, 1984.

and Cutzamala basins) to satisfy the thirst of the valley's eighteen million residents, whose aquifer continued to dwindle throughout the decade.[162]

At the same time, reporters writing about the arid northwest raised concerns over the aquifer's ability to recharge the debt incurred by thirsty cities and irrigation demands. Javier Cruz wrote a story about the overexploitation of groundwater in Ensenada, Baja California, and quoted the Director of the Ministry of Agriculture (SARH) who blamed the problem on campesinos drilling too many wells.[163] This theme, in which the government blamed poorly-managed environmental exploitation on ignorant peasants, mirrors the case of irrational forest use by campesinos seen in chapter two. Elviro Muro H. interviewed a geologist from National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), Mario Cabra Pérez, who described the nationwide water shortages found in Hermosillo, Sonora, Baja California, and Mexico City, and suggested a ban on the drilling of new water wells.[164] Joaquín Paredes also raised concerns over the loss of water in a news brief explaining that every day, forty percent of Saltillo, Coahuila's water was lost due to overexploitation, lack of system maintenance, and illegal well drilling.[165] In this case, the government shared the blame with the campesinos for wasting water. All of these stories

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[162] Exequiel Ezcurra, "The Basin of Mexico," in *The Earth as Transformed by Human Action: Global and Regional Changes in the Biosphere over the Past 300 Years,* ed. B.L. Turner II, William C. Clark, Robert W. Kates, John F. Richards, Jessica T. Mathews, and William B. Mayer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 585.

[163] Javier Cruz, "Prohíbe la SARH perforar pozos en Ensenada," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Aug. 8, 1983.

[164] Elviro Muro H., "Falta planificar la perforación de pozos en México: un investigador," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 28, 1983.

[165] Joaquín Paredes, "Falta mantenimiento a la red de agua," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Oct. 17, 1983.

projected a foreboding tone, suggesting that without water, economies, societies, and lifestyles would change for the worse.

While some reporters fretted over dwindling aquifers, Marta Anaya lamented the loss of scenic beauty among the canals of Xochimilco, one of Mexico's most popular tourist destinations. In a report filed for *Excélsior*, Anaya described the abundance of garbage and aquatic weeds "that have become the companions" of the canals. Describing her boat trip through Xochimilco she wrote," and so one sees it coming [the water], carrying trash. Gradually the boats go by. They navigate between a kind of green cream, which floats the backwaters."[166] Describing her trip as a kind of expedition, Anaya juxtaposed the common narrative of an explorer journeying through a natural place with the unappealing qualities of a garbage dump. This perverted excursion highlighted the disparity between what once existed, and the realities of the present, projecting a great sense of loss to the reader.

Even though the environmental threats to humans were many, some reporters devoted newsprint to educating readers of the dangers water pollution posed to non-human species. José Castañeda Carrillo, the president of a fishing cooperative near La Vega dam in Jalisco complained to reporter Eduardo Chimely that wastewater from a local sugar refinery threatened fish in the river.[167] Similarly, representatives from Project Green in the Huasteca region of San Luis Potosí told reporter Gustavo Rodríguez that they found genetic mutations in animals living in local rivers. Since the early twentieth

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[166] Marta Anaya, "Son los canales turísticos de Xochimilco los más contaminados," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 20, 1983.

[167] Eduardo Chimely CH., "Peligran los peces de la presa La Vega," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Aug. 2, 1983.

century this region had experienced repeated oil spills due to poorly regulated drilling.[168] Gustavo Rodríguez explained the danger this legacy posed to local fauna, and noted the special peril they encountered with the excessively polluted Valles River: "Any animal that drinks water in this area dies instantly due to the high degree of acid, oil, lye, and other toxic substances in the river."[169] While the report noted the dangers this river posed to people, that it also expressed concern for the ecosystem demonstrates that reporters tried to educate readers about threats that did not directly impact their health.

In addition to educating readers about lacustrine and riparian life, reporters from this sample also raised red flags over the threats posed to marine life. Javier Cruz filed two stories in September 1983 about water pollution off the coast of Baja California. The features dealt with a loss of marine life due to industrial waste from both the United States and Mexico. The first story noted how the California current carried chromium, lead, and pesticides from California south to the coast of Baja California where it damaged fish populations.[170] The following week Cruz wrote a story describing a fourteen hectare dead zone in the Bay of Todos los Santos in Ensenada, Baja California, due to the city's industrial waste.[171] Teresa Weiser, covering the National Environmental Congress in May 1984, relayed the environmental discussions of the nation's power

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[168] For more on the exploitation of the Huasteca's oil reserves, see Myrna Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution 1900-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[169] Gustavo Rodríguez, "Alta contaminación en la Huasteca potosina," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 3, 1984.

[170] Javier Cruz, "Contamina EU con desechos el Océano Pacífico," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 21, 1983.

[171] Javier Cruz A., "Grave contaminación causan varias industrias en Ensenada," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 26, 1983.

brokers who viewed desertification and the pollution of Mexico's rivers and seas as the most challenging problems. But despite the focus on these issues, Weiser still found room to mention the launch of a campaign of awareness to protect endangered species such as the sea turtle.[172] At a time when the nation's economy was flagging and millions lived in poverty, these issues might have been ignored. But Mexican journalists demonstrated an empathy for wildlife, and described water crises from the animals' point of view, simultaneously educating their readers about what they were losing with this reduced quality of life.

Affixing Blame for Water Crises

Excélsior and *Uno Más Uno* reporters in 1983 and 1984 also served as public watchdogs, affixing blame for environmental water crises upon a host of guilty parties ranging all across the social spectrum. Environmental journalists challenged the rhetoric of industrial corporations and federal, state, and local governments, suggesting that problems with the nation's water supply stemmed from their collective apathy and incompetence. Less frequent accusations named foreign governments for bringing pollution to Mexico, and the Mexican people as a whole for lacking an environmental conscience.[173] Just as describing water crises in terms of their proximate causes and deleterious impacts helped readers to understand the science behind the natural forces that threatened their health or livelihoods, naming the people whose actions caused water

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[172] Teresa Weizer [sic], "13 millones de hectáreas en el centro del país, en proceso de desertificación," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 21, 1984.

[173] In my sample of sixty-two stories documenting water crises, there were thirty-five cases in which the story blamed some entity for causing the water crises: fourteen (forty percent) accused industry of creating the pollution, fourteen (forty percent) accused the government of neglect, two (five percent) blamed foreign nations for bringing pollution to Mexico, and five (fourteen percent) accused the Mexican people of not caring about the environment and behaving wastefully.

crises empowered readers. Once people know who is threatening their water supply, they can choose to demonstrate against them. By naming those parties they believed to be guilty, environmental journalists and their sources attempted to turn readers against these parties, thereby sharing with them the onus of civic action.

More often than not, if a reporter or source blamed industrial callousness for provoking a water crisis, they would name the specific corporation or plant causing the problem. In a story about industrial pollution in the Blanco River, Teresa Weiser wrote: "With a high content of organic and solid material, the industrial waste within the Blanco River watershed not only wreaks environmental havoc in the region, but also continually deposits sediment in the hydroelectric plants installed along the river, which reduces the capacity of the dams and deteriorates the equipment used in the production of energy."[174] She then named the Moctezuma Brewery, the Kimberly-Clark paper mill, and two chemical companies called Proquina and Mexicana de Alcaloides as the largest contributors of pollution to the river. In a news story written by Roberto Sosa, a small town mayor accused a glass manufacturer of damaging the city's aquifer. Victor López Nassar explained to Sosa that Materias Primas de Monterrey had done irreparable harm to their drinking water, but only paid the city two and a half pesos for every ton of material it removed.[175] The mayor told Sosa that they had requested an intervention into the matter by the state government. Both of these examples demonstrate a willingness to point fingers at specific corporations. As we saw in chapter one, Weiser was not shy

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[174] Teresa Weiser, "Contaminación del río Blanco y azolvamiento en plantas hidroeléctricas por los desechos sólidos," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 30, 1984.

[175] Roberto Sosa, "Dañan mantos acuíferos las exploraciones en Jáltipan," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Nov. 12, 1983.

about naming those she believed guilty for polluting the atmosphere, so it is not surprising that she used this tactic in shaming polluters of the hydrosphere as well. López Nassar, in his efforts to secure state intervention against Materias Primas, likely used the newspaper as a way to generate public outcry against the glass manufacturer. In both cases, the strategy of blaming specific industries in the newspaper was meant to initiate processes that would end the pollution.

Accusations against industrial polluters indicate a concerted effort by journalists to bring national attention to flagrant violations of environmental law, and the resulting risks to human health. When water pollution damaged 5,000 hectares of ejido land in Jalisco in August 1983, members of the local agricultural committee contributed a narrative which publicly denounced the mining company Peña Colorada for dumping mineral wastes into the Maravasco River.[176] When an outbreak of salmonella hit Saltillo, Coahuila, in September 1983, medical doctor Raymundo Verduzco Rossan used the newspaper to urge authorities to punish two Mexican businesses, Zincamex and Cibiosa, for releasing their sewage into the city's irrigation water.[177] In April 1984, Teresa Weiser and Jesús Lastra filed an exposé on the ecological damage in the Coatzacoalcos River near Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, blaming Pemex for dumping hydrocarbons and oil and Fertimex for discharging high quantities of calcium and acid directly into the river.[178]

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[176] Eduardo Chimely CH., "Contamina al río Maravasco la minera Peña Colorada; 5,000 has. dañadas," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Aug. 24, 1983.

[177] Joaquín Paredes, "Veinte enfermos de salmonelosis en Coahuila por comer hortalizas contaminadas," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 2, 1983.

[178] Teresa Weiser and Jesús Lastra, "Desastre ecológico en Coatzacoalcos por la elevada concentración de industrias," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 16, 1984.

While it is hard to know quantitatively how much these kinds of public accusations translated into civic action, the number of people demonstrating for environmental causes increased as the decade continued. Jordi Díez and several other historians and political scientists have suggested that high profile environmental disasters such as the 1984 San Juan Ixhuatepec gas explosion, the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, and the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster served as rallying points around which environmentalist causes could grow.[179] But by covering these demonstrations, reporters gave rise to a positive feedback loop in which more stories about environmental demonstrations gave rise to more environmental demonstration participation as citizens learned what their countrymen were doing.

A pair of stories written by reporter Gustavo Rodríguez in May 1984 provides evidence for this relationship between environmental stories and environmental demonstrations. His news brief from May 18 described plans for a demonstration led by environmental group Project Green (*Proyecto Verde*) against a Mexican business called Fibracel and six other sugar refineries along the Valles River in San Luis Potosí.[180] While the group spokesman Pedro Medellín estimated they would see a turnout of about 10,000 people at the demonstration, Rodríguez's news brief from two days later covering the demonstration noted that more than 12,500 people showed up. The group held a symbolic

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[179] Jordi Díez, *Political Change and Environmental Policymaking in Mexico* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 29-30; Paul Lawrence Haber, *Power From Experience: Urban Popular Movements in Late Twentieth-Century Mexico* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 74; Stephen P. Mumme, "System Maintenance and Environmental Reform in Mexico: Salinas's Preemptive Strategy," *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (1992): 128; see the Conclusion to this thesis for more analysis on these events and their role in galvanizing Mexican environmentalism.

[180] Gustavo Rodríguez, "Continúa la contaminación del río Valles," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 18, 1984.

closure of Fibracel, and Project Green called on SEDUE to prevent future pollution.[181] While an increased attendance of 2,500 demonstrators is not overwhelming evidence that the newspaper brought more people to the protest, it was still a twenty-five percent increase over what they expected to receive.

Denouncements of the government for creating water crises were just as popular as denouncements of industries among environmental journalists serving as public watchdogs. Some claimed the government was itself degrading the environment, others accused the government of failing to enforce environmental laws, and still others accused the government of failing to establish adequate environmental protection policies. As noted in the introduction to this chapter with the sewage problems in Los Reyes neighborhood, sometimes Mexicans could not count on the government to redress their water issues. But by taking their plight to the newspaper, citizens could apply pressure on government administrators that they would not otherwise have been able to muster. At the same time, journalists with an environmental orientation worked to apply this same pressure to generate the environmental action they wished to bring about.

Most of the stories that accused the government of actively contributing to water pollution were directed at nationalized industries, such as Pemex. In September 1983, Mario Ruiz R. described the many measures Pemex had taken to reduce its environmental footprint in the Coatzacoalcos River and the Gulf of Mexico, but explained that the nationalized oil refinery in Coatzacoalcos still discharged its waste into the region's

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[181] Gustavo Rodríguez, "Protesta contra ingenios que contaminan," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 20, 1984.

water.[182] In this case, the reporter softened the blow by describing Pemex's environmental investment, but still accused it of damaging a water supply. By mentioning the government's efforts to rehabilitate the environment, Ruiz described a government working to mitigate a difficult crisis. In July 1984, the mayor of Salina Cruz, Oaxaca, Jorge Camacho Cabrera, also lobbed accusations of environmental contamination at Pemex. Camacho Cabrera claimed that Pemex did not have "adequate equipment for preventing pollution, plus it did not inform anyone about a spill of 300,000 liters of diesel that caused environmental damage in the vicinity of the town and the beaches."[183] In this case, a local government administrator accused a higher branch of government for causing a water crisis that affected his city. Camacho Cabrera and Ruiz worked together through newsprint to apply pressure to the government hoping for an end to the pollution.

The most prevalent form of government criticism concerning water crises in this sample consisted of accusing the government of failing to enforce environmental laws.[184] When residents of the Santiago Acahualtepec neighborhood in Mexico City complained to their municipal government that their drinking water was orange and brown and filled with garbage and red worms (*gusanos rojos*), authorities told them their water was fine.[185] So they took their story to *Uno Más Uno* in an attempt to pressure government administrators to fix the problem. When a lack of maintenance on three government-run

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[182] Mario Ruiz R., "Pasividad de las autoridades federales," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 12, 1983.

[183] "Grave contaminación de Pemex en Salina Cruz," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jul. 9, 1984.

[184] Of the fourteen articles in my sample of water crises stories in which someone accused the government, seven (fifty percent) described government failures to enforce environmental laws.

[185] "Protestas por la contaminación del agua," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 9, 1984.

water treatment plants resulted in pollution in the Balsas River in Michoacan, local alderman Jacobo Díaz Ortega made sure the newspaper knew that the federal government was failing to enforce its own water-quality laws.[186] When water service unexpectedly shut down in Culiacan during a heat wave, resulting in thirty children being treated for dehydration, reporter Carlos Velázquez informed readers that neither the Board of Drinking Water and Sewage nor municipal authorities could explain the outage, and neither intervened to relieve problems associated with the shortage.[187] When open canals carrying sewage from Mexico City threatened the inhabitants of Mixtiahuala, Hidalgo, a local ejido commissary, Rafael Aguirre, accused state delegates, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Health of not fulfilling their promises to install underground sewage pipes through the community.[188] All of these examples describe attempts by Mexican citizens to hold their government accountable on issues surrounding water quality and environmental regulation. They were not even asking for new laws, they merely wanted their government to follow the laws it had already legislated by providing its citizens with clean drinking water.

Journalists also described government environmental policy failures. In a story about some of the environmental problems impacting the Valley of Mexico, reporter Alicia Ortiz noted the lack of sewer service for nearly five million inhabitants. She interviewed Jorge González Torres, a member of the Mexican Environmental Alliance,

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[186] "Aguas residuales contaminan el Balsas," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jul. 7, 1984.

[187] Carlos Velázquez, "Carecieron de agua durante dos días," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 14, 1984.

[188] Rodolfo Wong, "Nada hace SSA por remediar la contaminación de aguas negras," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 12, 1983.

who argued that the federal government had not shown any interest in diminishing the impacts of pollution and that "vested interests hinder any possible solutions."[189] As an example of this he noted "the constant urban growth, promoted by large residential constructions that, authorized by the government, little by little have been destroying [the valley's] green spaces." González Torres blamed the federal government's decades-long centralization policy for giving rise to many of the environmental and health problems afflicting residents in the Valley of Mexico.

In a similar manner, Alejandro Rosales Jiménez, the environmental manager for the city of Orizaba, told Teresa Weiser that industrial development gave rise to a mutually beneficial economic relationship between local workers and local governments which encouraged neglect for water supplies, like that occurring in his city's Blanco River. He explained that "there is a kind of mutual blackmail between representatives of capital and labor and the game of concessions in different branches, all in contempt of sound public administration for the benefit of communities.[190] In other words, Rosales Jiménez believed the links between government, business, and labor had been corrupted to a point to which the very political structure of Mexico could not address the nation's most pressing environmental concerns. In a way, this was the ultimate policy failure in that the basic method by which the Mexican government did business prevented the government from fulfilling its role as champion of the people it governed.

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[189] Alicia Ortiz, "No se recoge 50% de la basura del DF, afirman ecologistas, *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Jul. 9, 1984.

[190] Teresa Weiser, "Contaminación del río Blanco y azolvamiento en plantas hidroeléctricas por los desechos sólidos," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 30, 1984.

Some journalists accused foreign nations of polluting the waters of Mexico, either from ocean currents or through the foreign-owned industries established in their country. Fausto Fernandez Ponte reported on a study conducted by the College of Mexico that found that maquiladoras were dangerous places to work and that they dumped very dangerous wastes into rivers along the border with the United States. The story had plenty of blame to go around – accusing maquiladora plants in general for industrial neglect and the Mexican government for failing to properly regulate these border industries – but they placed the majority of the blame on foreign nations like the United States or Japan who had constructed the plants to take advantage of Mexico's cheap labor. Clearly, the United States and Japanese governments were not operating these maquiladoras, rather it was businesses based in those countries. But the article did not make this distinction, instead referring to "maquiladora plants of the United States, Japan, and other countries."[191] This phrasing clearly meant to accuse the economic policies of these nations that encouraged the simultaneous exploitation of Mexican labor and degradation of Mexican water. In the very same week, reporter Javier Cruz filed a short story about research conducted by Catsuo Nichicawa, who found that the United States polluted the Pacific Ocean with chromium, lead, and insecticides, which the California current then carried south to Baja California where it damaged fish populations.[192] In both of these stories, reporters presented a foreign government as guilty of damaging Mexico's water, thereby shifting blame away from Mexicans.

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[191] Fausto Fernandez Ponte, "Alto indice de accidentes y enfermedades en plantas maquiladoras de Estados Unidos," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 23, 1983.

[192] Javier Cruz, "Contamina EU con desechos el Océano Pacífico," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 21, 1983.

A fourth group that journalists tended to blame for water crises were Mexican citizens in general, who some reporters characterized as lacking in environmental awareness. For example, in a story announcing the construction of three new water treatment plants designed to help clean up Lake Chapala, the manager of the Jalisco Public Works Department, Manuel Gómez Garza, explained that "the federal government would promise to control the industrial waste deposited in the water if state authorities would try to prevent local residents from throwing trash in the lake."[193] While some locals probably did use the lake as a dumping ground, the federal government, in promoting heavy industrial development in the headwaters of the Lerma River basin, of which Lake Chapala was a part, deserved most of the blame for the lake's deteriorating condition. But the story presented the government as the protector of the lake, and described local Mexicans as ignorant yokels incapable of environmental foresight. Moreover, blaming the locals shifted blame from the government-encouraged industrial complex 470 miles upstream.

Blaming the citizens for the loss of water resources was a popular theme in the pages of *Excélsior* during in 1983, a trend that is explained by its tendency to deflect blame away from the federal government due to its government-friendly staff. A September 1983 story consulted many different government administrators in a discussion of the barriers to environmental regulation and pollution prevention. Enrique Gastélum Ramos, the General Director of Water Use and Prevention of Pollution for SARH, explained that "there exists an absolute lack of awareness among ordinary

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[193] Eduardo Chimely CH., "Construirán 3 plantas tratadoras de aguas negras en Chapala," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 27, 1983.

citizens towards the conservation and protection of natural resources."[194] Another story described a SARH-imposed ban on the drilling of new water wells in Ensenada, Baja California, in order to prevent the overexploitation of the region's groundwater. Campesinos who broke this law would be fined 50,000 pesos.[195] In this story, the government stepped in to safeguard a precious resource from the short-sighted campesinos who had foolishly wasted the region's groundwater. Again, both of these stories described the Mexican government as the enforcer of the environmental foresight the citizens of Mexico seemed to lack.

The Government as Protector of Water Resources

Within the sample, government-friendly reporters and government spokespeople pushed environmental narratives which presented the federal government as the champion of environmentalism, and deflected blame for water crises to other entities. This chapter revealed many examples of citizens calling for government action to address water crises. In turn, when the federal government fined corporations for polluting water, or spent money on facilities to clean water supplies, it promoted these efforts in *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno*. As political scientist Stephen Mumme has pointed out, President De la Madrid promoted an environmental agenda throughout his term as a way to preempt any non-governmental environmental criticism.[196] The frequent reports of government-

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[194] "Obstruyen barreras legales el combate a la contaminación de tierras y aguas," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Sep. 22, 1983.

[195] Javier Cruz, "Prohíbe la SARH perforar pozos en Ensenada," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Aug. 8, 1983.

[196] Stephen P. Mumme, "System Maintenance and Environmental Reform in Mexico: Salinas's Preemptive Strategy," *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (1992): 126; Because the sample of sources used for this thesis came from a collection Mumme assembled, it shares many of the same primary sources he used in crafting his analysis. His "preemptive reform" argument holds up under a historical analysis of period newspapers.

directed environmental action found in the sample used for this thesis further supports his analysis. Stories presenting the government's perspective presented readers with a very different narrative from those crafted by educators and public watchdogs. Instead, these narratives asserted that the federal government knew about the nation's water problems and was taking effective action to remedy them. Despite the larger number of stories in this sample of water crises written by environmentalists, the federal government responded with a similarly proportioned number of stories promoting their counter-narrative of government environmental sensitivity.[197]

One of the federal government's duties was to enforce environmental standards and punish those who did not comply, so when bureaucrats upheld this responsibility they used newspapers to promote their actions. An *Excélsior* story from October 1983 informed readers that the Ministry of Communications and Transport fined the captains and owners of thirty-eight boats caught polluting Mexican seas with food waste, packaging, and other garbage.[198] This story served as a warning to those who would pollute Mexican waterways, but it also conveyed to the reading public a message of government authority to regulate environmental issues such as water crises.

The most popular method by which the federal government promoted its environmental proactivity through newspapers in this sample was with the announcements of wastewater treatment plant constructions. Two weeks before Teresa

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[197] As noted above, of the sixty-two articles from my sample that focused on water issues, fourteen (twenty-three percent) of them described efforts by the government to address water problems. A similar percentage of stories extolling government mitigation attempts exists among my sample of air pollution stories (twenty-one percent) and forest stories (eighteen percent). See Table 5 in the Appendix.

[198] "Por contaminar el mar fueron multadas 38 embarcaciones: SCT," *Excélsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), Oct. 5, 1983.

Weiser's story about pollution in the Blanco River in April 1984, a news brief appeared in the same paper announcing a study by SEDUE to determine the feasibility of constructing a new water treatment plant along the very same river in order to treat the pollution and make the water drinkable again.[199] The following month, a SEDUE spokesmen once again used *Uno Más Uno* to promote a plan under study that would construct twenty new water treatment plants across the country over a six year period, thereby reducing national river pollution by seventy-five percent.[200] In both of these stories, the spokesmen failed to blame any particular industry or city for polluting the rivers, they merely stated that the government knew about the problem and technocrats were working to solve it. This kind of reporting avoided accusing anyone, and instead presented a better future brought about by the federal government.

Environmental reporters wrote more frequently on water crises than on any other environmental issue, and they reported on the subject by educating readers about the ways in which water crises negatively impacted them, by serving as public watchdogs that accused different groups for causing the pollution, and by defending the federal government's efforts to address the crises. The quantity of these stories suggests that Mexican readers in the 1980s worried about water quality and scarcity issues, and wanted to know who and what was threatening this vital resource. Furthermore, the quantity of stories about the government's mitigation attempts suggests a smaller, but still culturally

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[199] "Potabilizan aguas residuales de fábricas," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), Apr. 14, 1984.

[200] "Programa de Sedue para el control de aguas residuales," *Uno Más Uno* (Mexico City, Mexico), May 7, 1984.

significant, attempt by the federal government to reassure readers that they could place trust in their nation's government to protect Mexico's water supply.

When compared with the other two environmental issues analyzed in this thesis, air pollution and forests, water crisis reporting was the most frequent, and reporters presented it with more foreboding urgency than they did stories on the other two issues. There certainly were a few editorials and stories about air pollution that warned how deadly breathing Mexico City's air could be, and some reporters presented stories about the loss of Mexico's forests as if a great plague of devastation were sweeping the country, but these were limited in number. The sheer quantity of water pollution stories, especially the ones reporting on water-borne epidemics and dangerous chemical pollution, suggests that reporters viewed water crises as a more immediate, widespread threat to the health of Mexicans.

Given the importance of water to human life and its role as a vector of communicable disease, this proliferation of stories concerned with Mexico's water supply is not surprising. Trees were important to the economy and their removal could eventually lead to erosion and desertification, but their destruction did not give rise to immediate human health concerns. And while breathing the air in Mexico City could be deadly, it mostly impacted the city's sensitive populations such as children or the elderly, and usually one needed prolonged exposure in order to get sick. Water was both vital to Mexico's health and an immediate threat to its people, and this explains its popularity as an environmental topic.

CONCLUSION

Excélsior, Uno Más Uno, and the Awakening of Mexican Environmentalism

"Don't worry Federico. No matter how it shocks us, we must admit that the Revolution tamed Mexico forever."

He hadn't seen the resentful eyes, the caged tigers lurking in the nervous bodies of the youths sitting watching the smog drift by.[201]

– Carlos Fuentes

In his short story *The Mandarin*, Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes contrasted the old and the new Mexico City through the life of Federico, an old man clinging to the extravagance, ritual, and beauty of the past even as the growing, polluted, soulless city endeavored to destroy any trace of its former charms. The above quote foreshadows a violent end to Federico – there is no room for such nonsense in Fuentes's monstrous, modern Mexico City – but, written in the 1970s, it also foreshadowed the rise in environmental advocacy of the following decade. Despite attempts by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to maintain an acquiescent, controlled, "tame" population, its failure to adequately address the nation's mounting crises, including the environmental one, provoked a surge in advocacy documented in the pages of Mexico's newspapers.

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[201] Carlos Fuentes, "The Mandarin," in *Burnt Water*, trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (New York: Farrer, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 158.

This story, along with many of Fuentes's other works, expressed a disgust with what Mexico had become, a disgust reflected in the environmental narratives which many other Mexicans contributed to *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* in 1983 and 1984. Those activists who chose not to sit idly by as industrial corporations and millions of vehicles flooded their air and water with poison, and as logging corporations clear cut their forests leaving behind degraded landscapes, all with tacit approval from the federal government, truly achieved a momentous task in the 1980s: they made it socially acceptable to challenge the PRI.

The movement only grew as the decade progressed and newspapers documented a series of environmental disasters, both within the country and without, that further weakened PRI hegemony. An explosion at a Pemex gas plant in San Juan Ixhuatepec killed 500 people in November 1984, and sparked both outrage and environmental awareness. Less than a year later, a massive earthquake in September 1985 killed around 10,000 people in Mexico City, spawning the creation of many new environmental nongovernmental organizations concerned with providing basic services for hundreds of squatter communities whose residents became homeless after the quake.[202] Two months after the earthquake, the first national meeting of environmental nongovernmental groups took place, forming the Pact of Ecologist Groups, which later proved vital in organizing opposition to President Miguel de la Madrid's plans to build Mexico's first nuclear power plant in Laguna Verde, Veracruz. Announced just five months after the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl, and with the memories of the Mexico City earthquake still fresh in

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[202] Jordi Díez, *Political Change and Environmental Policymaking in Mexico* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 30.

people's minds, the Laguna Verde project faced fierce resistance from both these new environmental groups and newspapers. Although the government succeeded in building the plant, several historians have argued that fear of a nuclear accident (and doubt over the federal government's ability to prevent one) marked the first truly national unification around an environmental issue.[203]

As this thesis has suggested, newspapers reflected the development of environmentalism (and government attempts to co-opt the movement) by providing a voice for the many different groups wishing to promote their specific environmental narratives. The battle surrounding air pollution centered around narratives crafted by reporters serving as public watchdogs and educators, who blamed those responsible for its creation, and listed the ill-health effects of breathing in polluted areas. While environmental journalists and scientific researchers worked to blame industries for disregarding environmental legislation or the federal government for failing to enforce it, authoritarian journalists and government spokespeople countered with the narrative that the Mexican people lacked environmental awareness, and that their failure to properly maintain their vehicles was the biggest contributor to air pollution.

The forest narrative split into two major themes, environmentalists, researchers, and campesinos who worked to document deforestation and its attendant ecological degradation and wise-use advocates who believed that forest resources should and could

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[203] Díez, 31-33; Velma García-Gorena, *Mothers and the Mexican Antinuclear Power Movement* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1999), 18; Stephen P. Mumme, "System Maintenance and Environmental Reform in Mexico: Salinas's Preemptive Strategy," *Latin American Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (1992): 128; Victor Alejandro Payá Porres, *Laguna Verde: La violencia de la modernización: Actores, y movimiento social* (México City: Instituto Mora, 1994), 73-75; Lane Simonian, *Defending the Land of the Jaguar: A History of Conservation in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 215-16.

be better managed to contribute to Mexico's economy. Authoritarian journalists and government spokespeople supported the latter position, and tried to convince the nation that the ejido system should be replaced with the privatization of forest resources in order to establish a more productive and environmentally-friendly logging regime.

The battle over water supplies featured narratives similar to those seen with air pollution, in which public watchdogs and educators explained the factors behind water crises to readers. Environmentalists, the poor, and researchers argued that industries and cities were contaminating water supplies and that the federal government was failing to protect the nation's drinking water. Government administrators and authoritarian journalists represented the opposing view, which tried to convince readers that the federal government was levying fines against polluters and enforcing legislation that safeguarded Mexico's water.

In all of these issues, *Excélsior* and *Uno Más Uno* presented numerous environmental narratives concerning Mexico's resources. Environmentalists, fearing for the future of Mexico's environment and recently emboldened by the PRI's failure to effectively manage the economy, tried to document the damage and blame those responsible for causing it or allowing it to happen. They served as the nation's reality check, presenting information as they saw it, not as the PRI wanted it presented. The federal government, working to maintain its hegemony and stave off the development of any autonomous civic groups, promoted itself as the protector of Mexico's environment and tried to deflect any blame for environmental problems onto other groups, such as campesinos, specific corporations, or the Mexican people in general. Despite all of these new challenges to the PRI, Mexico's ruling party remained in control of the nation until

2000, even though they had to rig the 1988 presidential election in order to do so.[204] So although the environmental reporters of these two papers writing in 1983 and 1984 did not bring about a regime change with subsequent shifts in environmental policy, they did contribute to the legitimization of government criticism and helped spread an awareness of environmental issues that still proliferates in Mexico today.

[204] Ginger Thompson, "Ex-President in Mexico Casts New Light on Rigged 1988 Election," *New York Times* (New York City), Mar. 9, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/09/world/ex-president-in-mexico-casts-new-light-on-rigged-1988-election.html?_r=0.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Distribution of five most popular environmental topics among the sample of 216 stories

	Number of Stories	Percentage of Total
Water Crises	62	29%
Forests	43	20%
Air Pollution	28	13%
Agricultural Problems	22	10%
Oil Issues	18	8%

Table 2: Distribution of air pollution topics among the sample of 28 stories

	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Total***
Blaming Someone	18	64%
Linking to Other Issue	14	50%
Government as Solution	6	21%

***Numbers do not add up to 100 because some stories have occurrences that fit into multiple categories.

Table 3: Distribution of forest topics among the sample of 43 stories

	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Total***
"Irracional" Forest Use	27	63%
Environmental Damage	22	51%
Government as Solution	8	18%

***Numbers do not add up to 100 because some stories have occurrences that fit into multiple categories.

Table 4: Distribution of water crisis topics among the sample of 62 stories

	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Total***
Blaming Someone	35	56%
Describing Water Crises	29	47%
Government as Solution	14	23%

***Numbers do not add up to 100 because some stories have occurrences that fit into multiple categories.

Table 5: Number of Narratives Defending the Federal Government by topic

	Number of Stories	Percentage by Category
Air Pollution	6	21%
Forests	8	18%
Water Crises	14	23%