Serrano Communities and Subaltern Negotiation Strategies: The Local Politics of Opium Production in Mexico, 1940–2020

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Abstract. This article examines why Mexican peasants cultivate opium poppies, and argues that their cultural, political, and economic motivations for engaging in this illicit activity suggest an affinity with Alan Knight's typology of the *serrano* peasant. Building on this comparison, I identify three strategies—"legalism," "weapons of the weak," and the threat or use of violence—that poppy farmers use to mitigate the dangers of participation in the drug trade, including attacks by state forces and various criminal organizations. The article concludes with a discussion of the ways poppy farmers have historically employed these strategies, and the factors that determine when and where they are used.

Mexico is one of the world's largest producers of opium, which is today the country's most important homegrown narcotic. In 2017, this opium provided the raw material for more than 80% of the heroin consumed in the US, helping to fuel a national opioid crisis that in the same year killed nearly 50,000 people.[1] News reports, popular literature, television

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1. DEA, "National Drug Threat Assessment 2018," https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-11/DIR-032-18%202018%20NDTA%20final%20low%20resolution.pdf, p. 13; National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Overdose Death Rates," January 2019, https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates.

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dramas, and true-crime documentaries about this illicit trade all tend to focus on intercartel warfare, police raids, and the adventures of major traffickers. The latter are presented as the all-powerful bosses of cross-border "narco-empires," who have penetrated and "corrupted" the Mexican state. Despite important (and well-documented) divisions between different institutions and levels of government, and their own considerable evolution over time,[2] such narratives invariably depict the state as "static, unified, and corporatist . . . with clear and unchanging lines of command from the president and the party through local governors, down to peasant commissars."[3] The power of the nation's drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) is meanwhile seen as the result of their financial power, itself the product of their total control of all aspects of the drug trade. In the case of Mexican heroin production, a handful of capos are frequently presented as enjoying "complete dominion and control over . . . the cultivation of poppies, the extraction of opium, its refinement into heroin, [and] its transportation to the principle centers of its consumption."[4]

Peel back the glitzy media curtain that surrounds all things "narco," however, and it becomes obvious that the profits—and thus the power—of any Mexican DTO depend less on a handful of quasi-celebrity "drug lords" than on hundreds of thousands of poor, largely anonymous Mexican peasants, who produce the opium that fuels DTO heroin exports to the US.[5] These same small-scale drug-crop cultivators are also among the chief victims of Mexico's War on Drugs, which, since it took the form of a militarized conflict known as the "drug war" in 2006, has claimed at least 150,000 lives.[6] This article centers on these peasants and seeks to

2. See, e.g., Alan Knight and Wil Pansters, eds., *Caciquismo in Twentieth Century Mexico* (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2006); Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith, eds., *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938–1968* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

3. Benjamin Smith, "The Rise and Fall of Narcopopulism: Drugs, Politics, and Society in Sinaloa, 1930–1980," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 7, no. 2 (2013): 126–27.

4. José García Cabrera, *¡El Pastel! Parte Uno: 1920–2000* (Mexico City: Palibrio, 2012), 44.

5. Romain LeCour, Nathaniel Morris, and Benjamin Smith, "No More Opium for the Masses: From US Fentanyl Boom to the Mexican Opium Crisis, Opportunities Amidst Violence?," Wilson Center, February 2019, https://www.noria-research.com/no-more-opium-for-the-masses.

6. Laura Calderón, Kimberly Heinle, Octavio Rodríguez, and David A. Shirk, "Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico," University of San Diego, April 2019, https://justice

answer a series of interrelated questions, starting with the most basic of all: Who are they, and why do they take part in such a dangerous trade? It then explores how these small-scale opium producers negotiate these dangers, including those posed by a variety of coercive state institutions (all of which officially enforce prohibition but are often deeply immersed in the drug trade themselves), as well as those emanating from a range of criminal enterprises (which often attack or extort peasant communities, or force autonomous opium producers to work for them directly as low-paid agricultural workers). Finally, it examines the economic, cultural, and political factors that influence poppy cultivators' choice of tactics in negotiating such external pressures.

Based on my own fieldwork and archival research across Mexico,[7] in combination with information provided by a range of different scholars, journalists, and civil society and human rights organizations, I argue that throughout the twentieth century, Mexican peasants have turned to opium production in an attempt to maintain traditional rural lifestyles—which usually include a high level of autonomy in terms of communal self-rule, self-reliance, and control of local lands—in the face of political pressures and economic dislocation. By examining the behavior of these peasants in light of Alan Knight's analysis of rural mobilizations during the Mexican Revolution (1910–40)—an era of widespread violence in some ways comparable to that prevailing in Mexico today—I propose that many of Mexico's poppy farmers can be seen as the heirs of what Knight calls the *serrano* tradition; a group of peasants defined, above all, by their "jealous independence" in relation to outside forces.[8]

The aggression of the Mexican army and police forces, or of DTOs and other armed nonstate actors, threatens the political, cultural, and territorial autonomy of today's poppy-farming *serranos*, prompting them

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inmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Organized-Crime-and-Violence-in-Mexico-2019.pdf.

7. This research was carried out, often incidentally, over nearly a decade of doctoral and postdoctoral study. It has so far fed into LeCour, Morris, and Smith, "No More Opium"; Romain LeCour, Nathaniel Morris, and Benjamin Smith, "The Last Harvest? From the US Fentanyl Boom to the Mexican Opium Crisis," *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development* 1, no. 3 (2019); and Nathaniel Morris, "Heroin, the Herreras and the 'Chicago Connection': The Drug Trade in Durango, 1950–1985," in *Histories of Drug Trafficking in Twentieth Century Mexico*, ed. Wil Pansters and Benjamin Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

8. Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1:115.

to react just as their predecessors did to similar threats during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: through "outright resistance, passive resistance, [or] the invocation of powerful local *patrones* which might intercede on their behalf."[9] Since the very beginnings of the Mexican state's campaigns against poppy cultivation in the 1940s, *serrano* opium producers' attempts to neutralize such external pressures have centered around three distinct but often complementary approaches: those that exploit legal channels and contacts with other, more sympathetic representatives of the state; those that involve the use of what Scott defines as "Weapons of the Weak";[10] or, most radically, those that employ open violence, including the formation of communal self-defense militias (today known as *autodefensas* or *policias comunitarias*).

My analysis of *serrano* poppy farmers' use of such strategies also draws on the work of scholars in the field of subaltern studies and thus builds on the links, first established in the 1990s by scholars such as Joseph, Nugent, and Mallon, between this primarily South Asian–oriented literature and studies of Mexican peasant politics.[11] Applying subaltern scholars' insights into peasant mobilizations to the case of Mexican opium producers' negotiations with external forces helps to demonstrate that the conflicts and tensions inherent in Mexico's current drug war are not a purely modern phenomenon, nor limited only to Mexico. Instead, this article shows that they constitute a new configuration of much older dynamics of conflict in rural, *serrano* regions of the country, with important parallels in other parts of the global South. Recognizing this reality helps to "defetishize" the Mexican drug trade and the identities of its peasant participants, who are neither "narcos" themselves nor the eternal victims of DTOs. Instead, they constitute a subaltern group that has adapted to changing political and economic conditions by turning to new, illicit sources of income, while responding to the novel challenges engendered by their involvement in the drug trade through the use of venerable strategies.

9. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:117

10. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

11. See Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Florencia Mallon, "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1491–1515; Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds. *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

Recognizing this reality entails engagement with debates within the subaltern studies literature over the extent to which scholars should privilege peasant insurgency over "compromise."[12] My analysis shows that for Mexico's poppy-growing peasantry—like the hill people of Scott's "Zomia,"[13] or the "rightful resisters" of rural China[14]—there are not always "sharp dualities between passivity and resistance."[15] Instead, in the Mexican case, open rebellion is only one aspect of multifaceted peasant efforts to negotiate the terms of elite domination, from which it is impossible for them to *fully* escape, given the relationships they must sustain with elites in order to make a living from illicit opium production.[16] My analysis therefore supports the idea that subaltern "resistance" often revolves around negotiation as much as it does rebellion, and might be more productively redefined as the efforts of dominated groups "to act with sufficient intention and purpose to negotiate power relations from below in order to rework them in a more favorable or emancipatory direction."[17]

In connecting recent interdisciplinary work on the Latin American drug trade to more established analyses of peasant mobilizations in the Mexican countryside, this article also provides an original counterpoint to reductive accounts of peasant drug production in Mexico and demonstrates the importance of the latter in shaping the social, political, and economic identities and realities of rural mestizo and indigenous communities. It sheds new light on the relationship between peasants' economic activities and the demands and pressures of national markets, and on state institutions' involvement in illicit activities they are officially charged with prohibiting. It identifies important parallels between the history of the Mexican opium trade and that of peasant coca production in the Andean nations, and, indeed, of opium production in Asia's "Golden

12. See Gledhill's introduction to *New Approaches to Resistance in Brazil and Mexico*, ed. John Gledhill (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 1–20; Saurabh Dube, *Stitches on Time: Colonial Textures and Postcolonial Tangles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 151–52; Uday Chandra, "Rethinking Subaltern Resistance," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 45, no. 4 (2015): 563–73.

13. James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 283–84.

14. Chandra, "Rethinking Subaltern Resistance," 566.

15. Dube, *Stitches on Time*, 151–52.

16. John Gledhill, "Indigenous Autonomy, Delinquent States, and the Limits of Resistance," *History and Anthropology* 25, no. 4 (2014): 507–29.

17. Chandra, "Rethinking Subaltern Resistance," 565.

Triangle."[18] In so doing, it also suggests productive avenues for further research on the specificities of *serrano* traditions across different regions and temporalities, while adding nuance and empirical data to debates around the drug trade that often fail to draw upon either, but the outcomes of which have important consequences for millions of people across the world today.[19]

An Economic History of Mexican Opium Production

With the exception of a few ethnographic and historical studies,[20] most of what we know about Mexico's poppy farmers comes from either journalistic or government sources. These often portray them as either the innocent dupes or helpless hostages of powerful DTOs;[21] as romantic fighters against external oppression;[22] or as fully integrated members of DTOs (which are presented as running complete "farm-to-arm" operations),[23]

18. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 200–201.

19. Compare Paul Gootenberg, "More and More Scholars on Drugs," *Qualitative Sociology* 31, no. 4 (2008): 426; Paul Gootenberg and Issac Campos, "Toward a New Drug History of Latin America," *HAHR* 95, no. 1 (2015): 4; Smith, "The Rise and Fall of Narcopopulism," 126–27.

20. See, e.g., Salvador Maldonado Aranda, *Los márgenes del Estado mexicano. Territorios ilegales, desarrollo y violencia en Michoacán* (Zamora: COLMICH, 2010); Victoria Malkin, "Narcotrafficking, Migration, and Modernity in Rural Mexico," *Latin American Perspectives* 28, no. 4, (2001): 101–28; James McDonald, "The Narcoeconomy and Small-Town, Rural Mexico," *Human Organization* 64, no. 2 (2005): 115–25; Smith, "The Rise and Fall of Narcopopulism."

21. See, e.g., Mark Fineman, "Narco-village," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 April 1996; Alberto Nájar, "México: campesinos en las redes del narco," *BBC Mundo*, 5 November 2009; the same is true for portrayals of peasants cultivating illicit crops in many other regions; cf. Thomas Grisaffi, *Coca Yes, Cocaine No: How Bolivia's Coca Growers Reshaped Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 85–86.

22. See, e.g., Ryan Devereaux, "The Hot Land: How A Lime Grower Led an Uprising against One of Mexico's Bloodiest Drug Cartels," *The Intercept*, 29 June 2016; naturally, the pronouncements of many peasant spokespeople often echo such privileging of resistance over the more complex realities of negotiation; cf. Gledhill, "Indigenous Autonomy," 507–29; Romain LeCour, "Pueblo Chico, Infierno Grande. Territorialidad e intermediación política: las Autodefensas en Michoacán, Mexico," in *Michoacan: Violencia, Inseguridad y Estado de Derecho*, ed. Salvador Maldonado (Zamora: COLMICH, 2019), 153–54.

23. Pamela Engel and Barbara Tasch, "Mexican Cartels Now Have a 'Sophisticated Farm-To-Arm Supply Chain' for the US Heroin Trade," *Business Insider*, 28 September 2015.

and therefore as the legitimate targets of both state repression and the attacks of "rival" DTOs.[24] The reality, however, is that most of Mexico's opium producers are self-employed peasant farmers who grow poppies on a small scale as a cash crop, alongside other, more traditional subsistence crops such as corn, beans, squash, and chilis. They sell their opium to wholesale buyers (*acaparadores*)—often exploitative and monopolistic local strongmen, linked both to DTOs and to Mexican state institutions—who process the opium into heroin and sell it to others for transport to the US. Although in 2017 Mexican peasants received around $1 billion from the sale of raw opium,[25] this figure is only one percent of the almost $100 billion potentially generated by street sales of Mexican heroin in the US.[26]

The expansion (and often subsequent contraction) of opium production in Mexico has been linked, since the early twentieth century, to similar configurations of national and international economic, social, and political pressures. Much like coca cultivators in Colombia and the Andean nations,[27] and many of Afghanistan's peasant opium producers,[28] Mexico's poppy farmers tend to be members of rural communities that have been partially integrated into national and international markets but have failed to see the benefits of such economic "development."[29] Faced with the increasing necessity of generating a cash income, but living in areas—particularly the highlands of the northwest, central-west, and southwest of Mexico—where poor soil, limited access to water, and a lack of reliable infrastructure preclude their cultivation of high-value legal crops, they turn to illicit alternatives. Thanks to prohibition, opium—like coca—commands high prices on the international black

24. Oswaldo Zavala, *Los Carteles No Existen: Narcotrafico Y Cultura En Mexico* (Mexico City: Malpaso Ediciones, 2018).

25. Based on fieldwork in Mexican opium-producing regions, and averaging out prices from four different states, LeCour, Morris, and Smith estimate that Mexican opium production in 2017 generated peasant producers a total of 19.278 billion pesos ("No More Opium," 24–25)

26. The DEA estimates 111 tons of heroin were produced in Mexico in 2017, worth US$902 per pure gram in the US ("National Drug Threat Assessment 2018," 12). Similarly, in the Andes, "less than 1 percent of the final retail price of cocaine makes its way back to the coca growers" (Grisaffi, *Coca Yes*, 83).

27. See Paul Gootenberg and Liliana Dávalos, eds., *The Origins of Cocaine: Colonization and Failed Development in the Amazon Andes* (London: Routledge, 2018); Grisaffi, *Coca Yes*.

28. See James Bradford, *Poppies, Politics, and Power: Afghanistan and the Global History of Drugs and Diplomacy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

29. Maldonado Aranda, *Los márgenes del Estado*, 351.

market, yet poppies can be easily grown even in difficult mountain terrain (which also makes them difficult for the enforcers of prohibition to find and destroy). Whether in Bolivia, Southeast Asia, or Mexico, even in the absence of good road networks and other transport infrastructure, the "high value per unit weight and volume" of such crops "more than offset[s] transportation costs."[30]

Outside of Mexico, some scholars have seen opium—in particular, its use—as having weakened the autonomy of subaltern groups by "sapp[ing] their will and capacity to resist" and "dr[awing] them deeper into the plains-based money economy."[31] However, Scott argues that in Southeast Asia, "no matter how isolated a hill people or maroon community was, they were never entirely self-sufficient. . . . They aimed to have the advantages of trade and exchange while remaining politically autonomous. Historically such trade crops included cotton, coffee, tobacco, tea, and, above all, opium . . . if the communities that grew them were beyond the state's range, they were compatible with political independence."[32]

Drawing on Scott's work, Grisaffi points out that in Bolivia, the illicit nature of coca production prior to legal reforms in the 1990s also impeded the state's ability to "make society 'legible,' and therefore amenable to its control," which bolstered the political, as well as the economic, autonomy of the country's coca producers.[33] In the case of Mexico's poppy cultivators, both Scott and Grisaffi's arguments would seem to apply. Here, those who produce opium rarely (if ever) consume it, while its sale allows them to resist external economic and political pressures and maintain rural lifestyles, control of their lands, and associated traditions of self-reliance and self-rule. The exact nature of these traditions varies from region to region. Many mestizo drug producers, such as those of Michoacán's Tierra Caliente, share "a regional, ranchero culture . . . characterized by gritty individualism, opposition to government, [and] valuing the family above society."[34] In contrast, other regions such as

30. Compare Scott, *Art*, 69; Grisaffi, *Coca Yes*, 133.

31. David Arnold, "Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudem-Rampa Risings, 1839–1924," in Guha, *Subaltern Studies*, 1:117–19.

32. Scott, *Seeing*, 200–201.

33. Grisaffi, *Coca Yes*, 147.

34. Salvador Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking in Rural Mexico," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 94 (2013): 50; McDonald, "The Narcoeconomy," 119–20.

Guerrero are dominated by indigenous communities where "the collectivity reigns [and] individual power, prestige, and honor are achieved through years of unpaid community service." These practices boost communal unity and cohesion and thus constitute resistance strategies in themselves.[35]

Despite such differences, both indigenous and mestizo opium producers tend to have in common a high regard for local self-rule—often overseen by political bosses known as "caciques"—and a strong attachment to their lands. In fact, both groups have often come to depend on poppy cultivation precisely because it helps them to sustain such political and territorial autonomy. The spread of this old-world crop throughout the mountains of Mexico thus in some ways parallels the diffusion across highland Southeast Asia of New World crops such as maize, cassava, and potatoes, whose ecological and nutritional qualities enabled independent-minded peasants to avoid government domination in the rice-growing plains and instead maintain "a quasi-sedentary existence outside the ambit of the state" in more mountainous areas.[36]

In Mexico, opium production first became a mainstay of autonomous peasant communities in the 1940s, particularly in the country's northern mountains: a region now known as the Golden Triangle, where the states of Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua intersect. Local peasants had originally turned to opium production in the 1930s because the revolution had devastated the local mining industry, in which many had previously worked as temporary laborers in order to earn extra cash.[37] After World War II stimulated demand for Mexican-produced heroin by disrupting the supply of Asian heroin to the US, poppy cultivation in the Golden Triangle "shifted from a small-scale affair to a major state industry." Despite the central government's official prohibition of such activity, regional authorities and local caciques supported poppy cultivation in order to share in its profits,[38] or because they believed the "high wages and commensurate purchasing power" it provided local peasants "dissuaded most from seeking further land reform."[39]

35. Sandra Ley, Shannan Mattiace, and Guillermo Trejo, "Indigenous Resistance to Criminal Governance: Why Regional Ethnic Autonomy Institutions Protect Communities from Narco Rule in Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 54, no. 1 (2019): 182–84.
36. Scott, *Art*, 201–5.
37. Smith, "The Rise and Fall of Narcopopulism," 134–35.
38. Smith, "The Rise and Fall of Narcopopulism," 133.
39. Smith, "The Rise and Fall of Narcopopulism," 134.

The reality of this ground-level elite support for such widespread, illicit peasant activity complicates once-commonplace historiographical narratives of the immediate postrevolutionary era, which argued that an evermore unified central state increasingly dominated the entire country, including remote and/or marginalized rural areas.[40] That so many *serrano* peasants in the 1940s and '50s actively defied the federal government's prohibitionist regime in order to shore up their economic—and by extension political and social—autonomy, instead complements more recent research documenting the continued ubiquity of popular resistance to state authority in rural Mexico.[41]

Over the ensuing decades, a similar mixture of local and international factors pushed opium production to expand south through the Mexican mountains. In particular, government aid for new infrastructure, allocation of agricultural credit, and its introduction of price guarantees for local products[42] enabled peasants to make more profit from illicit as well as legal crops, prompting an increase in the production of the former.[43] At the same time, traffickers from the Golden Triangle began promoting marijuana production in Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guerrero in order to meet expanding demand in the US.[44] In the early 1970s, with the collapse of the so-called French Connection, US demand for Mexican heroin also increased exponentially, prompting many marijuana producers to begin farming poppies too. By 1974 the army was "making substantial seizures of opium poppies in Guerrero en route to Sinaloa for heroin processing. Authorities learned that trafficking organizations from the states of

40. See, e.g., Enrique Krauze, *La presidencia imperial: ascenso y caída del sistema político mexicano (1940–1996)* (Mexico City: Tusquets Editores, 1997).

41. This includes opposition to conscription (Thomas Rath, "'Que El Cielo Un Soldado En Cada Hijo Te Dio. . .': Conscription, Recalcitrance and Resistance in Mexico in the 1940s," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, no. 3 [2005]: 507–31); the defense of cattle ordered killed as part of anti-foot-and-mouth campaigns, and outbreaks of lynching, often targeting corrupt or abusive representatives of the state (Gema Kloppe-Santamaría, "Lynching and the Politics of State Formation in Post-revolutionary Puebla (1930s–50s)," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 51, no. 3 [2019]: 17, 23); and popular protests to "veto the accession of mayors and governors, or topple them once in power" (Paul Gillingham, "Maximino's Bulls: Popular Protest after the Mexican Revolution 1940–1952," *Past & Present* 206, no. 1 [2010]: 180).

42. Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking," 48–49.

43. Luis Astorga, *Drogas sin fronteras. Los expedientes de una guerra permanente* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 2001), 46.

44. Jerry Kamstra, *Weed: Diary of a Dope Smuggler* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

Sinaloa and Jalisco had an arrangement with *guerrerense* opium growers for years."[45] The profits from such illicit opium and marijuana production enabled many *serrano* peasants to remain in their communities and hold onto at least some of their traditional autonomy, in contrast to the situation in Mexico's lowland areas, where the ongoing "Green Revolution" led to "population explosion, erosion, and market dependence [and] forced rising numbers off the land."[46]

From the 1980s onward, the Mexican government's neoliberal turn further stimulated opium production. As "infrastructure projects, agricultural credits, production inputs and guaranteed prices for farm produce" were abandoned,[47] peasants' living conditions dropped, pushing "more and more rural dwellers . . . to grow drugs in the hills and sierras" in order to survive.[48] After the inauguration of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, cheap food imports from the US, with which it was near impossible to compete, further squeezed peasant incomes,[49] and an estimated 1.3 million rural jobs were lost.[50] Many peasants were forced to migrate to Mexican cities or the US in search of employment as wage laborers. Those who refused to leave their homes often turned to the cultivation of illicit cash crops.[51] In the late 1990s, as US demand for marijuana fell and its appetite for heroin exploded, poppies became the most profitable of these crops.[52]

Mexican Opium Producers as *Serrano* Rebels

Mexican poppy farmers have long been linked by a set of common social, economic, and political characteristics. They tend to live in economically

45. Aileen Teague, "Mexico's Dirty War on Drugs: Source Control and Dissidence in Drug Enforcement," *Social History of Alcohol and Drugs* 33, no. 1 (2019): 77–78.

46. John Tutino, *The Mexican Heartland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 344.

47. Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking," 51–52.

48. Maldonado Aranda, *Los márgenes del Estado*, 433.

49. James B. Greenberg, Anne Browning-Aiken, William L. Alexander, and Thomas Weaver, eds., *Neoliberalism and Commodity Production in Mexico* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2012).

50. McDonald, "The Narcoeconomy," 121.

51. Michel Lohmuller, "Agricultores cambian café por amapola en centro de heroína en México," *InSight Crime*, 16 September 2016.

52. Humberto Padgett, *Guerrero. Los hombres de verde y la dama de rojo. Crónicas de la Nación Gomera* (Mexico City: Tendencias, 2015).

marginal—but never truly "isolated"—highland zones, have a high regard for local traditions of autonomy, and have long been tied into clientelist political networks dominated locally by caciques. Such characteristics suggest their affinity with the Mexican peasants categorized by Alan Knight as *serranos*. As opposed to mobilizations centered around demands for agrarian reform—whose peasant protagonists Knight defines as *agraristas*[53]—Knight argues *serrano* rebellions are directed not against large landowners but rather against "the state's unremitting, if sometimes ineffectual, quest for obedience." He sees such rebellions as a constant feature of Mexican history, "from the colonial through the independence periods and down to the Porfiriato."[54]

Most of the "classic" *serrano* rebellions of Mexican history have taken place in mountainous areas (hence their label, *serrano*, which translates as "highlander"). Here, as in comparable zones of India and Southeast Asia, geographical factors have traditionally facilitated local self-rule, and associated traditions of cultural and territorial (although not necessarily economic) autonomy, which central authorities have struggled to curtail.[55] In Mexico, the same places in which *serrano* recalcitrance has been most concentrated and protracted—such as the "semi-autonomous, pioneer communities" of the sierras of Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and Durango, and the indigenous communities of highland Guerrero and Oaxaca[56]—have suffered disproportionately from violent political conflicts, economic and social marginalization, and uneven and ineffective development programs. It is no surprise, then, to find that these same *serrano* heartlands are now the primary centers of opium production in Mexico.

Like the country's modern poppy farmers, the *serrano* rebels of previous eras were not ethnically homogenous. While "many *serrano* communities were Indian, some—notably those of the Sierra Madre Occidental—were mestizo." Knight therefore argues that ethnicity, while often helping to generate the communal cohesion necessary for effective opposition to external pressures, was not a determining factor for *serrano* rebellion. Instead, "it was political and ethnic forces which generated protest, crossing and often ignoring ethnic lines. Ethnicity affected the character of the protest, but it did not determine who the protestors would be."[57] Rather

53. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:78–127.
54. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:116.
55. Scott, *Art*, 20.
56. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:116–17.
57. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:116.

than geographical location or ethnic make-up, *serrano* rebellion—and, I argue, modern Mexican opium production—was above all linked to local traditions of self-rule. What self-rule actually consists of may differ somewhat between communities but generally implies that local people owed their primary political allegiances to local authorities. Territoriality was also central to local conceptions of self-rule, and of the means necessary for its defense. Subaltern studies scholars have shown, with regard to peasant rebellions in India, that "the notion of physical space enabled the insurgents to assert their identity in terms of their homeland . . . [while] the rebels' view of the enemy as an alien to an ethnic and physical space provided the domain of resistance with critical determinations."[58] So too, for Mexican peasants, the idea of the community as a *patria chica* (little fatherland) has long constituted an important physical, political, and moral axis around which they have mobilized against external threats.[59]

In Mexico, traditions of political and territorial autonomy were "not exclusively confined to highland regions" but existed "wherever the authority of state and landlord was tenuous, enabling peasant communities to maintain a jealous independence." But those best able to preserve such autonomy necessarily lived in less accessible (i.e., mountainous) regions, in particular those that facilitated the development of a particular variety of frontier society, defined by "relative freedom of mobility, a familiarity with violence, [and] resistance to urban political control and culture. *Serrano* society was still fundamentally peasant society, in that it was based upon low status rural cultivators, producing for subsistence as well as for the market, and controlling (not necessarily owning) their own means of production."[60] The same applies to most of modern Mexico's opium-production hot spots, where violence—whether related to the drug trade or not—has long been a key feature of life;[61] where the economy is (at least partly) integrated into broader markets, but most people have remained poor and often continue to engage in at least some subsistence cultivation;[62] and where the state either has never been

58. Dube, *Stitches on Time*, 147.

59. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:368–81.

60. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:115–16.

61. See Maldonado Aranda, *Los márgenes del Estado*; Smith, "The Rise and Fall of Narcopopulism"; Ley, Mattiace, and Trejo, "Indigenous Resistance."

62. See, e.g., Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking"; see also LeCour, Morris, and Smith, "The Last Harvest?"

particularly present or has more recently absented itself in line with neoliberal economic policy.[63] These factors have allowed local communities to maintain higher levels of political, cultural, and territorial autonomy than the national norm, but often at the price of participation in an inherently violent illicit industry.

It was precisely such a "heritage of violence" that, during the revolution, made *serrano* communities effective fighters. In Chihuahua and Sonora, for example, a century of battles with Apache raiders allowed local *serranos* to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for effective guerrilla warfare; strengthened the "solidarity of communities and regions"; and forced cross-class compromise within their communities, as "caciques and landlords depended on the strong right arms of their retainers, and they in turn respected the leadership displayed by those in authority."[64] The *serrano* rebellions of the revolutionary period, directed against oppressive external forces and centered around the strong leadership of local caciques, were therefore "often capable of mobilising very nearly the entire community—including better off, respectable families which resented alien impositions no less than the *pelados*. . . . [V]ertical divisions (between governing and governed regions) prevailed over horizontal (class) divisions."[65]

Most opium-producing communities today are similarly divided between minorities that have grown rich and powerful by taking advantage of the wider political and economic opportunities associated with the drug trade, and poorer majorities, whose members have subsisted, but not grown wealthy, through poppy cultivation.[66] In many such communities, the inherent violence of the drug industry has also helped to strengthen particularly violent local forms of *caciquismo*.[67] But the *serrano* mentality that prevails in these communities allows them to mobilize effectively and en masse against external threats, often "project[ing] a formal veneer of individual equality to the outside [even as] internal stratification is clearly marked."[68] Mobilizations organized in this fashion

63. Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking"; see also John Gledhill, *The New War on the Poor: The Production of Insecurity in Latin America* (London: Zed, 2019); and LeCour, "Pueblo Chico."

64. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:118.

65. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:122.

66. McDonald, "The Narcoeconomy," 123.

67. LeCour, "Pueblo Chico," 178.

68. Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking," 50.

thus tend, in typical *serrano* style, to avoid "subvert[ing] the social order inside the community," or "threaten[ing] the social order outside."[69]

As a result of such tendencies, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *serrano* rebels were "often accommodated into the status quo, sometimes co-opted by conservative forces, and rarely capable of achieving lasting gains."[70] This was even the case of *serrano* rebellions that incorporated, or were even led by, "social bandits,"[71] given that the latter, even though they functioned "outside the law. . . [did] not necessarily operate outside the local political and social hierarchy."[72] Thus although in his work on the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution, Knight necessarily focuses on *serrano* rebellions, he avoids the mistake—common in much of the early subaltern studies literature on South Asian peasant insurgencies—of overprivileging "the autonomy and agency of the subaltern, articulated by the duality between resistance and domination and subaltern and elite."[73] Instead, Knight's analysis of *serrano* movements holds open the possibility of subaltern *negotiation* of external domination, in addition to, or in combination with, *resistance* to it.

This aspect of Knight's analysis makes his *serrano* typology particularly suitable for application to modern Mexico's opium producers, who—due to their need to engage with regional elites (whether members of DTOs or government officials) who control the processing of opium into heroin and its export to the US—cannot ever completely free themselves from external political and economic domination. In particular, over the last decade, poppy farmers' shared tendencies with revolutionary-era *serranos* toward accepting the wider social or political order, making alliances with outlaws, and the traditional "flexibility and opportunism of *serrano* leadership,"[74] have encouraged some opium-producing communities to form tactical alliances with certain DTOs, often to obtain modern weapons for use against other, more threatening criminal groups. But it has also led to the co-option of many of these mobilizations, both limiting their potential to make more radical gains, and the extent to which we can talk about them as constituting concerted resistance to, as opposed to negotiation of, external pressures.

69. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:125–26.
70. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:125–26.
71. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:123.
72. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:307–8.
73. Dube, *Stitches on Time*, 151.
74. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:307–8.

Serrano Peasants and the Mexican War on Drugs

Throughout the world, governments have often perceived their authority as being threatened by peasant cultivation of certain crops. In nineteenth-century Southeast Asia, "easily accessible and labor-saving subsistence crops [constituted] a threat to state-making" in highland areas, causing governments to promote rice cultivation in more easily controlled lowland regions. Likewise, in the independence-era Americas, "those whose job it was to drive the population into wage labor or onto the plantations deplored crops that allowed a free peasantry to maintain its autonomy."[75] Since the 1940s, these crops have included drug crops, and militarized anti-drug campaigns have therefore provided governments across Latin America with a pretext for curbing peasant self-rule.[76] In the Mexican case, government eradication campaigns and attacks on *serrano* poppy cultivators and their families inherently target their ability to maintain rural livelihoods and traditions of autonomy threatened by disruptive market forces.

Mexican state agencies—particularly federal institutions, which have a greater interest in enforcing centralized control over the population than, say, municipal police forces—have also used the War on Drugs as a way of more generally imposing "order" on unruly groups, in a way that fits with long-standing patterns that date back to the government centralization campaigns of the nineteenth century.[77] That does not mean that the Mexican state has ever attempted to put a complete stop to the drug trade, of course. Federal, state, and municipal officials alike have often preferred to try to better *control* drug production and trafficking, both to avoid alienating local drug-trafficking elites or provoking unmanageable popular protest, and with an eye to obtaining for themselves a larger share of the industry's profits. This has often led to those officials "leading antidrug operations . . . fully engaging in the drug trade" at the same time,[78] and has also sparked frequent conflict between different organs of government and the different political cliques that control them,

75. Scott, *Art*, 206.

76. Gledhill, *The New War on the Poor*; cf. Grisaffi, *Coca Yes*, 132; James J. Brittain and James Petras, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia: The Origin and Direction of the FARC-EP* (London: Pluto, 2010), 89–114.

77. Maldonado Aranda, *Los márgenes del Estado*, 359.

78. Teague, "Mexico's Dirty War," 84.

belying any idea of the Mexican state as a monolithic entity.[79] After all, as Gillingham points out, the architects of the one-party state system overseen by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institutional, or PRI) "were a diverse mixture of technocrats and generals, bureaucrats and bosses, caciques and crooks, and their political and personal interests were thickly interwoven"[80]—a state of affairs that, as even a cursory glance at recent Mexican headlines will reveal, remains little changed today.[81]

The country's first major opium eradication campaigns began in the Golden Triangle in the 1940s and explicitly targeted a region "distinguished for its rebellion and its disorders."[82] During these years both the federal military and state government officials were more concerned with deposing local caciques than destroying poppy fields,[83] as part of a broader (and only partly successful) central government effort to shift the structure of Mexican politics away from one made up of "clientelist regional fiefs," toward the rule of "civilian, centrally selected [officials] . . . skilled in the everyday grind of bureaucratic rule."[84] Although few poppy plantations were destroyed in the eradication campaigns in the Golden Triangle, the extent to which regional military commanders, police chiefs, local militia commanders, and communal authorities were all accused of involvement in regulating and protecting opium production in the region allowed state governors and federal generals to replace them with more reliable allies,[85] while enforcing their own, more direct, and centralized control over the opium trade.

79. Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking," 51–52.

80. Gillingham, "Maximino's Bulls," 178.

81. A telling case in this respect is that of Nayarit attorney general Edgar Veytia, now serving a 20-year sentence in the US on drug trafficking charges; see Patricia Dávila, "'El Diablo' Veytia y sus amigos," *Proceso*, 5 April 2017, https://www.proceso.com.mx/480725/diablo-veytia-sus-amigos.

82. Anonymous government official to Alejandro Ortega Romero, 8 August 1955, Archivo Historico del Estado de Durango (AHED)/Gob/6.12/e.38.

83. Governor of Durango to head of expedition, Gral. Damaso Carrasco, 1 March 1948, AHED/Gob/6.12/e.32.

84. Gillingham, "Maximino's Bulls," 177.

85. Resident of Tamazula, Rosendo Ortiz, to President Ávila Camacho, 4 June 1947, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN)/Presidentes/MAV/422/5; Governor of Durango to General Caransco, 2 January 1948, AHED/Gob/C.6.12/e.32; "Corresponsalías," *El Siglo de Torreón*, 22 June 1950; "A la opinion pública del estado," *El Siglo de Torreón*, 7 August 1953.

Subsequently, as the Mexican state found itself challenged by the radical student movements, militant peasant groups, and small-scale left-wing urban and rural guerrilla insurgencies of the 1960s and '70s, it embarked on a counterinsurgency campaign—the so-called Dirty War—that lasted until 1982. Some of the most extensive and brutal government offensives—involving the army, the secret services, federal police units, and local paramilitary auxiliaries—targeted guerrilla movements that had broken out in highland regions, many of which were also centers of drug production. The government and its media allies sought to legitimize these campaigns by claiming the guerrillas and those suspected of supporting them—most of them peasants—were drug traffickers. Thus the Dirty War, which was explicitly "intended to reassert state control" over rebellious areas of rural Mexico, was disguised as a War on Drugs.[86] In regions such as the Golden Triangle and the mountains of Guerrero and Michoacán, the army, police forces, and their paramilitary allies—sometimes backed by *actual* drug traffickers with a vested interest in curbing local peasant autonomy—committed countless abuses against left-wing peasants and independent-minded, small-scale drug producers alike.[87] Campaigns against drugs continued to be used after the final defeat of the guerrillas as a pretext for crushing other perceived challenges to the authority of the state, even as the central state's most important coercive institutions, like the Federal Judicial Police (PJF) and the Directorate of Federal Security (DFS), remained deeply involved in drug trafficking themselves.[88]

Such crackdowns on "unruly" peasants continue into the present day and have increased since President Calderón declared "war" on the nation's DTOs in 2006. Representatives of the state at national, state, and municipal level now frequently—and deliberately—use the discourse of a War on Drugs to criminalize any perceived challenge to their authority,[89] including that posed by independent peasant leaders and civil society organizations. Such attacks further contribute to opium-growers'

86. Alexander Aviña, "A War against Poor People: Dirty Wars and Drug Wars in 1970s Mexico," in *México Beyond 1968*, ed. Jaime M. Pensado and Enrique C. Ochoa (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 136.

87. Teague, "Mexico's Dirty War, 81–85.

88. Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking," 55.

89. Zavala, *Los Carteles*; cf. Luis Astorga, *Mitología del "narcotraficante" en México* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1995).

perceptions of this war as a threat to their autonomy.[90] Thus just as *serrano* movements in the years directly leading up to the revolution—the "heirs of a long tradition"—were "revitalised by the centralizing pressures of the Porfiriato,"[91] the increasing violence of the state's War on Drugs has increased the incidence of opium-growers' open resistance to government attempts to target their leaders, confiscate their arms, destroy their fields and their illicit harvests, and kill or jail them for breaking prohibitionist laws.

Thanks to the prevalence of such abuses, until fairly recently *serrano* poppy farmers often saw members of DTOs as less threatening than corrupt and violent soldiers and police officers. Selling opium to DTOs enabled peasants to make a living, while DTOs made enough money through processing and smuggling drugs to the US that they "did not need to enrich themselves at the expense of local people; in fact, many made improvements and brought services to towns."[92] Meanwhile the outbreaks of violence that inevitably accompanied the expansion of the drug trade were "not seen as different . . . to the kinds of fights over land, political power and women" that had long existed in *serrano* communities.[93]

In recent years, however, this has changed, as the killing or arrest of major traffickers has fractured DTOs into multiple smaller groups. This process began in 1985, after the murder of DEA agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena by members of the so-called Guadalajara Cartel, which forced the presidency to crack down on the organization and its allies in the government itself (such as members of the DFS, which was disbanded later that year). The fragmentation of major DTOs has accelerated since 2006, as the violence of the drug war has forced drug-trafficking networks to become ever more localized. These smaller organizations, operating with lower profit margins than their predecessors, have become ever more aggressive in their attempts to establish direct (and more profitable) control over autonomous opium producers.[94] At the same time, many have branched out into the business of extorting rural people, or usurping

90. Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking," 60; Tlachinollan, "Emite Mecanismo de Protección a Personas Defensoras y Periodistas," 5 October 2018, http://www.tlachinollan.org/reconocimiento-publico-emite-gobierno-federal-reconocimiento-a-defensoras-es-de-la-montana-de-guerrero/.

91. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:308.

92. Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking," 53–54.

93. Gledhill, *The New War on the Poor*, 165.

94. Ley, Mattiace, and Trejo, "Indigenous Resistance," 191.

communally owned land in order to gain control of the natural resources found therein.[95] Many of their members have also engaged in sexual violence against local girls and women.[96]

Such violence, coercion, and theft not only physically threaten individuals and their extended families, but also constitute an affront to *serrano* conceptions of community, to their control of their lands, and to local social codes rooted in machismo.[97] During the Porfiriato and the revolution, the comparable "rise of new caciques, who monopolised scarce village resources," and the abuses of "high-handed local authorities, and their corrupt, clientelist network," sparked multiple rebellions in *serrano* regions of the country.[98] The increasing tendency of criminal organizations to behave in exactly the same way has, in recent years, inspired increasing numbers of opium-producing communities to mobilize against DTOs as well as state forces—at least in areas where these groups can actually be distinguished from one another.[99]

Opium Producers and *Serrano* Negotiation Strategies

Mexico's *serrano* opium producers often perceive the attacks of both state forces and DTOs as violating their autonomy in ways that fit with long-standing historical patterns. Popular mobilizations in modern Mexico have long shown "a strong continuity of forms of protest from the past and from the countryside,"[100] and so it's natural that poppy farmers' strategies to negotiate such external coercion also follow *serrano* patterns of long historical pedigree. Knight argues that, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these strategies have primarily involved "outright resistance, passive resistance, [and] the invocation of powerful local *patrones* which might intercede on their behalf."[101] Opium producers have used all three since the 1940s, mainly in the form of legal appeals for protection to superior authorities; passive tactics such as

95. Ley, Mattiace, and Trejo, "Indigenous Resistance," 182; Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking," 49.
96. Ley, Mattiace, and Trejo, "Indigenous Resistance," 192; LeCour, "Pueblo Chico," 166; Gledhill, *The New War on the Poor*, 182.
97. Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking," 53–54.
98. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:116, 1:119–20.
99. Teague, "Mexico's Dirty War," 85.
100. Gillingham, "Maximino's Bulls," 203.
101. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:117.

those classed by Scott as "weapons of the weak"; and the use of outright violence. Often, they have had to employ all three simultaneously, due to the diffuse and fractured nature of the Mexican state, the contradictions inherent in its representatives' attempts to enforce prohibition while also controlling the drug trade, and the sheer quantity of different DTOs and their local criminal "franchises" active across Mexico. The following section traces some of the ways in which these strategies have historically been used, and analyzes the factors that help determine poppy farmers' differing uses of each.

LEGALISTIC FORMS OF NEGOTIATION

Subaltern groups throughout the world have often turned to the use of petitions, legal maneuvers, and clientelistic appeals to potential protectors in order to neutralize the varied threats posed by outside forces. In fact, Comaroff and Comaroff argue that, today, subalterns' use of what they call "lawfare"—that is, "legal means for political and economic ends"—has become so prevalent that, across the world, "class struggles seem to have metamorphosed into class actions."[102] In Mexico, subalterns' use of such negotiation strategies has a long and well-documented history that dates back to the Conquest, when indigenous groups turned to the Spaniards' own legal and judicial practices "to negotiate and adapt to their needs the work, services, taxes, obedience and submission demanded of them" by their new rulers. During the nineteenth century, petitions continued to be the safest—and thus preferred—method for the "rural, marginalised poor" to negotiate, "with relative success," the more contentious aspects of elite domination.[103] The use of legalistic negotiation strategies by *serrano* peasants during the era of the revolution thus had significant historical antecedents, which have continued to shape the legal maneuvers of the nation's opium-producing peasantry today.

However, the specific conditions now faced by the latter also regulate and often restrict the utility of legalistic forms of negotiation. For example, *serrano* poppy farmers can only carry out negotiations via legal channels with government officials or institutions, because nonstate actors

102. Chandra, "Rethinking Subaltern Resistance," 567, citing Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 26–27.

103. Romana Falcón, "El arte de la petición: Rituales de obediencia y negociación," *HAHR*, 86, no. 3 (2006): 467.

such as DTOs are inherently *illegal* organizations (although, due to the reality of many officials' close association with DTOs, legal petitions may still reach the latter and potentially affect their behavior). Their success vis-à-vis the state is also far from guaranteed, as it depends on the existence of individuals within the state apparatus with whom negotiation is possible. But legal maneuvers remain the least risky forms of negotiation available to opium producers, and their use therefore dates back to the beginnings of Mexico's domestic War on Drugs. Archives holding criminal case files or correspondences between peasants and politicians are littered with references to deals made between poppy farmers and state representatives, as well as appeals made by peasants acknowledging their cultivation of drug crops was technically illegal, but seeking to win protection for themselves and their livelihoods by establishing alliances with one institution or faction of government against other, more threatening forces.

In Tamazula, Durango, in 1944, for example, the municipal police chief confidentially warned President Ávila Camacho that "since last year the sowing of poppies has increased, encouraged by Aureliano de la Rocha, Chief of the Judicial [Police] in this Municipality and that of Topia, who last year pretended to investigate the cultivation of these drugs but has done the opposite; as it is to my knowledge that he helps various inhabitants of the aforementioned places, and even protects them by designating them agents of the Judicial Police."[104] In exchange for this protection, de la Rocha was levying "taxes" on poppy farmers, paid in raw opium. This indicates not only the obvious corruption of local state forces but also local people's acceptance of such arrangements. Such practices were likely perceived locally as reflecting official tolerance for opium production, given that legal appeals made by peasants to the regional judiciary, regarding the "unwarranted" destruction of their illicit crops, attest that "the whole world cultivates [poppies], and despite there being Authorities in this place, they never troubled anyone or imposed any kind of prohibition."[105]

Given the conditions of the modern War on Drugs and the prevalence of government anti-drug propaganda, few peasant poppy farmers could today reasonably expect to achieve much through such *direct* appeals

104. Arnulfo Carrasco, Tamazula, to President Ávila Camacho, 1 December 1944, AGN/Pres/MAC/422/7.

105. "Declaration," Abraham Delgado, Casa de la Cultura Jurídica de Sinaloa (CCJS)/Penales/1945, exp. 53.

to the state. But my fieldwork experiences in opium-producing communities in Nayarit suggest that subtly different alternatives remain part of *serrano* negotiation tactics.[106] Although local people know poppy cultivation is illegal, they seek protection for themselves—and, by extension, their illicit crops—by decrying the abuses that state forces commit against them in the name of the War on Drugs, in the hope that these forces will be transferred elsewhere. In so doing, they often exploit the multilayered structure of the Mexican state, by complaining to Nayarit's state government that federal forces harass and steal from them; denouncing to the federal government the beatings carried out by municipal and state police officers; and excoriating all of these forces to the media, and anyone else who will listen, as being in cahoots with the region's DTOs.[107]

Meanwhile, opium-producing communities in Guerrero have gone a step further by openly calling on the authorities to legalize and regulate their production of opium. Their demands were taken up in 2016 by the governor of Guerrero, Héctor Astudillo, who suggested—perhaps with a view not only to votes but to his own economic benefit, given his reputed links to regional DTOs[108]—that the move could improve the state's economy and stem endemic regional violence. Astudillo's calls for legalization have since been backed by former presidents, the office of the Minster of the Interior, and even the top brass of the army.[109] In August 2018, Guerrero's State Congress sent a proposal for the legalization of medicinal opium production to the Mexican Senate, which is now studying the initiative.[110]

"WEAPONS OF THE WEAK"

When legal maneuvers prove useless as tools in negotiating away external pressures, however, *serrano* opium producers may turn to "weapons

106. For more details see LeCour, Morris, and Smith, "No More Opium," 13–17.

107. See, e.g., Patricia Dávila, "En Nayarit, cientos de desaparecidos ante la indolencia estatal," *Proceso*, 27 January 2018, https://www.proceso.com.mx/520152/en-nayarit-cientos-de-desaparecidos-ante-la-indolencia-estatal.

108. "Gobierno de Astudillo ya pactó con el narco pero no acaba con la violencia," *Proceso*, 27 March 2017.

109. Ignacio Fariza, "El expresidente Zedillo urge a México a pasar de la prohibición a la regulación de las drogas," *El Pais*, 25 September 2018; "El jefe del ejército mexicano cree que la legalización de la amapola ayudaría a poner fin a la violencia," *El Pais*, 6 October 2018.

110. Congreso del Estado de Guerrero, "Iniciativa Con Proyecto de Decreto que Adiciona y Reforma Diversas Dispocisiones de la Ley," 17 August 2018.

of the weak" such as foot-dragging, noncompliance, evasiveness, and obfuscation.[111] There is a long history of Mexican subaltern groups,[112] and of peasant drug growers across Latin America,[113] using such "weapons" against those who threaten their persons, livelihoods, or lands. In the case of an eradication campaign that the army carried out in the mountains of Durango in the 1940s, for example, *serrano* poppy farmers managed to harvest much of their illicit crop before the soldiers arrived, and then disappeared into the hills, leaving local women to destroy the remaining evidence. In this case, local women built on long-standing traditions of leading resistance to government policies that challenged "their obligation (and perceived *right*) to feed and protect their loved ones," while taking advantage of the fact that, according to macho Mexican honor codes, they could expect lighter treatment from the frustrated soldiers than could their menfolk.[114] Throughout the region's villages, the soldiers found nothing but burnt fields and taciturn women, from whom they could obtain no details whatsoever about the location of the men. At night, however, the latter tormented them by shouting insults and letting off gunshots from their mountain hideouts. The soldiers quickly became demoralized, and the expedition returned to its base having achieved little.[115]

More than 70 years later, women in Durango continue to employ nonviolent strategies to protect their families' livelihoods from soldiers. Attacks on women, and even "femicide," have become increasingly ubiquitous in the context of the modern Mexican War on Drugs.[116] But because of the convergence of older social codes and more modern concerns about such violence against women, the female members of

111. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, xvi, 29–35.

112. See the essays in Joseph and Nugent, *Everyday Forms*.

113. Similarly, Bolivian coca producers "routinely deny knowledge of the cocaine trade," use fireworks to warn of the military's arrival, and ridicule government officials enforcing anti-drug regulations (Grisaffi, *Coca Yes*, 102–3, 129).

114. Gilbert Joseph, "Rethinking Mexican Revolutionary Mobilization; Yucatán's Seasons of Upheaval, 1909–1915," in Joseph and Nugent, *Everyday Forms*, 149–50; see also Marjorie Becker, "Torching the Purisima," in Joseph and Nugent, *Everyday Forms*, 247–64.

115. US Consul in Durango to Sec. State, 27 June 1944, US National Archives (NARA)/RG59.1940-4.1.

116. Amnesty International, "Sobrevivir a la Muerte: Tortura de Mujeres por Policías y Fuerzas Armadas en México," 21 June 2018, https://amnistia.org.mx/contenido/sobrevivir-a-la-muerte-tortura-de-mujeres-por-policias-y-fuerzas-armadas-en-mexico/.

drug-producing communities still remain (somewhat) less vulnerable to arbitrary murder than their male counterparts. Indigenous O'dam (Tepehuano) women living in the far south of Durango have taken advantage of this fact, and "when members of the Army arrive to destroy [their plantations] they confronted them in their native language . . . [the soldiers] looked for interpreters to translate what the women were saying and explain to them their mission, in order to begin a dialogue with the women . . . who argued that the plantations were not theirs, despite being in the courtyards of their homes and only a meter's distance from their houses. . . . Curiously they could not find any men in the area."[117]

In my own fieldwork in Nayarit, I have observed Náayari (Cora) Indians also using their indigeneity as a defensive mechanism in the context of the War on Drugs. For a start, Náayari opposition to all outside forces that seek to dominate them is ritually institutionalized in their communities. During various religious fiestas, participants mockingly dress up as soldiers, police officers, or notorious figures from the worlds of drug trafficking and politics, ritually referencing powerful external actors in ways that subvert their dominance and reaffirm the power of local identities and practices. On a more practical level, Náayari poppy farmers, using portable radios to warn each other about the movements and activities of state forces, communicated only in the Náayari language in order to render their messages incomprehensible to outsiders listening in. Other local people, particularly women, claimed ignorance of Spanish in order to avoid the questions posed to them by soldiers or police officers. In Michoacán, Maldonado has noted the existence of a similar "web of silence and solidarity that envelops everyone who grows or distributes narcotics, so when the drug trade becomes integrated into regional economies and cultures, people adopt it as part of a lifestyle, in fact, a road to social ascendance."[118]

VIOLENT RESISTANCE

Mexican poppy farmers have often been successful in their use of legalistic strategies and "weapons of the weak," thanks to the pragmatic corruption of state officials and, until the PRI's neoliberal turn in the early

117. Saúl Maldonado, "En Durango mujeres indígenas plantan mariguana y amapola en sus patios," *La Jornada*, 23 October 2016.
118. Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking," 50.

1980s, because the state's legitimacy depended on its "revolutionary" heritage, forcing it to demonstrate a minimum level of responsiveness to peasant demands (as long as these were "reasonable," as defined, of course, by the state itself).[119] Mexico's *serrano* poppy farmers (like subaltern groups around the world) have therefore tended to use violence as a last resort,[120] and even then limited themselves to defensive, rather than offensive, actions, and solely vis-à-vis external actors—particularly DTOs and other criminal groups, but also the most violent or "corrupt" representatives of the state—who have proved completely unresponsive to legalistic appeals or the use of "weapons of the weak."

It is in their use of violence, however, that Mexican opium producers reveal their closest links to Knight's category of the *serrano*. Both groups have shown a propensity for engaging in violent, extralegal forms of justice such as lynching, due to strong autonomist traditions, the local weakness of state institutions, and the general prevalence of violence in such frontier societies.[121] Many *serrano* communities even lynched representatives of the state, such as policemen, throughout the first half of the twentieth century: not only when they abused their power but also when, in carrying out their official function, they interfered with more venerable traditions of community justice.[122]

Such tendencies have been reinforced, in the case of today's poppy farmers, by the fact that the state often treats them as criminals even when they are victims of crime, forcing them to take justice into their own hands.[123] In the context of less spontaneous violent mobilizations against external threats, both groups have also frequently allied with outlaws, whether revolutionary-era "social bandits" or modern DTOs. Thus *serrano* poppy farmers—concentrated in marginalized rural regions where violence is commonplace and access to firearms is widespread—have much in common with those *serranos* who, in the context of the Revolution, "possessed . . . a capacity for resistance greater than that of

119. Compare Gillingham and Smith's introduction to *Dictablanda*, 1–44.

120. See, e.g., Grisaffi, *Coca Yes*, 82, 103–4; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

121. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:115–6; 2:177, 214.

122. Kloppe-Santamaría, "Lynching," 15.

123. José Miguel Cruz and Gema Kloppe-Santamaría, "Determinants of Support for Extralegal Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean," *Latin American Research Review* 54, no. 1 (2019): 61; the same phenomenon is widespread in Bolivian coca-growing communities (cf. Grisaffi, *Coca Yes*, 92–95).

any other popular group—lowland peasants, peons, city workers. . . . Though not lacking in a kind of corporate solidarity, *serrano* people were freer, more mobile . . . and above all, more accustomed to fighting. For the *serrano*, the transition from peaceful protest to guerrilla warfare was less traumatic, and usually more successful, than for other groups."[124]

Such similarities are all the more apparent in those opium-producing communities that have been in a state of semipermanent mobilization since the Dirty War. Traditions of mobilization inspired by decades of state violence against them, combined with their participation in the violent world of the drug trade, and the government's own declining ability to cite its "revolutionary" credentials in an era of neoliberal economic programs, have undoubtedly helped many communities successfully employ—and legitimize their use of—violence as a form of self-defense. Just as in Burma in the 1930s, or Bolivia in the early 2000s,[125] this violent resistance has often compelled state forces to roll back eradication campaigns, and nonstate actors to abandon attempts to usurp local control of opium production.

Like their other strategies, the use of violence by poppy farmers dates back to the earliest days of Mexican opium production. During the aforementioned eradication campaign in Durango in the 1940s, the flipside to local women's use of "weapons of the weak" was the ever-present possibility of local men attacking government officials. In the first place, a fear of being ambushed and killed in the mountains meant that the health department agents leading the campaign refused to travel without a military escort, which held up their departure and gave local people a chance to harvest much of their crop. Similar fears prompted their escort to refuse to arrest women found destroying the evidence of this illicit harvest. The capacity of the region's *serrano* inhabitants to violently resist the enforcement of prohibitionist laws subsequently overcame even US pressure on the regional government and military authorities, which were extremely reluctant to carry out any further expeditions due to the apparent willingness of poppy farmers to fight to defend their livelihoods.[126]

124. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:126.

125. Robert Maule, "British Policy Discussions on the Opium Question in the Federated Shan States, 1937–1948," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 33, no. 2 (2002): 204, 215; Grisaffi, *Coca Yes*, 137.

126. US Consul in Durango to Sec. State, 27 June 1944, NARA/RG59.1940-4.1.

In subsequent decades, such *threatened* violence—rather than violence in itself—was often sufficient to dissuade state forces from targeting the Golden Triangle's poppy farmers. But on occasion, they resorted to ambushes and targeted assassinations to protect themselves, as in 1954, for example, when in the same region of Durango, a "Rural Police Commander was assassinated . . . together with others, in an ambush. The Commander had been an energetic participant in the campaign against drugs."[127] As drug production spread farther south, the army and police forces also "suffered high casualties" in the "lawless, drug-producing spaces" of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guerrero, where local *serranos* were quick to use violence to defend themselves if necessary.[128]

Oral histories provide ample evidence of such violence. Gledhill notes that, due to the corruption and violent tendencies of Michoacán's state police force (who not only abused poppy farmers but also "extorted money from people who had no problem with the law"), members of drug-producing communities often concluded that the only way to deal with them "was to ambush and kill them on the road before they arrived."[129] Folk songs detailing drug trafficking and production (so-called *narcocorridos*) similarly detail such confrontations. In the mountains of Nayarit, for example, a locally composed ballad called "The Twelve Coras" commemorates a battle between indigenous poppy farmers and the army in the 1980s, which resulted in the downing of a military helicopter:

> Across the sierra, just a breath from Durango
> The helicopter buzzed them—who could guess what would happen
> In those bountiful gardens, in the fields of flowering poppies?
> Twelve Coras were killed, in the gardens they tended
> And six soldiers were buried, who fell in the fighting
> With the shot-down "mosquito," that first found the poppies.

It is more difficult to find evidence of violence between opium producers and nonstate actors during this period, as the media usually presented such events as clashes between rival gangs, guerrilla raids, bandit attacks, or lynchings.[130] DTOs were also likely reluctant to provoke rural

127. "Comandante Rural Asesinado," *El Siglo de Torreón*, 21 August 1954.

128. Teague, "Mexico's Dirty War," 78, 82.

129. Gledhill, *The New War on the Poor*, 158.

130. Benjamin Smith, *The Mexican Press and Civil Society, 1940–1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 268–69.

violence that disrupted business, attracted unwanted attention to their activities, and upset the government officials upon whom they also depended for protection. Since the 1990s, however, peasant-DTO violence has become more common, as territorial disputes between ever-smaller criminal groups have proliferated, while these groups also increasingly desire direct control over all aspects of the opium trade and engage in kidnapping, extortion, and the theft of communal resources for profit.

The most famous examples of poppy farmers' violently responding to such attacks come from Michoacán and Guerrero, where many of them have joined communal militias. In the former state, militias emerged first in the indigenous communities of the Coastal Sierra region, taking advantage of a constitutional reform, passed in 2001, recognizing indigenous peoples' rights to organize their political and judicial systems in line with their traditions and customs. In the context of long-running struggles with "economic groups—legal and illegal—anxious to appropriate [their] land for investments in tourism, drugs or mining but, above all, to control the area's maritime harbors,"[131] the Nahua inhabitants of Ostula initiated their uprising in 2009 by deposing local authorities "corrupted" by regional DTOs. However, they have since pursued—with some success—a militantly autonomist path in relation to state and nonstate actors alike, in part because many of them are also small-scale opium producers seeking to defend their political and economic autonomy against both of these external forces.[132]

Although Ostula's militia is organized around long-standing and specifically indigenous traditions of autonomous communal governance (albeit infused with more recent political values rooted in participation in the revolution and subsequent agrarian struggles), its success in defending the community against "out of control" DTO and state forces[133] inspired mestizos in the neighboring Tierra Caliente to organize their own militias in 2013. In traditional *serrano* style, these militias united communities across class divides, incorporating "large agricultural landowners, businesspeople, peasants, employees and . . . a certain profile of drug trafficker," against the Caballeros Templarios, a DTO that "distinguished itself within Mexico's contemporary criminal landscape through

131. Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking," 49.

132. Gledhill, *The New War on the Poor*, 175–76.

133. "Ostula se moviliza para mantener la seguridad en la sierra-costa," *Subversiones*, 29 February 2019, https://subversiones.org/archivos/134725.

their practices of social control."[134] While the militias violently overthrew Templario rule in the Tierra Caliente, they had no interest in combating drug production or traffic, instead seeking only a return to local "normality"—in this case, the reestablishment of traditional *cacical* control over the region's politics and economy, including the drug trade.[135]

In Guerrero, the emergence and the activities of communal militias are even more closely tied to the local politics of opium production. Most of Guerrero's militias are affiliated with one of several rival confederations, which today fight between each other as much as against regional DTOs and "corrupt" state forces. The largest of Guerrero's militia confederations is the Regional Coordination of Communal Authorities–Communal Police (CRAC-PC). It dominates a huge, predominantly indigenous area called La Montaña, where local people "have cultivated poppies for the cartels for decades."[136] But the region's communal militia groups—structured according to a similar mix of indigenous and revolutionary traditions as Ostula's militia—have, through force of arms, prevented DTOs from "recruiting young indigenous men into their ranks and from forcing indigenous households to cultivate poppies for them," as has occurred in other areas.[137] Thus "it is the communities—not the cartels—who dictate the terms of [local opium] production. In other words, despite partial coexistence, communities have resisted and contained narcos operating in the region."[138] This violent defense of their autonomy has allowed the communities of the Montaña region to limit local DTO violence and internecine turf wars, and they therefore suffer a lower murder rate than those of the rest of the state.[139]

However, in regions where illicit crops are a mainstay of the economy and militia members are also often small-scale drug producers, many communal militias have also gone beyond simply protecting themselves, their families, and their local autonomy from aggressive DTOs. In both Michoacán and Guerrero, militias also defend their communities from military and police units charged with combating opium production, to the extent that some—especially those of the Tierra Caliente—are

134. LeCour, "Pueblo Chico," 153–54.
135. LeCour, "Pueblo Chico," 165–66.
136. Ley, Mattiace, and Trejo, "Indigenous Resistance," 192.
137. Ley, Mattiace, and Trejo, "Indigenous Resistance," 194–95.
138. Ley, Mattiace, and Trejo, "Indigenous Resistance," 192.
139. Ley, Mattiace, and Trejo, "Indigenous Resistance," 188.

accused of constituting cartels themselves. Of course, the use of drug war discourse by the state or its local representatives to delegitimize mobilizations that challenge their authority goes back to the era of the Dirty War.[140] Accusations that some militias have become small-scale cartels also ignores the more important connections between DTOs and regional politicians, the army, and the police, while drawing artificial boundaries between drug-producing peasants, low-level traffickers, and communal caciques.

A recent case will perhaps serve to demonstrate this point. In summer 2019, in Michoacán's Tierra Caliente, "a group of soldiers came under fire from armed men in a town called La Huacana. Press reports said the armed aggressors (presumably drug gang members) fled after trying to repel the soldiers, but that villagers acting in defense of the gangsters detained the soldiers and their weapons for a few hours. The event was captured on cell phone video."[141] According to media reports citing military sources, "the disarming of soldiers in Mexico is very rare, and the incident is an example of how embedded and supported organized crime is in some rural communities, as well as the lack of a rule of law."[142] But the use of the phrase "organized crime" may be misleading here, given that subsequent reports from the community itself reveal that the soldiers had been sent to disarm the locals—many of whom are small-scale drug producers—and arrest the local cacique, reputedly a trafficker himself. After they encountered opposition, the soldiers accidentally shot dead an innocent teenage boy. Thus the community's capture and disarmament of the soldiers could just as well be interpreted as a classic case of *serrano* self-defense—uniting rich and poor, "caciques" and "pelados" alike[143]—in the face of state aggression against the community, as an example of local support for some sort of autonomous mafia separate from the community itself. After all, there is no reason to believe, just because

140. See, e.g., Oscar Verdín Camacho, "Llora líder indígena: 'quiero limpiar mi nombre, soy inocente, no tenía gente armada,'" *Nayarit en linea*, 29 March 2016, http://www.nayaritenlinea.mx/2016/03/29/llora-lider-indigena-quiero-limpiar-mi-nombre-soy-inocente-no-tenia-gente-armada?vid=86292; Agustín de Castillo, "Huicholes crean autodefensas para restituciones en Huajimic," *Milenio*, 30 January 2017.

141. Deborah Bonello, "How One of Mexico's Biggest Cartels Is Trying to Dominate the Country's Wildest West," *Vice*, 31 May 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/evy5wj/how-one-of-mexicos-biggest-cartels-is-trying-to-dominate-in-mexicos-wildest-west.

142. Bonello, "How One of Mexico's Biggest Cartels."

143. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:122.

some journalists and politicians today describe Mexico as suffering from a "narco-insurgency," which many *serranos* do not continue to reject, just as their parents and grandparents did, "the encroachment of the state into local affairs, including attempts to punish criminal conduct."[144]

However, there is also some truth to the idea that various militias have gone beyond tactical cooperation with DTOs or state forces to become full-time traffickers or political enforcers. Many of the militias of Michoacán's Tierra Caliente have been co-opted by the state and incorporated into its security forces, or, it is rumored, have gone from accepting arms from DTOs to working for them directly.[145] Likewise, in Guerrero, cacical rivalry and intercommunal feuding caused the CRAC-PC to split into rival factions in 2013. These have since violently disputed control of La Montaña, each accusing the other of having become government paramilitaries or cartel gunmen.[146]

Ultimately, such tendencies fit perfectly with what Knight describes as the "classic *serrano* features" of these groups' revolutionary-era forebears, among them the Guerrero rebels led by the Figueroa brothers, who sought "a return of control over local affairs to the hands of local men, and an end to central interference in the state," but whose appetite for power meant that after their victory, they soon became as abusive as the caciques they had fought to overthrow.[147] If many of the communal militias in *serrano* regions of Guerrero, Michoacán, and elsewhere are the heirs to such traditions, it is no surprise that in context of the drug war, just as during the revolution, their tolerance for violent caciquismo often drives them to outgrow the cause of communal self-defense in the pursuit of political and economic power, leaving them vulnerable to cooption by the state, DTOs, or both.

Conclusion

The similarities between Mexican poppy farmers and Knight's *serrano* peasants indicate that, from the 1940s through to the present day, much

144. Kloppe-Santamaría, "Lynching," 23.

145. LeCour, "Pueblo Chico," 162; cf. Gustavo Castillo Garcíá, "El cártel Jalisco Nueva generación entregó armas a Los Viagras," *La Jornada*, 17 April 2016.

146. "¿Quiénes son los malos y quiénes los buenos?" *La Jornada Guerrero*, 3 April 2019, https://www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/index.php/editorial/item/6690-quienes-son-los-malos-y-quienes-los-buenos.

147. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 2:307.

of Mexico's drug violence has more closely resembled traditional patterns of rural conflict than some form of countryside gang warfare. Few rural opium producers are members of cartels, or the eternal victims of such groups—although most of them have been badly stung by market forces, feel abandoned by the state, and are threatened by organized crime. However, they have refused to let government indifference and the brutality of the global economy—in both its legal and illegal forms—destroy their rural lifestyles and traditions of autonomy, turning instead to opium production in order to survive as *serranos*. And it is as *serranos*, rather than as "narcos," that they understand the pressures leveled upon them by state forces and DTOs alike: pressures that appear in many ways similar to those they have always faced from neighbors, bandits, revolutionaries, rebels, and, most significantly of all, governments bent on modernizing them out of existence. Thus it is no surprise that in order to negotiate such challenges, they use historically tried-and-tested strategies.

Poppy farmers' decisions as to which strategy to employ depend on a range of different factors. Given that, by definition, *serrano* mobilizations are primarily reactive and emerge as direct responses to external threats, poppy farmers' actions are usually shaped, above all, by the nature of the latter. Thus less risky, legalistic negotiation strategies are preferred in cases where they are able to carry out such negotiations. Likewise, if the use of "weapons of the weak" may be as effective as the use of guns, and is less likely to invite the violent retribution of more powerful forces, then opium-producing peasants usually choose to employ the former. And even when violence is inevitable, they tend to use it selectively: preferring to leverage the *threat* of its use rather than enter into open rebellion, or to fight back against low-level criminals and corrupt municipal policemen while avoiding direct confrontation with major DTOs or the federal army, which command much greater firepower.

However, when legal maneuvers, weapons of the weak, or even the threat of violence are insufficient, Mexico's poppy farmers have taken up arms against even the most formidable enemies. Just as *serrano* support for rebellion during the revolution was not always "of simply material origin" but was also sparked by more general resentments and moral outrage,[148] opium producers' more recent use of violence has not always been a reaction only to physical attacks or extortion but also to more abstract threats to their autonomy. Cultural and historical factors play

148. Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920*, 1:307–8.

an important role in defining different groups' perceptions of what, exactly, constitutes such a threat. Indigenous communities in Guerrero and mestizo "rancheros" in Michoacán, for example, have different conceptions of what autonomy means in practice, different relationships with the land on which they live, and order their social and political lives according to different sets of rules and values, which necessarily condition their perceptions of, and responses to, external pressures.

It is also important to note that the cultural values—including indigeneity—that determine such perceptions and responses are themselves mutable, and that the prior use of a particular strategy, or combination of strategies, to head off the threats posed them by outside forces often inflects future decisions as to its use. Such decisions are not tied solely to memories of a strategy's past successes or failures; different forms of negotiation can also have pronounced cultural and political side effects that go on to condition their future use. Violence begets violence, after all; thus in some communities in the Costa Sierra of Michoacán, "young indigenous men . . . fully adopted the [mestizo] *ranchero* model of masculinity, packing pistols in their belts and carrying AK-47s over their shoulders . . . [for] fear of attack by other groups or the military."[149] In other cases, however, mobilizations against external forces have encouraged local reengagement with indigenous political values and cultural expressions, such as language, in order to boost communal cohesion and solidarity, or have defined new local gender norms, in some cases promoting machismo, at other times conferring new authority on women as "bearers of tradition." As Knight's typology of *serrano* rebellion suggests, however, most opium producers' mobilizations do not lead to profound social change. After all, the goal of most participants is not the fundamental reform of their societies but rather the defense of their persons, livelihoods, and traditions of autonomy from the attacks of outsiders, regardless of their affiliation.

149. Gledhill, *The New War on the Poor*, 162; cf. McDonald, "The Narcoeconomy," 123.