

‘Patria, Honor y Fuerza’: A Study of a Right-Wing Youth Movement in Mexico during the 1930s–1960s

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Abstract. This article focuses on the intricate and developing nature of official politics and grassroots activism in post-revolutionary Mexico. It does so by tracing the trajectory of the Pentatlón Deportivo Militar Universitario, a right-wing youth movement that emerged in Mexico in 1938. By locating the group within both the international and domestic emergence of youth movements in the early twentieth century, the article shows how the study of Pentatlón’s formation, objectives and later evolution can significantly enrich our understanding of an important phase in Mexico’s post-revolutionary history. Within the context of right wing oppositional politics, analysis of the movement provides a fascinating insight into both the emerging Mexican state’s ability to appropriate the radical impulses of the younger generation and the Pentatlón’s willingness to accommodate such strategies in order to ensure its own survival.

Keywords: youth movements, nationalism, pro-Catholic, fascism, Mexico

Introduction

This article explores the interplay between national politics and grassroots youth activism during the formative period of Mexico’s post-revolutionary state. It does so by tracing the trajectory of the Pentatlón Deportivo Militar Universitario (University Militarised Sports Pentathlon, PDMU), a right-wing youth movement created in July 1938 by 12 medical students from the National University in Mexico City. Among the founding group were Carlos von Retteg, Luis Saenz Arroyo and José Blanchet, who during May Day celebrations that year had become indignant when many youths chose to wave

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red and black flags rather than the national colours. They abhorred the socialist educational policies of President Lázaro Cárdenas' administration (1934–40), viewing them as an attack on the Catholic Church and fundamental Mexican values. Agreeing that something needed to be done to arrest an inexorable drift towards communism, they decided to form a youth organisation to restore pride in the nation.

The Pentathlón's organisation, structure, codes of conduct and values show similarities with other radical youth groups in Mexico and beyond. According to Blanchet and federal government reports, von Retteg was the driving force behind the Pentathlón's formation. The son of an immigrant German family, he was known to be a sympathiser of Hitler and an anti-Semite.¹ While other founder members, Blanchet included, sympathised more with developments in Franco's Spain, all agreed that their new organisation should be fundamentally nationalist and highly disciplined. As implied by the Pentathlón's motto, 'Patria, Honor y Fuerza' (Fatherland, Honour and Strength), military drills and rigorous exercises would provide members with the strategic, technical and physical prowess to accomplish their self-proclaimed duty of producing leaders capable of defending national and family values. Rejecting the superficial attractions of the material world, 'Pentathletes' placed value on self-denial, self-discipline and respect for each other and their elders. Activities that did not contribute to the betterment of the nation were contrary to their philosophy. Although not an overtly Catholic organisation, the Pentathlón was grounded in the Catholic ethos, and all founder members shared a deep suspicion of liberal freemasonry and other forms of thinking that they judged to be damaging to national prestige.²

By June 1940, Pentathlón groups existed in Mexico City, Puebla, Guadalajara, San Luis Potosí, Mazatlán, Pachuca, Torreón and Aguascalientes, with others in the process of being established elsewhere.³ At this stage the Pentathlón was a conservative youth movement comprising wealthy and middle-class university students who believed that Mexico could only be saved through determined resistance. The fact that the Pentathlón did not continue to oppose the Mexican state relied on two interlinking factors: the ability of state officials to infiltrate and harness Pentathlón radicalism, and the national government's move away from Cárdenas' socialist agenda and towards an accommodation of more conservative tendencies within the ruling Partido Revolucionario Mexicano (Mexican Revolutionary Party, later Partido

¹ Interview with Dr José Blanchet, co-founder of the Pentathlón, Mexico City, 6 June 2007; report on the Pentathlón, June 1947, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (hereafter AGN), Miguel Alemán, 532.2/7.

² Interview with Dr Blanchet. In particular, Blanchet singled out the move to socialist education as a prime example of destructive liberalism.

³ Pentathlón letter to Cárdenas, 9 June 1940, AGN, Lázaro Cárdenas, 136.3/2263.

Revolucionario Institucional, PRI). While it was never linked to any political party, consolidation of the Pentatlón depended upon patrons who enjoyed key political roles. Gustavo Baz, rector of the National University and secretary of health under President Manuel Avila Camacho (1940–6), gave invaluable support in the Pentatlón's formative period. Similarly, founder members of the Pentatlón, Jorge Jiménez Cantú and Ginés Navarro Díaz de León, were secretaries of health under President Luis Echeverría (1970–6) during a time when the group reached its zenith. Under such patronage, membership rose to 50,000 in the 1970s, with the Pentatlón being viewed as a youth group of great utility by successive national presidents.

Establishing the facts about the Pentatlón presents significant challenges. Archival evidence is fragmentary, sparse and often biased. The Pentatlón's own official history is similarly scant on details, preferring to record key figures and moments in the movement's existence. At the time of our research, only one of the founder members, Dr José Blanchet, was still alive, and his recollections needed to be handled with appropriate caution. As we hope to prove, however, the diverse sources of collated information do provide sufficient evidence upon which to judge the Pentatlón's importance. Charting the trajectory of the Pentatlón can significantly enrich our understanding of an important phase in Mexico's post-revolutionary history. Analysis of the movement provides insights into the emerging Mexican state's move away from the Left in the 1940s and its ability to appropriate the radical impulses of a younger generation on the extreme Right. Yet unlike many other Mexican youth movements that were either crushed or subsumed by political parties or the Catholic hierarchy, the Pentatlón remains, to this day, a youth organisation with a distinct identity. Its ability to sustain this, we argue, arises from the ruling party's recognition of the value of the Pentatlón as a credible example of voluntary youth patriotism.

To understand how this relationship evolved, we need to identify what made the Pentatlón different. This calls for detailed scrutiny of its formative ideology, principles and values, its means of gaining patronage, and its methods of remaining attractive to Mexican youth. While many of these details are, of course, Pentatlón-specific, it should always be remembered that members of the organisation were children and adolescents who mixed with their peers, lived in ordinary neighbourhoods and were exposed to all the influences that impinged upon the sensibilities of the younger generation. As such, a more subtle appreciation of the Pentatlón needs to recognise the broader context within which Mexican youth culture grew.

We begin our analysis of the Pentatlón, therefore, by locating it within the early twentieth-century explosion of youth movements that developed in various parts of the world. This reveals that youth movements within ostensibly different cultural, social and political contexts nonetheless often

shared similar overall objectives, attracted recruits in similar ways and regulated their forms of internal association through comparable structures. Bearing in mind José Blanchet's acknowledged sympathy towards youth movements under Franco, particular attention is given to aspects of nationalist, pro-Catholic youth movements in Spain. An appreciation of the dynamics between Catholic and nationalist movements in Spain allows a better understanding of the complexity of youth associations and activism in Mexico during the period of the Pentatlón's formation. By outlining the ways in which these groups were formed and operated, it becomes easier to analyse the degree to which the Pentatlón did, indeed, represent an exception to the Mexican rule.

The Proliferation of Youth Movements

The considerable historiography on youth movements recognises both the top-down and grassroots impulses behind their formation. Increasing industrialisation in the late nineteenth century provoked social reformers to seek ways of rescuing children from urban squalor and to offer the restorative alternative of healthy pursuits in the countryside. Often quasi-military in organisation, it was hoped that youth movement membership would produce disciplined, vibrant and patriotic young people who would be ready to defend national interests in times of war and contribute towards social stability in times of peace.⁴ Yet it is clear that the impetuosity of youth could equally be channelled towards political dissent. Herbert Moller argues that throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, societies undergoing disruptive change were characterised by 'adolescents and young adults ... eminently attracted by direct action as well as by ideologies promising perfection in a hurry'.⁵ He specifies Italy, Bosnia, Russia and Germany among his examples, but could also have included the influence of Chinese youth in the revolution of 1911 or the nationalist, anti-Christian riots a decade later.⁶

Studies of youth movements suggest that the First World War marked a watershed: in various European countries, youth associations reflected disillusionment with an older generation that had wreaked such havoc upon

⁴ For studies on early examples of such groups, see Robert MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 11-12; John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), pp. 77-8; John Hargreaves, 'Sport, Culture and Ideology', in Jennifer Hargreaves (ed.) *Sport, Culture and Ideology* (London: Routledge/Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 30-61.

⁵ Herbert Moller, 'Youth as a Force in the Modern World', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 10: 3 (1968), p. 241.

⁶ Jessie G. Lutz, 'Chinese Nationalism and the Anti-Christian Campaigns of the 1920s', *Modern Asian Studies*, 10: 3 (1976), pp. 395-416.

civilised sensibilities. Groups led by youth represented a break with the past and heralded an era in which members of the younger generation displayed more confidence in defining their roles within society.⁷ Yet this did not make them impermeable to manipulation: indeed, it could make them more susceptible to approaches that were framed in the right manner. Andrew Donson suggests that cultural changes influenced the way in which youthful impatience was manifest. Tracing the increasingly nationalistic, warmongering nature of youth literature in Germany during the 1910s, he points out that its authors were tapping into a more global notion that, together with family, schooling and recreation, transmitted the idea that manhood was tied to youthful vigour. 'Strenuous masculinity', in the post-1914 German context, was reflected in stories that reified 'the warrior fiercely loyal to the nation'.⁸ Donson speculates that defeat in war left unfulfilled fantasies among a youthful readership which made them susceptible to promises of a better future through fascism and right-wing political violence.⁹

The development of youth consciousness in early twentieth-century Mexico was in part influenced by external factors. Jean Meyer locates the rise of right-wing youth groups in Mexico within a continental move towards centralist, authoritarian politics that surged as a reaction to the multiple crises caused by the Wall Street Crash. He cites Bolivia's Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario, Brazil's populist dictator, Getulio Vargas, and falangists in Chile as part of this process. He also notes that the rise of fascism within Argentina was characterised by young leaders such as Juan Perón who openly admired Hitler.¹⁰ As Gregorio Bermann observed in 1946, the continent's youth were attracted by a diverse range of associations: student federations, religious organisations, sports and recreational groups, boy scouts, and fascist and nationalist groups.¹¹ At its most basic, youth mobilisation in

⁷ Peter D. Stachura, *The German Youth Movement 1900–1945: An Interpretive and Documentary History* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1981), p. 94; Detlev J.K. Peukert (trans. Richard Deveson), *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (London: Penguin Press, 1991), p. 91; Elizabeth Harvey, 'Autonomía, conformidad y rebelión: movimientos y culturas juveniles en Alemania en el periodo de entreguerras', *Hispania*, 67: 225 (2007), pp. 108–9; Ricardo L. Chueca Rodríguez, 'Las juventudes falangistas', *Studia Historica. Historia Contemporánea*, 5 (1987) p. 91; Feliciano Montero, 'Juventud y política: los movimientos juveniles de inspiración católica en España: 1920–1970', *Studia Historica. Historia Contemporánea*, 5 (1987), pp. 106–7.

⁸ Andrew Donson, 'Models for Young Nationalists and Militarists: German Youth Literature in the First World War', *German Studies Review*, 27: 3 (2004), p. 580.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 593.

¹⁰ Jean Meyer, *El sinarquismo, el cardenismo y la iglesia (1937–47)* (Mexico: Tusquets, 2003), pp. 26–7.

¹¹ Gregorio Bermann, *Juventud de América: sentido histórico de los movimientos juveniles* (Mexico: Cuadernos Americanos, 1946), pp. 296–7. For a more recent treatment of right-wing movements in Argentina, see Federico Finchelstein, *La Argentina fascista: los orígenes ideológicos de la dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2008).

Latin America took the form of a battle between those with left- and right-wing political agendas, and mass youth organisations often played an integral part in broadening such movements' popular appeal. In many countries Church-affiliated movements represented a further source of youth consciousness.

In the case of Mexican youth movements, First World War factors cannot be directly transposed – yet Mexican society had been equally traumatised by a revolutionary struggle that hurled the country into a bloody civil war from 1910 to 1917. The Cristero rebellion (1926–9) was a religious war that bitterly divided an already fragmented society and raised new uncertainties about future stability. Compounding this instability was the perceived threat of US imperialism (in the form of invasive capitalist, protestant ethics) and the sudden influx of republican refugees fleeing Franco's regime. Indeed, the Spanish Civil War provoked a range of emotions within Mexican society and, as José Blanchet suggests, affected the way in which Mexican youth might become politicised. It seems pertinent, therefore, to dwell upon events in Spain, particularly the nature of youth movements operating under the umbrella of the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Right-Wing Groups, CEDA), led by Gil Robles.¹² In CEDA one perhaps sees a merging of the diverse values that would be reflected in Mexico by the Pentatlón and other youth movements.

Romero Salvadó describes CEDA as 'a vast coalition of right-wing Catholic groups whose objective was to gain power by mobilising Catholic and conservative Spain and whose slogan was the defence of religion, fatherland, law, order and property'.¹³ During the early 1930s Robles and CEDA lent support to right-wing republicans in parliament. In 1934 they gained three ministerial positions, and Robles briefly became minister of war the following year. CEDA had a youth movement in the form of Juventud de Acción Popular (Popular Youth Action, JAP), a uniformed militia open to those between the ages of 16 and 35. Its manifesto clearly set out its objectives, values and determination: 'We go forth to preach the justice and love which flow from the Gospel and the Encyclicals of the Pope, convinced that Catholic social doctrine alone can mollify frenzy below and bridle egoism above ... We

¹² CEDA was merely the latest in a line of right-wing organisations that appeared in Spain during the 1920s and 1930s. For further information, see Alejandro Quiroga, 'Perros de paja: las Juventudes de la Unión Patriótica', *Ayer*, 59: 3 (2005), pp. 69–96; Montero, 'Juventud', pp. 108–110; Francisco J. Romero Salvadó, *The Spanish Civil War: Origins, Course and Outcomes* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 41; Richard A. H. Robinson, *The Origins of Franco's Spain: The Right, the Republic and Revolution, 1931–1936* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1970).

¹³ Romero Salvadó, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 41–2.

are men of the Right ... We shall obey the legitimate orders of authority; but we shall not tolerate the impositions of the irresponsible rabble.'¹⁴

For all its bellicose rhetoric, in its early days the JAP did not advocate violent opposition. Lacking the more overt dynamism of other right-wing groups such as the Falange, the JAP nonetheless deployed diverse tactics to reinforce its mass support among Spanish youth, including the promotion of sporting activities designed to 'strengthen the race'. As with fascist gatherings in Germany and Italy, the JAP's penchant for mass rallies in auspicious sites and its use of flags and hymns further underlined its claim to be a credible, patriotic alternative to socialism.¹⁵ Faced with increasing religious persecution under the Republican government, right-wing youth groups became radicalised and, to a certain extent, unified by a common enemy. In 1936 over 15,000 disillusioned JAP members joined the Falange, while others maintained regular contact with groups committing violence.¹⁶ Religious persecution offered legitimacy to those who mobilised in defence of their faith. With the defeat of republicanism, Franco's centralist state offered respect and support to the Catholic Church; in return the Church emphasised the idea that religious and patriotic objectives converged under the new order. Youth movements from diverse backgrounds were forced to accept a new political reality that demanded loyalty to Franco's hierarchical system.

The same conundrum between state and faith lay at the heart of Mexican society. The armed conflict of the Cristero rebellion might have given way to an uneasy truce in the early 1930s, but throughout the early years of the Lázaro Cárdenas presidency, relations between these two pillars of Mexican society might best be described as antagonistic. While less confrontational by the end of Cárdenas' presidency, ongoing relationships between the Catholic Church and the national government would never reach the form of alliance witnessed in Spain. As such, youth movements that carried a pro-Catholic agenda were often subsumed within a formal political opposition, in the shape of the Partido de Acción Nacional (National Action Party, PAN). The vital difference that set the Pentatlón apart from many of its Spanish and Mexican contemporaries was that it remained independent of the direct control of any political party and the Catholic hierarchy. The Pentatlón certainly shared the concerns and objectives of many youth movements that arose in the early twentieth century, but what made it rare and, perhaps, accounted for its longevity was that it sought ways of achieving these objectives without nailing

¹⁴ Cited in Robinson, *The Origins of Franco's Spain*, pp. 76–7.

¹⁵ José María Báez y Pérez de Tudela, 'El ruido y las nueces: la Juventud de Acción Popular y la movilización "cívica" católica durante la Segunda República', *Ayer*, 59: 3 (2005), pp. 131–2, 136–8.

¹⁶ Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War: Reform, Reaction and Revolution in the Second Republic* (2nd edition, London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 257.

its colours too firmly to the mast of any one individual or institution. Exactly how it fits into the mosaic of youth movements within Mexico is the topic to which we now turn.

The Church, the State and Mexican Youth Movements

The proliferation of youth movements in Mexico echoed the broader global pattern. Increasing literacy, greater access to education and the gradual erosion of rural insularity all contributed to making Mexico's post-revolutionary generation more aware of social, economic and political issues. Increasing youth consciousness was also fostered by the state's own reification of youthful, especially male, vigour. Even before the revolution, educators were emphasising the benefits to the nation of producing adolescents who were cognisant with physical exercises devised by the military.¹⁷ Efforts by the Ministry of Education during the 1920s and 1930s merely extended this philosophy, with masculinity, physical prowess and patriotic duty being synonymous in the many documents emanating from the ministry during this period.¹⁸ In the post-revolutionary period, however, opportunities were given to youths beyond the elite class to engage in activities that fostered camaraderie and a sense of youthful dynamism. Mexican youth groups shared the methods of attracting recruits commonly deployed elsewhere: uniforms, insignia, marches, bands, anthems and sporting activities. While many of these associations were voluntary and purely sport-based, given the turbulent social and political times that characterised the 1920s, it was inevitable that some of the most vociferous reflected political concerns.

An early example of left-wing youth radicalism was the Red Shirt movement of governor Tomás Garrido Canabal in Tabasco during the 1920s. A quasi-military group for 15- to 25-year-olds, the Red Shirts included students and office, factory and shop workers who met regularly to augment the radical educational, anti-alcohol and anti-religious campaigns set up by Garrido's state government. While activities included sporting events, dramas, and parades

¹⁷ For examples of such rhetoric within official documents, see 'Plan de estudios de la Escuela Nacional Preparatoria', *Boletín de Instrucción Pública*, 2: 3 (20 June 1903), pp. 168–7, Archivo de la Secretaría de Educación Pública (hereafter SEP); 'Variedades universitarias: educación física – un deber nacional', *Boletín de Instrucción Pública*, 2: 6 (10 Aug. 1903), pp. 312–17, SEP.

¹⁸ Claire Brewster and Keith Brewster, *Representing the Nation: Sport and Spectacle in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 13–37; Mónica Lizbeth Chávez González, 'Construcción de la nación y el género desde el cuerpo: la educación física en el México posrevolucionario', *Desacatos*, 30 (May–Aug. 2009), pp. 43–58. For an early example of how the media had picked up on the link between physical fitness and military prowess in the post-revolutionary period see Rodolfo Alvarez y V., 'Cultura física: tanto el civil como el militar, siempre deberán ser fuertes', *Arte y Sport*, 1: 34 (1920), p. 3.

mocking the Church, the degree to which these acted as incentives is difficult to gauge given that membership was all but compulsory for Tabasco's younger generation.¹⁹ The group nonetheless contained many committed members who firmly embraced the extreme secular agenda of their leader. When Red Shirts clashed with Catholic worshippers at Coyoacán in September 1934, it was an example of the violence that had reached the streets of the capital city between youth with conflicting philosophies. It was precisely this vision of perceived anarchy that would impel the Pentatlón's founders to act four years later.

Another significant left-wing youth movement that sought to further the socialist agenda of the Cárdenas period was the Juventud Socialista Unida de México (Mexican United Socialist Youth, JSUM). Ben Fallaw's study of Yucatán provides a fascinating glimpse of how the JSUM operated at a local scale, blending political education with social advancement by offering night classes in political theory, vocational training and cultural enhancement. In luring disaffected youth from crime and unemployment, local chapters enjoyed great success by offering 'a strong dose of sport and recreation'.²⁰ As in other cases in Mexico and beyond, more overtly attractive activities acted as bait with which to introduce youths to less accessible messages.

The role of the Catholic Church within post-revolutionary society was the catalyst for considerable youth mobilisation. The 1917 Mexican Constitution severely limited the privileges of the Catholic Church and, crucially, restricted its ability to influence the young. As the depth of constitutional attacks on the Church became apparent in the mid-1920s, increasingly vociferous sectors of the congregation began to organise themselves in its defence. The most prominent in the immediate post-revolutionary period was the Asociación Católica de Juventud Mexicana (Mexican Catholic Youth Association, ACJM). Formed in 1913, the organisation underwent rapid growth between 1917 and 1924. David Espinosa suggests that although the ACJM tried to embrace all sectors of society, its critics accused it of being elitist with little interest in Mexico's largely under-educated population. With the express objective of creating young leaders 'capable of fighting against Catholicism's ideological enemies: liberalism, anarchism, socialism, Marxism, Protestantism, and materialism', the ACJM appeared to share many of the adversaries later identified by the Pentatlón.²¹ When, during the Cristero rebellion, Catholic

¹⁹ Stan Ridgeway, 'Monoculture, Monopoly, and the Mexican Revolution: Tomás Garrido Canabal and the Standard Fruit Company in Tabasco (1920–1935)', *The Americas*, 17: 1 (2001), pp. 149–50.

²⁰ Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 44–5.

²¹ David Espinosa, "'Restoring Christian Social Order": The Mexican Catholic Youth Association (1913–1932)', *The Americas*, 59: 4 (2003), pp. 451–74.

groups took up arms to resist the forced imposition of constitutional reforms, the ACJM provided a network of willing recruits, including individuals who would plot and carry out the assassination of president-elect Alvaro Obregón in 1928.

Following the cessation of hostilities in 1929, the Mexican Church formally adopted Catholic Action as the means through which it might direct its followers.²² Despite protestations from ACJM leadership, this move had the effect of eclipsing the influence of more radical Catholics in favour of those willing to respect the authority of the Church hierarchy.²³ María Luisa Aspe Armella suggests that even as it did so, Catholic Action was undermined by an inner contradiction. The duty to affirm, diffuse and defend Christian values in individual, family and social environments often conflicted with constitutional prohibition of Church participation in politics.²⁴ In a conciliatory move, the Vatican endorsed a recommendation that approved Catholic Action in Mexico but stressed the need for non-violent strategies of resistance and a clear separation between the Church and political parties.²⁵ As Jean Meyer notes, however, there was significant opposition to this move away from the 'intransigent-integralism culture' practiced by many lay activists.²⁶ The 1930s were characterised by divisions within Mexican Catholicism over how best to resist the secularisation of society.

Student groups were at the forefront of promoting Catholic Action philosophy. Enjoying considerable support from the Catholic hierarchy, the Unión Nacional de Estudiantes Católicos (National Union of Catholic Students, UNEC) was particularly active, seeking to develop a continent-wide organisation to coordinate actions and strengthen solidarity.²⁷ Although the group had limited success in attracting foreign delegates to its congress in Mexico City in 1930, the event produced a strong final statement reflecting

²² Tracey Koon describes Catholic Action as an international organisation of the laity dedicated to defence of Christian religious and ethical principles in the modern 'paganised' world. Founded in 1863 and ostensibly under the overall control of the Church's hierarchy, its mission would be interpreted and reinterpreted depending on contemporary circumstances and the perspectives of those groups seeking to embrace its objectives. Its task of cultural, educational and moral penetration aimed to extend the influence of Catholicism over the masses and to develop leadership cadres from within the Catholic movement. See Tracy H. Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: The Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy, 1922–1943* (Chapel Hill, NC, and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. 22. ²³ Espinosa, 'Restoring Christian Social Order', pp. 464–9.

²⁴ María Luisa Aspe Armella, *La formación social y política de los católicos mexicanos: la Acción Católica Mexicana y la Unión Nacional de Estudiantes Católicos, 1929–1958* (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2008), pp. 16–17, 157.

²⁵ Stephen J. C. Andes, 'A Catholic Alternative to Revolution: The Survival of Social Catholicism in Post-revolutionary Mexico', *The Americas*, 68: 4 (2012), pp. 550–1.

²⁶ Cited in Andes, 'A Catholic Alternative', p. 560.

²⁷ Aspe Armella, *La formación social*, p. 84.

salient concerns among Mexican and Latin American student bodies. Distinctly anti-Protestant in nature, the conference recognised and valued Spain's cultural legacy and the need to combat threats to a shared Iberoamerican identity posed by US imperialism. It stressed the important role that students could play in challenging the secularisation of education, the need to reject communism, and the obligation to adopt measures designed to produce genuine social well-being as opposed to the inferred false solutions of liberalism and/or socialism.²⁸

Given the emphasis subsequently placed on socialist education by the Cárdenas government, the imperative to declare loyalty to the fatherland or to the Vatican would become a challenge that Mexico's younger generation encountered every day – especially on university campuses, where the dilemma was often violently contested. For Mexicans of all ages the question of faith was inextricably linked to a broader philosophical battle concerning the future character of the nation. As Ricardo Pérez Montfort demonstrates, a plethora of right-wing movements developed in the 1930s to meet the perceived challenge to national interests. Some were concerned with Bolshevik incursion, others with attacks against the Catholic faith; others still displayed a form of extreme nationalism fuelled by xenophobia and racism. Heterogeneous in nature, each group adopted differing methods and ideologies to achieve its objectives.²⁹ The internationalisation of this conflict resulted from President Cárdenas' open support for the Republican government in Spain and his subsequent offer of asylum for republicans fleeing Franco's regime. The presence of a large Spanish community in the country directly connected Mexico to the conflict in Spain. Some Mexican conservative organisations, such as La Confederación de la Clase Media (Middle-Class Confederation) and Pro-Raza, greeted Franco's rise to power with enthusiasm.³⁰ Meyer suggests that Lázaro Cárdenas, having observed the fate of Republicanism in Spain and the significant support for Franco in Mexico, subsequently adopted a more moderate stance towards right-wingers

²⁸ Roberto Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia católica en México* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica), p. 77; Bernardo Barranco V., 'La Iberoamericanidad de la Unión Nacional de Estudiantes Católicos (UNEC) en los años treinta', in Roberto Blancarte (ed.), *Cultura e identidad nacional* (Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994), p. 172.

²⁹ Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Por la patria y por la raza: la derecha secular en el sexenio de Lázaro Cárdenas* (Mexico: UNAM, 1993).

³⁰ Ricardo Pérez Montfort, 'Notas sobre el falangismo en México (1930–1940)', in Brigida Von Mentz (ed.), *Fascismo y antifascismo en América Latina y México: apuntes históricos* (Mexico: CIESAS/SEP, 1984), pp. 61–81. See also Friedrich E. Schuler, *Mexico between Hitler and Roosevelt: Mexican Foreign Relations in the Age of Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934–1940* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

within his own party ranks.³¹ The presidential campaign in 1940 played into the developing drama. One of the main candidates, Juan Andreu Almazán, drew support from a broad coalition of the Right. His main rival, Manuel Avila Camacho, went out of his way to distance himself from the more extreme anti-Catholic reforms of the Cárdenas period. Blancarte points out that while Avila Camacho's famous declaration 'soy creyente' (I am a believer) may have been taken out of context, his stress upon 'the highest moral values of the Mexican family' was a sentiment that would appeal to both left and right strands within society.³²

The largest and arguably most militant of the many right-wing organisations was the Unión Nacional Sinarquista (National Synarchist Union, UNS), formed in Guanajuato in May 1937. Hugh Campbell notes how opponents of the UNS, including the Mexican government, initially accused it of being a Nazi organisation that, together with other radical right-wing groups, was influenced by Hitler and Mussolini.³³ While it was not a youth group per se, UNS propaganda, doctrinal literature and internal organisation suggest that it was a group very similar in character to the Pentathlón. Authoritarian in nature and militaristic in structure, it espoused apolitical, patriotic and anti-foreign (both anti-communist and anti-United States) credentials. As such, it eschewed the nationalism of Mussolini and Hitler while aligning itself more comfortably with the Falange's sense of base Catholicism and concept of *hispanidad*.³⁴ Significantly, as far as the Pentathlón's future relationship with the Mexican state was concerned, Meyer suggests that for as long as the UNS remained ostensibly apolitical its survival was countenanced by the Cárdenas and Avila Camacho presidencies. 'Ambiguous tolerance' of the UNS allowed the administrations to use *sinarquismo* as a counterbalance to the Left while moderating the more extreme Right.³⁵ Any influence that the Catholic hierarchy held over UNS actions remained covert, making it relatively easy for the Church to distance itself from the organisation when its attacks against the Avila Camacho presidency finally provoked the government into bringing about its eventual demise.³⁶

Beyond the UNS, other right-wing organisations with significant youth sectors took part in violent opposition to the perceived socialist drift within Mexican society: among these were the Unión Nacionalista Mexicana

³¹ Meyer, *El sinarquismo*, p. 52.

³² Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia*, pp. 73–4.

³³ Hugh G. Campbell, *La derecha radical en México, 1929–1949* (Mexico: Sepsetentas, 1976), pp. 84–90.

³⁴ Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia*, p. 79; Campbell, *La derecha radical*, p. 105.

³⁵ Meyer, *El sinarquismo*, p. 46.

³⁶ Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia*, p. 93; Campbell, *La derecha radical*, pp. 94–5, 116–7.

(Mexican Nationalist Union), the Partido Nacionalista de México (Mexican Nationalist Party) and the Vanguardia Nacionalista Mexicana (Mexican Nationalist Vanguard). The *camisas doradas* (Gold Shirts), known officially as the Acción Revolucionario Mexicanista (Mexican Revolutionary Action, ARM), clashed violently with communist youth movements, most notably in one bloody encounter in front of the National Palace in November 1935. While the Pentathlón may have shared the ARM's concern regarding the drift towards socialism, the direct, political attack on Lázaro Cárdenas conveyed in the ARM manifesto of January 1938 marks a distinction with the Pentathlón's overtly apolitical stance.³⁷ Pentathlón rhetoric was more generic and idealistic than the stark condemnatory nature of the ARM or, indeed, the political declarations made by the UNS against Avila Camacho.

Campus Politics

Within Mexico's National University, a mixture of personal ambition and contemporary politics ensured that the decade preceding the formation of the Pentathlón was characterised by bitter disputes between academics and among students.³⁸ The overriding issue was the rising tide of socialist education; specifically, the 1936 reform of Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution determining that all state education should be socialist in nature.³⁹ Student groups, such as UNEC, campaigned vigorously against what they viewed as a Marxist attempt to control university autonomy. The ACJM viewed UNEC as an unwelcome rival in higher education as, since the early days of the revolution, it had believed that it enjoyed the prerogative to direct Mexican youths' spiritual lives.⁴⁰ The fact that the recently formed UNEC had gained a privileged position within Catholic Action did little to soothe such tensions. The Catholic hierarchy's accord with the Mexican government in the aftermath of the Cristero rebellion angered many ACJM members. Rather than submit to the authority of the Church, in 1932 more radical elements within ACJM set up the Juventudes Nacionalistas (Nationalist Youth), a rival Catholic youth association which had links with radical secular right groups

³⁷ The text of the manifesto is available at www.biblioteca.tv/artman2/publish/1938_227/Manifiesto_de_Accin_n_Revolucionaria_Mexicanista_1549.shtml. All internet references were last checked in July 2014.

³⁸ For a detailed early treatment of campus politics, see Donald J. Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State: Student Conflicts, 1910-1971* (College Station, TX: A&M University Press, 1982). See also Susan Quintanilla, 'El debate intelectual acerca de la educación socialista', in Susan Quintanilla and Mary Kay Vaughan (eds.), *Escuela y sociedad en el periodo cardenista* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997), pp. 47-75.

³⁹ Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Fondo Consejo Universitario, Sección Rectoría, cajas 37-41 (1936-7).

⁴⁰ Aspe Armella, *La formación social*, p. 91.

such as the ARM and UNS.⁴¹ Although the Juventudes Nacionalistas folded at the end of the 1930s, its very existence underlined both the generational frictions within the Catholic movement in Mexico and the differing interpretations among youth over how best to serve and protect the faith.

Another student group that was heavily engaged in the state-versus-Vatican polemic, and which included Pentathletes within its membership, was the somewhat bizarrely named Conejos (Rabbits), a group that Meyer describes as having been formed by Jesuits ‘to save the University from socialism’ and that ‘quickly became fascist and anti-Semitic’.⁴² Although they were not mentioned by name, a government report dated 1947 was probably referring to the Conejos when it described the existence of an organisation that aimed to:

produce future group leaders who can occupy key positions within the national government when necessary. Invitations for individuals to join the organisation are shrouded in mystery in an attempt to arouse their curiosity. Once a prospective member attends, he is initiated in a special ceremony characterised by the use of hoods, skeletons, candles, crucifixes, etc. He is then required to take an oath of secrecy and a pledge to obey any order given by the group’s leader.⁴³

A semi-secret organisation with mysterious initiation ceremonies, the Conejos was a group that sought to restore Catholic principles to society and to education in particular.⁴⁴

Suspicious that UNEC had become infiltrated by covert societies caused the Church hierarchy great concern.⁴⁵ Behind this unease was the fact that the Church’s attempts to distinguish its religious and pastoral mission from political involvement were undermined by two basic realities: firstly, that Catholic Action’s objectives, by their very nature, impinged upon the political sphere; and secondly, that student groups such as UNEC, which were intrinsic to the deployment of Catholic Action’s mission, could not help but become influenced by the highly charged political environment on campuses. It was from this complex background that the Pentatlón emerged.

Political tensions within the School of Medicine proved crucial to the Pentatlón’s formation. Dr Ignacio Chávez’s resignation as director in March 1934 followed months of bitter divisions between factions of students and academics within the school, but more specifically was a protest against the Marxist agenda then being forced upon university policies by radicals such as

⁴¹ Espinosa, “Restoring Christian Social Order”, p. 472; Campbell, *La derecha radical*, pp. 84–90.

⁴² Cited in Soledad Loaeza, *El Partido Acción Nacional: la larga marcha 1939–1994. Oposición leal y partido de protesta* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999), p. 139.

⁴³ Report dated June 1947, AGN, Miguel Alemán, 532.2/7.

⁴⁴ Edgar González Ruiz, *La sexualidad prohibida: intolerancia, sexismo, represión* (Mexico: Grupo Interdisciplinario de Sexología, 1998), pp. 17–47; interview with Fernando Carranza, son of a ‘Conejo’, Xalapa, Veracruz, Aug. 2006.

⁴⁵ Aspe Armella, *La formación social*, pp. 384–5.

Vicente Lombardo Toledano.⁴⁶ Chávez was temporarily replaced by Dr Gustavo Baz, an individual who would play a pivotal role in the development of the Pentathlón. Baz's early career in the Military School of Medicine had been interrupted by the revolution. Offering his medical skills to the forces of Emiliano Zapata, Baz saw action against the dictatorship of General Huerta before relinquishing his military position when he was appointed governor of the state of Mexico in 1915. With the triumph of Carrancista forces in 1916, Baz returned to a career that would eventually lead him to simultaneous directorship of the School of Medicine and the Military School of Medicine. Baz sought to put the regimented organisation synonymous with the latter to good social effect in the former. Seemingly responding to accusations of academic elitism, Baz organised medical students into brigades charged with bringing medical services to rural communities. He resigned later that year, however, in protest at the treatment of the incumbent rector, Gómez Morín.⁴⁷ Eighteen months later, Baz returned as director and one of his immediate tasks was to resolve a bitter strike among medical students that, at its height, witnessed armed guards ejecting students from faculty installations.⁴⁸ Disputes between the Faculty and the incumbent rector, Chico Goerne, propelled Baz towards the centre of campus politics. Viewed as a voice of reason within an atmosphere of chaos and violent conflict, Baz contributed to the resignation of Goerne and his replacement by an interim Directorate that Baz would eventually come to lead.⁴⁹ In July 1938, Baz was elected rector of the university and ushered in a period of relative stability. He presided over a statute that limited the political and pedagogic autonomy of individual academics while at the same time making academics responsible for instilling discipline and order among their colleagues and student groups.⁵⁰ It was at this juncture that medical students formed the Pentathlón. While Baz played no part in the Pentathlón's formation, as a former director of the School of Medicine and

⁴⁶ Mabry, *The Mexican University*, p. 120.

⁴⁷ Gómez Morín would go on to become the founder of the PAN, a conservative, pro-Catholic political party. Brief details of Gustavo Baz's life are available at http://portal2.edomex.gob.mx/edomex/estado/historia/gobernadores/restablecimiento_orden/gustavo_baz_prada/index.htm; see also Gustavo Baz, *Gustavo Baz: Anecdótico e ideas* (Toluca: Edo de México, 1973).

⁴⁸ Archivo Histórico de la Facultad de Medicina de la UNAM, Fondo Escuela de Medicina y Alumnos (hereafter FEM y A), leg. 167, exp. 2, fols. 47–52; UNAM Sección Rectoría, caja 39, exp. 456; FEM y A, leg. 307, exp. 5, fols. 19; FEM y A, leg. 167, exp. 8, fol. 66.

⁴⁹ Alicia Olivera de Bonfil and Eugenia Meyer, 'Gustavo Baz y sus juicios como revolucionario, médico y político', interview (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1971), p. 44. The transcript of the full interview is available at http://ru.ffyl.unam.mx:8080/jspui/bitstream/10391/3832/1/Meyer_Eugenia_Gustavo_Baz_1971.pdf.

⁵⁰ Eugenia Espinosa Carbajal and Jorge Mesta Martínez, 'La ley orgánica de 1945 de la UNAM, contexto y repercusiones', available at www.unidad094.upn.mx/revista/44/leyorganica.htm.

later rector, he was an influential figure within campus politics and had direct contact with its founder members. Moreover, his determination to stabilise the university would play a crucial role in channelling the passions of the Pentathlón's early members.

Pentathlón official history does not mention the single most important event that would determine the direction of the group's early life: the eclipsing of Carlos von Retteg (one of the three medical students who had conceived the idea of forming the Pentathlón) by another member, Jorge Jiménez Cantú.⁵¹ While José Blanchet (another of the original three) dismisses this as a trivial matter,⁵² there is a suggestion that the clash was the result of Jiménez Cantú using his seniority within the Conejos to force fellow Conejo, von Retteg, to act in ways that the latter deemed to contravene the Pentathlón's code of honour. When von Retteg refused, Jiménez Cantú forced a split in the organisation that saw almost half of the members abandon von Retteg in favour of his own leadership.⁵³ That Jiménez Cantú was able to consolidate his position and ensure the survival of the Pentathlón in its first few vulnerable years was partly a result of his own leadership abilities, but substantially due to the patronage of his former tutor, Gustavo Baz. As the Pentathlón was a student organisation, the university rector could not directly influence it, but through his protégé, Jiménez Cantú, Baz instilled a degree of political tolerance, and even pragmatism, within the Pentathlón's aims. Certainly Blanchet affirms that the eclipsing of von Retteg ensured that the Pentathlón adopted a trajectory that allowed it to pursue nationalist, anti-communist and pro-Catholic interests while simultaneously fulfilling its patriotic duty.⁵⁴ It also seems likely that given Baz's own military career, the degree of authoritarian discipline that was central to the Pentathlón would have been something he was keen to develop.

Campus politics in 1930s Mexico were not, of course, fully representative of broader society. Higher education was predominantly elitist, especially in areas such as medicine. The vociferous rejection of socialist education by groups such as the ACJM, UNEC, Conejos and Pentathlón thus reflected sectors of society that had been sidelined rather than eradicated by the revolution – circles that shared a conservative outlook and clung to the orthodoxy and

⁵¹ An accessible version of the Pentathlón's official history is outlined on their webpage at <http://pdmuedomex.neositios.com/nuestra-historia>. See also Carlos Burciaga, 'PDMU internados', unpubl. professional thesis, UNAM, 1955.

⁵² Interview with Dr Blanchet.

⁵³ Report dated June 1947, AGN, Miguel Alemán, 532.2/7. Blanchet confirms that Jiménez Cantú was leader of the Conejos in the late 1930s and that at one meeting of the group he had attended, all those present had been students from the School of Medicine. Interview with Dr Blanchet.

⁵⁴ Interview with Dr Blanchet. See also Thomas G. Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), p. 110.

remaining influence of the Catholic hierarchy. Yet unlike the fate of many groups established during these turbulent times, the Pentatlón's longevity bears witness to its strategy of remaining true to its core values in a way that attracted official endorsement and broader appeal. Analysis of its trajectory allows us to appreciate the complexity of Mexican society in the mid-twentieth century, characterised by increasingly centralised, authoritarian politics and a growing youth culture that was diametrically opposed to such restraints.

The State, the Pentatlón and the War Effort

As with similar movements in Spain, from its inception the Pentatlón was a hierarchical, militaristic organisation that placed a high premium on discipline and intellectual and physical prowess. While Blanchet recalls that the Pentatlón's armed capability was commensurate with its conviction that socialism could not be combated through negotiation, its added facet of militarism may have increased recruitment as it lent an aura of seriousness and intrigue that other movements lacked. The Pentatlón's motto, 'Patria, Honor y Fuerza', underlines a determined, even aggressive, demeanour. This was reinforced by members wearing uniforms, partaking in military marches and manoeuvres, singing anthems and hymns, and embracing a rigorous regime of physical exercise that encompassed the five disciplines of the modern pentathlon (fencing, equestrianism, swimming, running and shooting).⁵⁵ Commensurate with the government's own link between masculinity, physical rigour and patriotism, Pentathletes displayed their commitment to the nation by embarking on a quest for goals that demanded self-discipline in every facet of their lives.

During his first months as head of the Pentatlón, Jiménez Cantú devised the *Pentalogo* and the *Ideario Pentathlonico*, the organisation's guiding principles and ideals that remain unchanged to the present day. The *Pentalogo* is a fundamentally nationalist text in which Pentathletes pledge to make sacrifices for the honour and benefit of their nation. The *Ideario* similarly outlines ways in which Pentathletes can lead a moral life in order to help themselves, their families and Mexican society. At its core is the objective to produce youth who act in a thoughtful way, are confident but never too proud to seek advice, and who appreciate simple, worthy values rather than the transient attractions of the material world. Yet the wording of many of the

⁵⁵ Although such activities were never designed to create elite athletes, Jorge Gilling Cabrera, commander of the Pentatlón during the 1960s, did occupy a leading role in sports administration during preparations for the 1968 Olympics, and became director of the Centro Deportivo Olímpico Mexicano in 1967.

Ideario's 42 instructions is simultaneously strident and ambiguous. Take for example, the following:

II – Do not try to be the least bad of the worst, but the best of the good.

XVI – Prefer the company of swine and the smell of the sewers than that of exploitative despots and their perfumes.

XXVII – Always fight for a form of equality that exalts the best human values; justice, honour, industry, culture, moral and aesthetic improvement, rather than the equality of the gutter.⁵⁶

In many respects, these nationalistic sentiments could easily have been espoused by the Pentathletes' socialist adversaries. Egalitarianism, anti-elitism and physical and moral improvement would have been welcomed within Cárdenas' education programme. Reference to the 'equality of the gutter', however, is reminiscent of CEDA's intolerance of 'the impositions of the irresponsible rabble'; in a clear critique of socialism, it suggests a quest for more worthy forms of social improvement. It was, however, the very ambiguity of such messages that made them simultaneously innocuous and threatening. For example, rumours circulated that a group of unionised workers planned to disrupt the Pentathlón's first anniversary celebrations, suspecting its members of being the vanguard of a 'brigada de choque' (shock brigade). Countering these rumours, an editorial in the newspaper *El Gráfico* denied that the Pentathlón had political or religious links, underlining that its aims were purely patriotic.⁵⁷ The presence of the secretary of defence, General Jesús Castro, at these celebrations suggests that he shared this sentiment.⁵⁸ Certainly, during Gustavo Baz's lengthy patronage, the Pentathlón made great efforts to demonstrate that it posed no challenge to the Mexican state. For the remainder of the Cárdenas presidency the Pentathlón achieved this by emphasising its nationalist sentiments while quietly obscuring its anti-socialist agenda. Moreover, even before Cárdenas stepped down in 1940, Mexico's flirtation with socialism, especially in education, was largely over. National politics had overtaken the Pentathlón: one of its founding motives, the struggle against socialism, had been resolved before the group left its infancy. What remained was a strong sense of nationalism and patriotic duty, and this quickly converted the Pentathlón from a potential threat into a paragon of revolutionary virtue.

The presidency of Avila Camacho marked a watershed in Mexican politics and society. In the midst of global conflict, militarism and patriotic rhetoric ushered in an era of centralist, increasingly authoritarian politics that would

⁵⁶ Full texts are available at www.palimpalem.com/2/pentathlon/index.html?body9.html and in correspondence dated 3 April 1962, AGN, López Mateos, 532/43.

⁵⁷ 'Contra el Pentatlón [*sic*] Universitario', *El Gráfico* (sección editorial), 25 July 1939.

⁵⁸ 'El Batallón Deportivo Militar Universitario recibió ayer su bandera, en solemne ceremonia', *La Prensa*, 25 July 1939.

bring an end to a period of what critics of Cárdenas perceived as state-fostered anarchy. Blanchet suggests that this was also a fundamental moment in Pentathlón history in that the group was able to have a more 'open and honest' relationship with the national government.⁵⁹ The failure of Juan Andreu Almazán's presidential campaign struck a death knell for many right-wing movements and organisations that had openly supported him, while prominent members of the ACJM and UNEC saw their future as lying within the PAN after its formation in 1939.⁶⁰ That the Pentathlón did not share the other groups' demise relied on several factors. The ambiguity and flexibility in interpreting the Pentathlón's core values enabled the group constantly to readjust its posture to suit contemporary social and political values. Its determination to remain beyond the direct control of political and religious authorities is reflected in the fact that Pentathletes rarely resigned their affiliation to become politicians, preferring instead to further their cause from within the organisation. However, it was also true that the long-term economic viability of the Pentathlón increasingly depended upon patronage from the national government. What developed, therefore, was a symbiotic relationship in which both the PRI and the Pentathlón were content to portray the group as an exemplar of patriotic youth voluntarism. There was little doubt, however, that such an arrangement drew the group uncomfortably close to individuals within the political establishment.

The second phase of the Pentathlón's development was its initiative to make the organisation less elitist. In doing so, the Pentathlón ceased to be an organisation dominated by well-to-do medical students and became one that embraced a cross-section of Mexican society. Two distinct sections quickly emerged: the original voluntary association of youth into the main Pentathlón cohort; and, from 1941, an *internado* (boarder) section, largely comprising youth from impoverished families who would live in Pentathlón establishments. There they would receive education, physical instruction, food and lodgings within an environment that promoted strong family values, respect for their elders and love of the fatherland.⁶¹ In some respects, the *internado* system mirrored the Escuelas Hijos del Ejército initiative launched during Cárdenas' presidency. As Rath notes, these schools were intended to educate the children of lower-ranking military personnel and produce future officers. While maintaining a regime of physical and mental discipline similar to that adopted by the Pentathlón, the Hijos del Ejército schools differed in that they were seen as central to the socialist educational agenda of producing

⁵⁹ Interview with Dr Blanchet.

⁶⁰ Pérez Montfort, *Por la patria*, pp. 96–7; Aspe Armella, *La formación social*, p. 328.

⁶¹ Memo dated 21 Jan. 1947, Archivo Histórico de Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia: Fondo Subsecretaría de Administración (hereafter AHSSA: SSA) Sección SPR., caja 9, exp. 10.

a generation of young adults who would challenge the class system and embrace patriotic unity. Interestingly, the parents of such children often ‘discarded most of the radical rhetoric surrounding the schools in favour of an older language of paternalism and rights conferred around patriotic military service, bravery, and soldierly suffering’.⁶² These sentiments were, ironically, much more in line with those espoused by the Pentathlón’s internado system.

Once the ‘socialist issue’ had been resolved in Mexican politics, the Pentathlón’s patriotic credentials were easier to sustain, especially as Gustavo Baz, its main benefactor, now enjoyed a cabinet position within national government. Having comparatively little political experience, it is not entirely clear how Baz moved from being rector of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) to secretary of health. According to his own testimony, his appointment was largely based upon the close friendship and trust that he developed with Manuel Avila Camacho while acting as physician to the future president’s mother and later, to the president’s wife.⁶³ What is more certain is that Baz’s patronage ensured that the Pentathlón’s youthful enthusiasm and determination to advance patriotic causes did not become a political thorn in the state’s side. Indeed, state patronage increasingly transformed the organisation from a potential threat into a valuable asset. A 1940 memorandum from Pentathlón headquarters to President Cárdenas outlined how the organisation’s patriotic objectives were being hampered by a lack of resources.⁶⁴ Successful petitions from various Pentathlón groups to President Avila Camacho for arms, munitions, uniforms, musical instruments for military bands, travel grants and so on underline both the organisation’s precarious financial situation and the support it was receiving from the government.⁶⁵ In October 1941, for example, Jiménez Cantú expressed regret that Avila Camacho could not attend the Pentathlón’s fourth anniversary celebration because it would have been ‘the best possible motivator and well-deserved recognition for someone who has always been a committed supporter of the Pentathlón’. He added that, given the Pentathlón’s high moral standards, it was with considerable embarrassment that he had to ask for the president’s help in clearing a Mex\$ 2,000 debt.⁶⁶ Reliance on various federal departments for finances, materials and properties brought the Pentathlón

⁶² Thomas Rath, *Myths of Demilitarization in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1920–1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), pp. 44–51.

⁶³ De Bonfil and Meyer, ‘Gustavo Baz’, p. 44.

⁶⁴ Memo dated 9 June 1940, AGN, Lázaro Cárdenas, 136.3/2263. See also letter dated 12 June 1940, AGN, Lázaro Cárdenas, 136.3/299; letter dated 16 June 1940, AGN, Lázaro Cárdenas, 136.3/403; letters dated 15 and 16 Aug. 1940, AGN, Lázaro Cárdenas, 136.3/403.

⁶⁵ Letter dated 9 May 1941 thanking Avila Camacho for support, AGN, Avila Camacho, 136.1/7.

⁶⁶ Letter dated 23 Oct. 1941, AGN, Avila Camacho, 136.1/7.

into the system of state patronage that was so effective in limiting the independent ambitions of other representative groups. Even beyond Baz's time as secretary of health, the Ministry of Health continued to help the organisation for many years, for example by leasing a property that became the Pentathlón's headquarters in Mexico City. This was eventually donated to the organisation by a former Pentathlete, Ginés Navarro Díaz de León, during his period in charge of the ministry in November 1975.⁶⁷

Significantly, within the context of global armed conflict, the Pentathlón's profile as a military reserve became elevated during Avila Camacho's presidency. When, in August 1942, Avila Camacho declared the introduction of national conscription, he did so amidst much patriotic rhetoric. Yet the objectives went beyond protection of national sovereignty. Rath suggests that conscription would help the state to instil a measure of discipline, patriotism and egalitarianism within Mexican society. Under the law, all able-bodied 18-year-olds were to receive military training each Sunday morning, with a ballot being made to determine those destined for enlistment within the federal army.⁶⁸ The Pentathlón was ideally situated to underline its patriotic credentials and its members' leadership potential. In November 1942, for example, the commander of the Pentathlón in Papantla, Veracruz, informed Avila Camacho of the formation of a military academy. Expressing loyalty to the president 'in these times of emergency', the commander affirmed that this academy would equip cadets with the skills to become efficient officers.⁶⁹ Correspondence increasingly couched petitions for material support within the context of the Pentathlón's contribution to the war effort.⁷⁰ Simultaneously, the Ministry of Defence used the Pentathlón as a means of appraising the military preparedness of National University students. In August 1942, the ministry sent a letter to the rector lamenting that graduates receiving a commission into the armed forces routinely displayed less knowledge about military affairs than those they purported to command. The ministry strongly urged the university to offer classes on 'military discipline, concepts of the fatherland, patriotism, and all those things that a university student needed to know to become a soldier'. This should begin with Pentathletes and other student volunteers, but the ministry hoped that

⁶⁷ See letter from Baz to Ministry of Defence, 16 June 1940. Various letters between the Pentathlón and the Ministry of Health during 1946 show that the ministry routinely gave money to the organisation: see AHSSA: SSA, Sub A, caja 9, exp. 10. For correspondence from 1945 to 1975 regarding the payment of rent for the Pentathlón buildings in Sadi Carnot, see AHSSA: SSA, SPt, caja 33, exp. 2.

⁶⁸ Rath, *Myths of Demilitarization*, p. 61.

⁶⁹ Letter dated 14 Nov. 1942, AGN, Avila Camacho, 545.2/14-29.

⁷⁰ Letter dated 23 Jan. 1941, AGN, Avila Camacho, 532/7; letter dated 9 Nov. 1942, AGN, Avila Camacho, 136.3/973; letter dated 13 Oct. 1945, AGN, Avila Camacho, 136.1/51.

it would eventually become obligatory for all university students.⁷¹ Only four years after its formation, the Pentatlón was being incorporated into a project that, while coinciding with its overriding principles of patriotic duty, was nonetheless compromising its supposed autonomy. Among guests attending its anniversary celebrations in 1944 were a host of top-ranked federal army officers included the president's brother, General Maximino Avila Camacho, who gave a glowing eulogy of the institution's patriotic fervour.⁷² Certainly by 1948 the Ministry of Defence saw the Pentatlón in Mexico City as an 'escuela militarizada' capable of producing individuals with the necessary qualities to be successful in the National Reserve.⁷³

Following the end of the Second World War, the legal status of the Pentatlón was reaffirmed by the formation of the Civil Association of the Pentatlón Universitario. The document of association reiterates the institution's patriotic duty, its social responsibilities (alluding to its recently formed boarding facility) and the spirit of camaraderie and solidarity among its members. As if to reaffirm its apolitical status, the declaration acknowledges the Pentatlón's need for financial support but maintains that this should not prejudice its autonomy or its objectives.⁷⁴ Despite these assertions, a government report from 1947 reveals the degree to which the Pentatlón had become dependent upon state patronage. It confirms Baz's early intervention in the development of the Pentatlón and how he used his influence to attract broader government support, especially from the Ministry of Communications and Ministry of Defence. The report also portrays Baz as the movement's supreme commander and claims that Pentathletes were ready and willing to carry out his every command. Moreover, it depicts the Pentatlón as an increasingly competent coercive force. Under Avila Camacho, the movement had received specific training for the establishment of an engineering unit with expertise in radio communications, undercover surveillance and sabotage. As an estimation of the Pentatlón's military potential, the report concludes that the Ministry of Defence had supplied it with arms including 233 rifles, machine guns, ammunition and hand grenades.

The report makes it clear, however, that this military potential was less autonomous than the group's document of association would suggest. Significantly, it notes that all the Pentatlón commanders and officers had jobs in different ministries and that this made them unconditionally loyal to

⁷¹ See letter from Capt. Eduardo Solís Guillén to Rodolfo Brito Foucher dated 27 Aug. 1942, Centro de Estudios Sobre la Universidad, Fondo Consejo Universitario, Proyectos (1942–3), exp. 2.

⁷² 'Séptimo aniversario del Pentatlón Universitario', *Novedades*, 5 Sep. 1944, p. 15.

⁷³ Biblioteca de la Defensa Nacional, *Memorias de la Secretaría*, Sep. 1948–Aug. 1949.

⁷⁴ AHSSA: SSA, SPi, caja 123, exp. 3.

the government.⁷⁵ This last observation underlines the reality for any group striving to remain apolitical within the Mexican system. With government jobs often relying on political favour, Pentathlón commanders employed by the state were part of the reciprocal arrangement that traded patronage for party loyalty. Hence, while Pentathlón rules mirrored those of the army in that members following an active political career were required to relinquish membership of the organisation, some of its members were nonetheless tied into the political system.

The most prominent example of this, of course, was the link with the Pentathlón's patron, Gustavo Baz. The report claims that Baz had instructed all officers and their men to be prepared for whatever mobilisation he deemed necessary. As an indication of the direction this might take, it states:

Dr Baz has personally ordered that when faced by any student revolt, the Pentathlón should stage an armed intervention to resolve the situation as best it can. An ultimatum will be issued in the press giving rebel students 24 hours to disperse and/or leave any occupied buildings. If they refuse, the Pentathlón will display a great show of strength, followed by an attack.⁷⁶

What is unclear is whether this observation relates to the short period of Baz's authoritarian control of the National University, or whether it continued during his time as secretary for the Ministry of Health. While there is a suggestion that the Pentathlón was deployed to help restore discipline within the University of Puebla campus in 1952, there is no evidence to conclude that this was anything other than an isolated, local incident.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, this type of direct intervention would be increasingly common on university campuses in the turbulent decades that followed. As Jaime Pensado outlines, *porros* (right-wing thugs) were routinely planted within university campuses from the 1940s onwards. Acting as agents provocateurs, they were deployed to cause confusion, unrest and disunity within student ranks. Exacerbating divisions that naturally occurred among campaigners over how to conduct disputes, such tactics often added an element of violence into student politics that provided the excuse for intervention by authorities.

The State, the Pentathlón and Alternative Youth Culture

As Pensado and Eric Zolov have separately highlighted, greater access to higher education and increasing exposure to foreign cultural influences during the 1950s and 1960s provoked growing resentment among Mexican youth

⁷⁵ Report dated June 1947, AGN, Miguel Alemán, 532.2/7.

⁷⁶ Report dated June 1947, AGN, Miguel Alemán, 532.2/7.

⁷⁷ Rath, *Myths of Demilitarization*, p. 140.

towards the authoritarian, paternalistic nature of the state.⁷⁸ Perceiving their parents' generation to be complicit in restraining their actions, Mexican youth created their own cultural space, partly borrowed from overseas and partly home-grown, that sought to reject the hegemonic designs of national politicians. Pensado argues that the state's response to this rejection of hierarchical order was imaginative in that it recognised the need to deploy less confrontational tactics to regain control of Mexican youth. This included accommodation and even sponsorship of those expressions of alternative culture that youth found so attractive. Yet he is right to suggest that such ambivalent tolerance could only go so far. Public spectacles of boisterous behaviour taxed the sensibilities of decent society, prompting newspaper editorials to call for a liberal dose of national service to correct such wayward individuals.⁷⁹

These developments within rebel youth culture were anathema to the Pentathlón. Pentathletes offered an example of rectitude – those who had chosen voluntarily to rebuff the perceived drift towards delinquency. A cartoon of the ideal Pentathlete, muscular, stripped to the waist and brandishing a spade, appeared in *Aquí* magazine in 1954. The image acknowledged the organisation's increasing engagement in community development work.⁸⁰ In a similar vein, Pámanes' 'Rebeldes sin casco' ('Rebels without a Helmet') shows the Pentathlón as a beacon of hope for those concerned by the disaffection of Mexican youths (Figure 1).⁸¹ No doubt reflecting the state's more conciliatory approach to curbing wayward behaviour, the cartoonist suggests that persuasion rather than coercion was more likely to achieve positive results.

The development of the Pentathlón's internado system suited Mexico's changing social and familial dynamics. Families with modest and low incomes might view the placement of their children in the Pentathlón boarding schools as a means of social mobility.⁸² Certainly, the emphasis on discipline, comradeship and respect for authority may have been an attractive solution for parents of increasingly recalcitrant children. It cannot be presumed,

⁷⁸ Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Jaime Pensado, *Rebel Mexico: Student Unrest and Authoritarian Political Culture during the Long Sixties* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).
⁷⁹ Pensado, *Rebel Mexico*, pp. 72–80.

⁸⁰ '16 años al servicio de la patria', *Aquí*, 10 July 1954.

⁸¹ The cartoon has no date of publication. Its caption and depiction of rebellious youth, however, suggest that it was published soon after the release of the film *Rebel without a Cause* in 1955.

⁸² In return for such an initiative, the Pentathlón often received financial assistance from the Ministry of Health. See correspondence dated 1947, AHSSA: SSA, Sub A. caja 9, exp. 10. This assistance continued after the departure of Baz and up to Jiménez Cantú's time as minister of health.

Figure 1. 'Rebeldes sin Casco', Cartoon in *La Opinión*



Source: *La Opinión*, undated, PDMU Archive.

however, that all youngsters shared the same objectives; indeed, a liberal degree of family pressure may have been behind their recruitment. Yet the Pentatlón deployed the same formula to attract youngsters as groups elsewhere in Mexico and beyond: engagement in sports activities and excursions into the countryside that were designed to instil a sense of camaraderie, identity and self-esteem. Certainly such benefits help to account for the expansion of the voluntary sections of the movement in the 1950s. In 1951, the Pentatlón Menor (Junior Pentatlón) was formed for boys aged between eight and 14 years, and in 1958 girls were admitted under a newly created female unit. The Pentatlón thus offered all Mexican youngsters the chance to share its values and objectives. A measure of its success can be gauged from the fact that in 1966 over 2,000 *capitalinos* chose to fulfil their national service within the Pentatlón, and that national membership had risen to over 50,000 by 1971.⁸³ The sentiments of Alfonso Valencia, personnel officer of an industrial complex in Atequique, Jalisco, are indicative of this growth. In a letter to President Adolfo López Mateos in 1962, he suggested that the formation of a local Pentatlón unit would help staff and workers to raise

⁸³ 'La juventud se prepara a hacer una Patria más grande', *El Universal*, 31 Jan. 1966. The estimate of 50,000 is given in 'Asfisia al joven el "smog intelectual" afirma el Pentatlón', *El Universal*, 10 July 1971. This is consistent with a membership figure of 40,000 that appears in 'Juventud responsable', *El Nacional*, 13 Oct. 1967.

their children ‘in a way that would avoid bad habits that lead to idleness, delinquency and “rebellion without a cause”’.⁸⁴ A year later, as guest of honour at the Pentatlón’s 25th anniversary, López Mateos personally witnessed the self-discipline and fervent patriotism that characterised the group’s underlying philosophy.⁸⁵

By the 1960s, the state’s attempts to countenance restricted youth dissent had been replaced by a more hard-line approach. Pensado illustrates the ways in which presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz began a strategy to undermine legitimate student protest and portray it as a sign of foreign manipulation of vulnerable minds. One aspect of this that merits particular attention was sponsorship of porro groups: groups of youths planted into student communities purporting to represent a more radical stance but in reality there to create a sense of anarchy that would legitimise intervention by law enforcement agents.⁸⁶ Bearing in mind Baz’s intended use of coercion two decades earlier, it is understandable why suspicions linger over the Pentatlón’s role in campus disturbances during the 1960s.

In February 1964 the daily newspaper *Novedades* published, without further comment, the full text of the *Pentalogo*, which reminded readers of the Pentathletes’ respect for family, order and the nation.⁸⁷ Such sentiments represented an overt rejection of the current alternative youth culture and placed the Pentatlón at odds with many Mexican students, especially those on university campuses who were increasingly questioning the state’s right to determine educational and social norms. Indeed, President Díaz Ordaz later used a visit to the National Palace by the Pentatlón to exhort Mexico’s youth to follow the Pentathletes’ example.⁸⁸ In July 1968, on the 30th anniversary of the Pentatlón’s formation, the organisation’s commander-in-chief, Sergio Álvarez Castro, addressed the issue of youth unrest in various parts of the world. While he recognised desires for ‘peace and love’ as fundamental to society, he dismissed the ‘hippy’ appropriation of these values because they came from a ‘non-productive’ group within youth culture. He praised the president’s decision to extend the ballot to 18-year-old Mexicans, perceiving this to be a sign of confidence in Mexican youth and consistent with the Pentatlón’s underlying aim of producing responsible adolescents willing to fulfil their patriotic duty.⁸⁹ Just two weeks later, a confrontation between

⁸⁴ Letter dated 3 April 1962, AGN, López Mateos, 532/43.

⁸⁵ ‘El XXV aniversario del Pentatlón [*sic*]’, *Excelsior*, 10 July 1963.

⁸⁶ Pensado, *Rebel Mexico*, pp. 185–193.

⁸⁷ ‘Compromisos de miembros del Pentatlón’, *Novedades*, 16 Feb. 1964.

⁸⁸ ‘Pido GDO al juventud buscar en el deporte y disciplina la formación del carácter’, *Novedades*, 4 Oct. 1967; ‘Los jóvenes’, *Excelsior*, 5 Oct. 1967; ‘Juventud responsable’, *El Nacional*, 13 Oct. 1967.

⁸⁹ Quoted in ‘Ha demostrado el PDMU que la juventud de México es responsable’, *El Universal*, 9 July 1968.

students from Mexico City's National University and National Polytechnic was brutally suppressed by security forces. This was the beginning of a mounting confrontation that would end tragically on 2 October 1968 with the massacre of students at Tlatelolco, Mexico City.⁹⁰

Present-day Pentathlón members suspect that their predecessors may have been among those who took part in the suppression of the student movement in 1968 and the Corpus Christi massacre in 1971. Indeed, one informant alluded to the fact that during the campus disturbances in 1968, the military organisation of the Pentathlón was used to bring order. When asked how this was achieved, he replied, 'in the only way that order can be restored in such circumstances – by force'.⁹¹ It is impossible to know the extent to which these suspicions are justified. Understandably, no evidence exists within the Pentathlón's archive to suggest the group's participation in such operations, nor do any studies relating to the period implicate the Pentathlón. Certainly Pensado's detailed analysis of government-sponsored porro activities designed to counter student protests makes no mention of the Pentathlón.⁹² While the true degree of the Pentathlón's involvement in these events will probably never be known, the very fact that rumours existed demonstrates the extent to which it had become part of the state machinery.⁹³

The Pentathlón: Just Another Uniformed Youth Movement?

Youth movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were products of their changing political, social and economic contexts. The rapid industrialisation of the nineteenth century had spawned fears of a rising urban youth underclass and fostered top-down attempts to redirect wayward youthful energies towards more worthy, middle-class objectives. Similarly, the widespread devastation that touched all countries as a result of the First World War tended to radicalise the next generation and make them less likely to submit to the authority of their elders. Despite their perceived need for autonomy and freedom of expression, however, youth groups were characterised by a high degree of formality, structure and discipline. The youth movements of the 1920s and 1930s contained a further inner contradiction: if their reason for being was to declare public frustration and a lack of confidence

⁹⁰ For a discussion of the Student Movement within the broader context of Mexico hosting the Olympic Games, see Brewster and Brewster, *Representing the Nation*, pp. 104–29. The exact number of deaths is still unclear. For many years, the estimate of over 300 deaths made by John Rodda, reporter for the *Guardian*, has been used. Recent investigations published in US National Security Briefing Book No. 201 claim that the number was 54. This report is available at www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB201/.

⁹¹ Due to the sensitive nature of such rumours, the identity of individuals harbouring such suspicions is not disclosed. ⁹² Pensado, *Rebel Mexico*, pp. 188, 237.

⁹³ 'Campaña de servicio social en el Pentathlón', *El Universal*, 9 July 1971.

in their parents' generation, then the hierarchical composition that many groups adopted made them susceptible to appropriation by those with sufficient political and/or organisational experience. Catholic youth movements could not help but be tied to the divine authority of God and his representative on earth, the Pope. As such, their members' freedom of independent action was limited to alternative interpretations of how to implement Vatican doctrine. In Catholic countries, moreover, the extensive community-based network of the Church meant that critical scrutiny was never far from any youth group that threatened to adopt a radical interpretation. Secular groups were, arguably, equally constrained by hierarchical authority and dogma. Any nationalist youth organisation that aspired to lead an assault on political authority needed the backing of a viable alternative power base that would interpret such actions as part of a patriotic endeavour against an illegitimate regime. In the case of Spain, Franco performed this role and offered youth movements a degree of space and legitimacy within which to pursue their goals. The trade-off was political obedience and subjugation to a leader who was far from youthful himself.

Applying these observations to the Pentathlón, the Mexican political context is crucial. Although the Cristero rebellion had ended, there remained an uneasy compromise between the Catholic hierarchy and the government; anti-Catholic aspects of socialist education continued to anger many Mexicans. As in Spain, Catholic Action in Mexico intended to bring the more radical elements of the congregation under Church control while simultaneously maintaining a Catholic presence within their everyday lives. Yet the formation of breakaway groups such as the *Juventudes Nacionalistas* underlined profound discontent with a situation that limited the Church's options in combating socialism in educational institutions. While unrest within the National University in the 1930s shows that the polemic was cross-generational, it is clear that students believed themselves capable of independent action. Thus, despite its later rapid change of emphasis, the Pentathlón originated from within the student body and was designed to recruit like-minded youths. While its ideals and objectives may not have made overt reference to its Catholic ethos, they were designed to counter any further incursion of a socialist doctrine into a country the moral and social values of which were grounded in Catholic doctrine. This did not mean, however, that the Pentathlón saw itself as subject to the authority of the Catholic hierarchy; nor did it see itself as wedded to any political party, such as the PAN, that sought to uphold Catholic interests. The Pentathlón's staunch support of Catholic values came from a conviction that these were intrinsic to Mexico: the importation of foreign ideologies, whether socialist or Protestant in nature, needed to be resisted.

This, in turn, leads to an observation regarding the Pentathlon's originally conceived character. From its very inception, it was a nationalist movement.

It maintained that its duty was to defend and contribute towards improving the nation. That nationalism was integral to its philosophy is not surprising: Catholic nationalism enjoyed a long history in Mexico, and many Pentathletes would have been exposed to its doctrine. In addition, the Pentathlón's founder members had been among the first recipients of a post-revolutionary educational system that placed national identity, national history and national geography at the centre of the curriculum. Only in the later years of their pre-university education (if at all) would a socialist interpretation of nationhood have been introduced. As such, the form of nationalism promoted by socialist educators would have been alien and hostile to these idealistic, patriotic Catholic youths. Deeply devoted to the fatherland and with a mission to defend Catholic values from corrosive ideologies, it is understandable why they and groups such as the UNS would have been attracted to the same sort of solutions as their contemporaries in Spain.

While Catholic groups in Spain were forced into a compromise that accepted Franco's dictatorial rule, the presidency of Avila Camacho offered the Pentathlón a means of preserving its fundamental values. No longer was its brand of nationalism going against the national political tide. As Blanchet observes, by 1940 Pentathletes could be far more open about their nationalist tendencies, and even their decidedly militaristic character was viewed positively after Mexico became involved in the Second World War. At the same time, the intrinsic ambiguity built into the Pentathlón's underlying imperative 'to serve the nation' enabled it to adapt to contemporary circumstances. Thus, rather than disappearing into oblivion as did many other youth groups, the Pentathlón's longevity was sustained by periodic reinterpretation of the group's core values.

The self-governance of the Pentathlón *by* youth and *for* youth was severely limited from the outset. Although ostensibly the Pentathlón was a youth organisation that jealously guarded its apolitical independent stance, its leaders were quickly controlled by the political patronage of an older generation, initially in the form of Dr Baz, rector of the National University and secretary of health under the Avila Camacho administration. In time, however, state bureaucratic patronage took over and the Pentathlón's continued existence relied upon it being a useful tool of the governing party. Whether in offering lodging and education to children from poorer families or in providing mobile medical facilities to rural populations, the viability of the Pentathlón depended on sustained state patronage. As the organisation developed, long-serving Pentathletes would increasingly occupy senior command positions. In doing so, a generation gap became institutionalised between the Pentathlón's regional and national leaders and its rank-and-file youth members.

The case of the Pentathlón offers a clear example of the subtle workings of the post-revolutionary state in Mexico. Within a short space of time,

an initiative borne from youthful frustration and anger against socialism was contained, redirected and eventually sustained by the original target of its actions. Yet Pentathlón leaders could defend the group's later trajectory by underlining that the political landscape had changed sufficiently for it to desist from opposing the state. This in turn underlines the nature of the PRI and its own longevity. That the Avila Camacho presidency was able to defuse the Pentathlón's anger and disaffection is merely one example of a post-revolutionary state that would become increasingly adept at gauging the temperature of its people's political and social passions and developing policies designed to assuage them. The Pentathlón was particularly susceptible to such approaches because its ambitions exceeded its independent means. Its initial intention to remain apolitical and uncompromised meant that, from the outset, Pentathlón units throughout Mexico were in a fragile financial condition. The internado section further drained scarce resources and, with a degree of justification, the Pentathlón expected government help. Simultaneously, its dogged allegiance to patriotic ideals laid the Pentathlón open to the designs of state officials who relied on similar rhetoric to foster political stability. Ostensibly talking the same language, the Pentathlón allowed its version of nationalism to be reinterpreted in such a way as to ensure the flow of state favour. In recognising this basic truism, the Pentathlón has continued to recruit young Mexicans, despite the oppositional youth culture of the 1950s and 1960s and the increasingly materialistic world of subsequent decades.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Este artículo se centra en la naturaleza intrincada y en desarrollo de la política oficial y el activismo de base en el México postrevolucionario. El material rastrea la trayectoria del Pentathlón Deportivo Militar Universitario, un movimiento de jóvenes de derecha que emergió en México en 1938. Al localizar al grupo al interior del surgimiento internacional y doméstico de movimientos de jóvenes a comienzos del siglo XX, el artículo muestra cómo el estudio de la formación, objetivos y posterior evolución del Pentathlón puede enriquecer significativamente nuestro entendimiento de una fase importante en la historia del México postrevolucionario. Dentro del contexto de políticas contestatarias de derecha, el análisis del movimiento provee una fascinante perspectiva tanto al interior de la emergente habilidad del Estado mexicano de apropiarse de los impulsos radicales de la generación más joven como del deseo del Pentathlón de acomodarse en tales estrategias para garantizar su propia sobrevivencia.

Spanish keywords: movimientos de jóvenes, nacionalismo, pro-Católico, fascismo, México

Portuguese abstract. Ao traçar a trajetória do Pentathlón Deportivo Militar Universitario, movimento da juventude de direita que surgiu no México em 1938, este artigo enfoca a natureza intrincada e emergente das políticas oficiais e do ativismo

de base no México pós-revolucionário. Ao situar o grupo no âmbito da emergência de movimentos da juventude na esfera doméstica e internacional no princípio do século XX, o artigo demonstra como o estudo da formação do Pentathlón, seus objetivos e evolução subsequente podem enriquecer nosso entendimento acerca de um período importante da história pós-revolucionária mexicana. Dentro do contexto da política opositorista de direita, a análise do movimento oferece uma compreensão fascinante no tocante à emergência da habilidade do estado mexicano em apropriar-se de impulsos radicais das gerações mais jovens e da disposição do Pentathlón em acomodar estas estratégias de modo a garantir sua própria sobrevivência.

Portuguese keywords: movimentos da juventude, nacionalismo, pró-católico, fascismo, México