

EVERYDAY LIFE, 1849–76: THE IMPACT OF WAR

The wars and Reform Laws of mid-century disrupted all aspects of Mexican society from landholding patterns to gender relations. The brutal civil strife, which raged from 1854 to 1867, killed hundreds of thousands of people and inflicted enormous hardship on soldiers and civilians alike. The fighting also caused incalculable damage to commerce and industry.

Repercussions from the wars continued for several years thereafter. Thousands of unemployed soldiers, unwilling to return to their former status as poor country people, roamed as bandits. Lawlessness and disorder ruled. Since casualties of war hit disproportionately among males, the resulting demographic imbalance affected marriage and migration patterns for a generation. The Reform Laws, most especially the Ley Lerdo and the expropriation law of 1859, profoundly altered relations among rural people. They created unprecedented opportunity to redistribute property wealth by privatizing large amounts of land formerly owned by the Catholic Church or held collectively by rural communities. Mexican rural dwellers would continue to experience the reverberations of these laws for the next fifty years.

The effects of the Reform Laws were equally important in the cities. In the immediate aftermath of the Reform, some urban areas, like Mexico City, had a turnover rate of fifty percent in the ownership of buildings and lots. Renters in the cities had their lives turned upside down. Concurrent with the wars,

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Mexico had begun to feel the full force of the technological advances developed during the nineteenth century. These would deeply affect the way Mexicans viewed and experienced rural and urban workplaces. The 1848–77 period marked both the nadir of the dismal conditions of everyday life in Mexico and the initial stage of their modernization (but not necessarily improvement).

As Mexico turned from war to peace and reconstruction, its people confronted new challenges to adapt to these changes. Through it all, of course Mexicans survived and lived their lives, having good times as well as bad. A small minority prospered. Though many aspects of life remained as they had for centuries, few Mexicans would ever be the same. The era of the civil war and reform at mid-century ushered in a new Mexico, which its people resisted, at times fiercely, but whose emergence proved impossible to halt.

The transformations of everyday life and politics intertwined. Local government presided over much of the redistribution of wealth brought on by the Reform Laws. It determined the extent and pace of implementation. In many areas, sympathetic local authorities could and did delay the implementation of laws for decades. Thus, as the national Liberal government pushed for the end of communal landholding, control over village, municipal, and district authorities became more critical than ever to the everyday existence of average men and women. A way of life was at stake.

The Impact of the Civil Wars

Without a massive investigation of local records throughout Mexico, we will probably never compile even a reasonably accurate estimate of the physical destruction of property and the loss of life caused by the civil wars and the French Intervention. They most certainly took an enormous toll. The contending armies left a wake of devastation. The U.S. consul in Veracruz reported in 1859 that haciendas were abandoned, ranchos deserted, and village pillaged and sacked. And this was an assessment made when another eight years of hard fighting lay ahead. Carlton Beals (writing long afterwards) described conditions similarly:

Already the countryside was desolate. Robbers swarmed on all sides; bandits . . . swept into towns, first one band, then the other, looting, burning, murdering, raping. Scarcely a village had a girl under twenty-five left, even the ugliest ones had been forcibly carried off. . . . On the roads were few travelers; the inns had been burned down, mills abandoned, fields laid waste,

cane fields trampled down by cavalry of either faction. Walls had great holes like toothless mouths. . . . An army of children, of adults, of ragged old folk with hungry faces, begged . . . with shrill, weeping voices.

The consequences of these conflicts, however, went far beyond the brutality of battle. War thoroughly disrupted commerce. Merchants faced intermittent forced loans, erratic taxation, and currency scarcities. Agricultural production suffered because the military draft created labor shortages. Rural routines were in shambles. Hacendados had to adapt to labor losses resulting from the draft. Haciendas and villages had to survive the ravages of foraging armies, which constantly demanded provisions from their already depleted supplies. A substantial part of the population became transient. Soldiers, unwilling to return to their status as landless country people, shunned returning home and turned instead to banditry. Gangs of bandits became commonplace, contributing to a widespread sense of insecurity. Urban areas suffered equally. One observer described Mexico City as “great stretches of abandoned terrain, vast mud holes, and swelling trash heaps,” with rampant misery and marauding gangs.

The combination of casualties and reduced numbers of men of marriageable age had extensive demographic and social repercussions. As part of a natural readjustment to the large number of male military deaths during the war with the United States, men married younger. There were fifty percent fewer bachelors in 1848 than earlier. The same male casualties caused the number of widows to rise dramatically from 33 to 35 percent of all women in 1811 to 41 percent in 1848. There were also many single-parent households led by women, who raised their children alone. As the civil wars intensified during the next two decades, it is likely that these numbers grew larger.

War brought about a substantial flow of people, mostly women without prospects of employment or marriage, who moved from the countryside into the cities. Many women between the ages of fifteen and thirty-nine sought employment as domestics. Given the low regard society paid to domestic service, we can imagine how difficult life was in the war-torn countryside for women to push them to migrate. In cities such as Zacatecas, where migrants made up a substantial portion of the residents, the proportion of women in the population far exceeded fifty percent.

There were more women working in 1848 than previously. The loss of young men and migration allowed women to enter the workforce in greater numbers and also, in some instances, to upgrade their occupations. A few

gained access to formerly all-male occupations and, as a result, the proportion of women who labored as domestic servants declined. If we exclude laundresses, cooks, and porters, the number of maids as a percentage of female employees decreased from 54 to 30 percent. If we include these three categories, the decline was somewhat less dramatic, from 57 to 43 percent. Food services and commerce took up the slack. Seamstresses increased from 3 to 14 percent of working women.

In the countryside the wars affected relations between hacendados and their peons. Successive governments demanded that peons serve in the civic militia (*leva* or draft). The republican government meted out harsh punishment, such as fines and prison terms, for those who tried to evade conscription. It regarded evading the *leva* as treason. But many hacienda administrators, desperate for workers, did their utmost to keep their peons from the clutches of the *leva*. Caught between government demands on one side and a combination of the need to preserve their labor force and a moral obligation to protect their employees on the other, hacendados commonly handed over a few of their peons to authorities in order to save the majority. Labor scarcity forced hacendados to provide additional incentives, such as wage advances, to make sure their employees stayed. Temporarily, the balance tipped in favor of the workers. For example, in order to compensate for the acute shortage of currency during wartime, haciendas had to provide workers with their sustenance in advance. But given the competition for workers, employees were unlikely ever to repay this debt.

The effects of war and reconstruction were not always beneficial to the lower classes. In Michoacán, for example, they may have increased the disparities between rich and poor. There the top ten percent of the elite controlled 44 percent of the total wealth during the 1850s compared with only 32 percent in the two previous decades.

War polarized the politics of everyday life. In Morelos, for instance, confrontations between villages and haciendas over land and water not only increased, but grew more embittered. Traditional rivalries between villages deepened, the result of assassinations, plunder, and atrocities committed in wartime. In areas such as the Puebla Sierra hard feelings left over from the civil wars lasted for years. Insurrections marred the region for a decade after the departure of the French. The civil conflicts had not only set village against village, but fragmented villages internally as well. With their shifting local alliances, the civil wars upset the balance of social and ethnic power. The land redistribution mandated by the Reform Laws only intensified these tensions.

The Reform Laws

To the victorious Liberals, traditional landholding villages obstructed progress; they were symbols of the colonial past, which held back the nation. The Liberals believed it was crucial to transform land into a commodity and to change country people into wage laborers or capitalist agricultural entrepreneurs. At the same time the Liberals sought to break down local loyalties and replace them with a sense of national citizenship. Conversely, country people wanted to maintain their communal landholding and local autonomy. For the most part they successfully resisted the Liberal program until the mid-1880s, when Porfirio Díaz strengthened the central government.

The Liberals' Reform Laws were intended to create a middle class of modest urban property owners and small farmers. With this in mind, the laws gave tenants the first opportunity to purchase Church property. Although in the short term, the result was a massive shift in land ownership both in urban and rural areas, often to small proprietors, in the long term the Reform Laws led to the increased concentration of land ownership. The worst excesses, however, would not come until after the construction of an extensive railroad network. Few tenants had the necessary funds to sustain the payments required to purchase urban or rural properties made available by the Reform Laws, despite provisions in legislation for extended payment schedules. Given the precarious employment possibilities in major cities, the average tenant had a difficult enough time putting food on the table, let alone servicing a mortgage. Individuals with ready cash, not the poor, took advantage of the opportunities furnished by the Reform Laws. In the cities, for example, merchants obtained two-thirds of the properties sold off by or expropriated from the Church for sale to the public. Professionals and government officials bought the remaining third. Mexicans purchased two-thirds and foreigners one-third of the properties.

The expropriation of Church lands and the legislation that ended the legality of corporate, collective community holdings profoundly affected the countryside. The symbiotic but conflictual relationship between Indian villages and large estates began to change at mid-century, because land prices rose as the economy righted itself after decades of civil war and foreign intervention. Since there were no limitations on individual acquisitions, the law created a new class of large landowners. This process was at work in Oaxaca where many original buyers of Church properties could not maintain payments and soon resold their newly acquired properties.

Serious challenges to corporate village landholding began in some areas as early as the 1860s. Namiquipa, a village in the foothills (sierra) in the western part of the state of Chihuahua, suffered huge land losses to a hacendado, a foreigner named Enrique Müller. In Namiquipa, although the village held lands communally, access was traditionally individual. Men had earned the use of their own plot as a reward for (often) gallant military service in the Indian wars. The commodification of land under the Liberals, then, not only inserted a new set of economic relationships into village life, but altered traditional values and status as well.

To the Chihuahuans who resided in pueblos like Namiquipa their well-being and honor were tied up in the land they cultivated. As seen in chapter 1, the essence of manhood in rural communities was inextricably entwined with control of the land, which enabled the head of household to provide for his family. Without access to land either through individual or collective ownership, lease, sharecropping, or residency on a hacienda, men could not feed their families. They could not be men without the land. In Namiquipa and other villages in the north, when the Indian wars ended in the mid-1880s, peace shut off the main road to honor and status. Coupled with the widespread assault on small, individual, and collective landholding that began at the same time, elimination of access to land via reward for military service shook their society to its very core. Until the mid-1880s regional elites, needing the support of the villages in their internecine squabbles, had left the communal lands alone. The advent of the railroads increased property values, however, and the villages suffered a heavy onslaught against their land by the very same elites who once had sought them as allies.

The land redistribution laws disrupted everyday life on several other levels as well. Most tenants could not afford to buy the property they rented and had to adjust to new ownership. The Church had generally been an excellent landlord, because it charged reasonable rents. Although tenants were protected by the Reform Laws, in that they could stay for three years without any alteration of their lease contract, conflicts arose immediately. Because of loyalty to the Church, many tenants renounced their rights to buy the land they rented. In places like Guadalajara, out of loyalty to the Church tenants refused to pay rents to the new owners.

The Reform Laws intruded on other aspects of everyday life, often to the dismay of country people. To some village residents, the Liberals' establishment of state-run public schools usurped responsibilities better left to fam-

ily and church. Families, most especially mothers, were expected to teach the tenets of honor and propriety. It was the father's exclusive right to discipline his children. As a result, country people viewed state education as an infringement on patriarchal authority. The residents of the Chihuahuan sierra, for example, believed that the government's appropriation of church functions concerning marriage dishonored women. Civil marriages challenged male control over female sexuality and reproduction. Country people saw this as a threat to the purity of their women.

The Liberal program threatened the core of everyday life and political interactions among people. From the mid-1850s, Liberals sought to establish law and rationality as the principles of government. They sought to substitute (at least in theory) electoral democracy for patron-client relations and authoritarian rule. In terms of daily life this meant that Liberals worked to change the foundation of crucial institutions and relations. The Reform also altered the dealings between hacendado and country people, among villagers, between landlord and tenant, and between husband and wife. For the Liberals marriage was grounded on a profound contract, not coercion. While the Liberals did not challenge the fundamental authority of a husband over his wife and children, aspects of this authority were changed by law. Until this time the state (and the Church) accepted the right of husbands to beat their wives as a form of discipline. The criminal code of 1871, however, included wife beating in the category of common crime. In the extreme case, a man could no longer murder his adulterous wife without punishment; he would spend four years in prison.

Another 1859 law regulated marriage and divorce, declaring marriage both a civil contract and sacred union. Liberal reforms did not grant women suffrage or citizenship, nor did they alter women's submission to men. The civil code of 1870 obligated men to feed and protect their wives, and women were to obey their husbands, who continued to control their wives' property. The law maintained the double standard for adultery. If a woman committed adultery, then it was grounds for divorce, but for men adultery was grounds for divorce only if abuse accompanied philandering. The Liberals created enormous pressure on traditional, patriarchal values, because they enacted these new laws at a time when the basis of manhood, the ability to feed and shelter one's family, was under threat.

The New Workplace

Mid-century began the transition from artisan to factory production of manufactured goods. The introduction of modern machinery, first in the textile industry, reduced the need for skilled artisans and started a process of de-skilling the workforce. Entrepreneurs established large factories with thousands of employees, some of whom worked in one area and others who labored at home. By the 1850s, local officials were already bemoaning the decline of tailoring, shoemaking, and other traditional crafts. The governor of the state of Querétaro, for example, went so far as to attribute the rise of banditry in his region to the establishment of the modern textile factory, Hercules, which caused extensive unemployment among artisans displaced by machines. These changes would accelerate after the end of the civil wars and the construction of the railroad network in the 1880s.

Secondary Cities

Despite the disruptions, dislocations, and terror of war, life went on. Some of Mexico's large and medium-size cities flourished, perhaps due to the business of war and the energies of migrants from the countryside. Some of these secondary cities remained sleepy with steady routines; everyday life revolved around family, church, work, and market. We have this picture of a Sinaloan municipality at mid-century, painted by Stuart Voss:

... [T]he central, and usually single, plaza was a meeting place for those who brought in their wares and produce from the surrounding countryside. A few shops surrounded the plaza. . . . The plaza was also a gathering place for peddlers, tradespeople, and muleteers to sell livestock and other items stolen from haciendas by bandits or their own peons, small contraband, and other merchandise they had come by legally. . . . A few artisans labored at their trade in shops along the streets near the plaza—baking bread, making shoes, molding pottery. Near the plaza, standing out among the one-story adobe flats of the poor and modest of means, were the well-built homes of the few prominent families of the community, who often owned the haciendas outside of town. Located on one side of the plaza, a focal point of the town, was the parish church, whose priest was usually only slightly better educated than his parishioners. If the town were fortunate, there was a municipal building on the other side of the square, most of the time looking worn and badly in need of repair. . . . [T]he slow pace of life matched the largely static economic activity.

Charles Berry described life in Oaxaca City, a southern state capital, with about 20,000 inhabitants at mid-century, in much the same terms. People rose early, some as early as 3:00 A.M., to recite the Rosary (prayers), followed by a procession (a parade of worshipers and clergy) that marched around the town for half an hour ending with a snack of chocolate. Most residents heard mass at 5:00 A.M. Marketing and house chores filled up the hours before breakfast at 9:00 A.M. Children went to school. The male head of household went to work. The female continued to labor at home. At noon there was a light meal of fruit, and more prayers. The whole family came together at 2:00 P.M. for dinner and an hour's siesta. The men returned to work, while the women gathered in the veranda to sew until evening prayers, which they recited at dusk. The family ate a light dinner at 7:00 P.M. An hour later there were more prayers. Conversation took up the remainder of the evening until 9:00. Life revolved around family, church, and meals.

While Oaxaca City was undoubtedly more pleasant than noisy, smelly Mexico City, it suffered many of the same problems. Most important was the terrible incidence of disease. Intestinal parasites and respiratory ailments struck many of the residents. Oaxaca endured deadly cholera epidemics in 1833 and 1854 and smallpox in 1851–52.

By the 1830s Zacatecas, a city of 25,000 in the center of an important mining district, had recovered from devastating losses during the Independence era, only to slide back during the succeeding tumultuous decades. Puebla, too, had undergone a resurgence, becoming by the 1850s an industrial city, mainly producing textiles. Its factories, equipped with modern machinery, turned out half of the nation's textiles. The city also had a large porcelain factory. Veracruz, in 1856 a city with a population of 10,000, underwent a boom. Although it had suffered badly in the war with the United States, the city revived with the establishment in 1850 of daily stagecoach and telegraph service between Veracruz and Mexico City. Veracruz remained an unhealthy place, however, for yellow fever struck every year.

Mexico City

Mid-century brought the beginning of the physical relocation of the middle and upper classes to the western sections of the city. The massive sell-off of Church property—half of the city's buildings—during the late 1850s created new landlords who carved up older buildings into apartments and shops. In the 1860s the wealthy moved from the central zone around the Zocalo. The

refurbishment of the Alameda Park and the construction of the massive boulevard, which later came to be known as the Paseo de la Reforma during the Maximilian era, pushed the rich into the new residential districts in the western part of the city.

Ironically, the initial force behind the beautification of the capital came in the 1860s from the French invaders and Maximilian. As soon as the French arrived, they poured funds into the city. Typical of the Intervention, the new regime paved the streets with cobblestones, but because they had not adequately accounted for the city's poor drainage, the cobblestones were soon lost underneath the mud produced by recurrent flooding that had tormented the city since the colonial era. The empire also installed gas lighting. Maximilian and Carlota remodeled Chapultepec Castle in grand style to suit their royal tastes. The emperor then built the grand boulevard to connect the park and castle to the Alameda. Whatever the invaders' efforts to make the capital the rival of Paris and London, in the end they did little to enhance its livability. As the city grew, conditions for the multitudes became more crowded. Then as now the management of Mexico City was beyond the capabilities of Mexican governments.

Food, Clothing, and Shelter

For most Mexicans the fabric of everyday life, the food they ate, the housing that sheltered them, and the clothing that covered them, remained much the same throughout these tumultuous decades. Nowhere were disparities between social classes as clear as in these three basic aspects of daily existence.

The average Mexican's diet, as it had in earlier eras, generally consisted of maize, beans, squash, and chiles with small amounts of eggs, pork, meat, and cheese. The essential dietary element was the corn tortilla. Women shucked the corn and soaked the kernels in water with small bits of limestone, which loosened the sheath of the corn, imbued it with calcium, and increased the content of amino acids. The latter created proteins from the mix of corn and beans, crucial in a diet that lacked meat. Next the women beat the corn in the metate (grinding bowl) for hours. Finally, small pieces of the resulting dough were worked between the hands, tossed and patted and flattened out, until no thicker than a knife blade, after which they were thrown on the steaming hot *comal* (griddle). The combination of maize tortillas and beans (tucked inside the folded tortilla) was not only delicious, but also provided almost all of

the required daily protein. Squash, which is made up of ninety percent water, supplied badly needed liquid in an arid land, and filler to make meals more satisfying. Chiles added to the beans were the source of crucial vitamins A, B, and C and also killed bacteria that caused intestinal disorders.

For the wealthy food was plentiful, varied, and rich. Meals were leisurely. In the morning at 8:00 they partook of a small cup of chocolate with sweets. Two hours later, they ate a hearty breakfast of roasted or stewed meat, eggs, and beans (boiled soft and then fried with fat and onions). Dinner was at three in the afternoon. It began with a cup of clear broth, followed by highly seasoned rice or some other starch, beef or mutton, pork, fowl, and sausages, various vegetables and fruits, and dessert. After such repast a siesta (nap) was in order. At six there was a warm drink of chocolate or in summer a cold, sweet beverage. Cigars and conversation or a walk followed. Wealthy families ate supper at 10:00 P.M. Roasted meat, salad, beans, and sweets comprised this "light" meal. Domestics served all meals on elegant china and silverware with tablecloths and napkins.



Tortilla seller

A middle-class diet in Mexico City consisted of the following. Breakfast started with a hot drink, chocolate for the adults or *atole* (a corn gruel) for the children. Toast, biscuits, or pastries with coffee and milk came next. At 11 A.M. chocolate or *atole* was drunk with anisette. The large meal served in mid-afternoon consisted of bread, soup, a roast, eggs in chile, vegetables, beans flavored with pickled onion, cheese, and sauce. Dessert was honey with grated orange on a toasted tortilla. A light dinner in the evening was comprised of *mole* (a spicy sauce), stewed meat, and a lettuce salad. The serving staff was more modest in these homes than in the mansions of the rich.

The diet of the urban poor was far less nutritious and satisfying and hardly plentiful, but sufficient for survival. Pastry or brioche rolls with *atole* and clear tea or *aguardiente* made up breakfast. During the day, corn tortillas, beans, and chile with bits of unappetizing meat or fat, all purchased from street vendors and restaurants, sustained them. The poor took few, if any, meals at home for there was no place in their crowded rooms for cooking appliances. Bread was far too expensive for the poor. The tortilla was used as fork and spoon.

The sale of contaminated, spoiled, and adulterated food was woefully common. Unscrupulous bakers were known to substitute rust and lead for more expensive ingredients. Because wealthy capitalinos feared the masses with their long history of riots in times of shortages, Mexico City's municipal government made sporadic efforts to sustain low staple prices. The water was, as discussed previously, unhealthy.

In the countryside meals for the poor were more plentiful, perhaps, than for the urban working class, but were nonetheless simple. The center of the meal was the corn tortilla, usually filled with beans, sometimes supplemented with an egg and broth of peppers. Vegetables, most commonly squash, and fruit were also central to the rural diet. Water or pulque was drunk with the meal. The more prosperous small farmers, known as *rancheros*, ate more meat, mostly pork. Many farmers raised chickens to be eaten during fiestas. Their eggs, if not sold, comprised the farm families' breakfasts. Lump sugar provided the sweet part of meals.

Differences in dress were also stark. Affluent urban women conformed to the latest fashions from France, often adding traditional Spanish garb, such as the mantilla. Brantz Mayer described one rich woman in Church in the 1840s: "She wore a purple velvet robe embroidered with white silk, white satin shoes, and silk stockings; a mantilla of the richest white blond lace fell over her head and shoulders, and her ears, neck, and fingers were blazing with diamonds." The dandies who frequented the fashionable spots in Mexico City might wear

a “French cutaway suit, American patent leather shoes and an English stovepipe hat.” The more sedate wore broadcloth suits and silk hats.

Few Mexicans, of course, could afford rich silk and woolen apparel. Frederick Ober described mestizo dress in the early 1880s: “In the warmer regions he wears (on Sundays) a carefully plaited white shirt, wide trousers of white or colored drilling, fastened round the hips by a gay girdle, brown leather gaiters, and broad felt hat, with silver cord or fur band about it.” Rancheros wore “open trousers of leather ornamented with silver, with white drawers



A mestiza and a mestizo

showing through, a colored silk handkerchief about the neck, and a *serape*—the blanket shawl with a slit in the centre. . . .” The women “seldom wear stockings, though. . . . [F]eet are often encased in satin slippers; they have loose, embroidered chemises, a woolen or calico skirt, while the *rebozo*—a narrow but long shawl—is drawn over the head, and covers the otherwise exposed arms and breast.”

Most Mexicans dressed in simple, practical clothes. They wore sandals or went barefoot. Their *huaraches* or footwear were simply and easily made from rawhide or plaited fibers. Despite the laws that demanded they wear pants and hats in public, Indian men usually wore a breechcloth. Other rural Mexicans wore collarless, buttonless cotton shirts and pants with long legs that covered their feet. Belts were strips of rawhide or cloth. The *serape*, a brightly covered woolen blanket, was an all-purpose garment that protected its wearer from the elements. The one common luxury was a hat, usually of straw. Rural women wore no fancier apparel than the men. Indian women often wore only a few yards of cloth wrapped around their bodies. *Rebozos* were used similarly to *serapes*, protecting women from the elements and, in addition, providing modesty. The *rebozo* when folded just the right way could be used to carry small children. Other women wore a scarf bound at the hips with a girdle extended to the feet. A broad mantle with openings at the head and arms covered the upper part of the body. This wool garment was often ornamented with colorful embroidery. Wealthier Indian women wore a white petticoat with embroidery and ribbons. Some girls wore simple white cotton dresses with the head, neck, shoulders, and legs below the knees left bare. Women also wore heavy earrings and necklaces of cut glass. On their feet were the same sandals as on the men or they wore no shoes at all. Mostly they went without head coverings. Often men and women carried rosary beads in religious devotion.

The *vaqueros* (cowboys) of the north were, perhaps, more “dashing,” according to one traveler:

. . . [An] Indian, dressed in a pair of leather unmentionables, without suspenders, buttoning from the knee downwards, which are usually left open in warm weather for comfort, and to exhibit the white drawers underneath; a common cotton shirt . . . ; a red sash tied tightly around the waist; a pair of sandals on his feet, and enormous iron spurs on heel; with a heavy conical felt hat . . . on head, and a long iron-pointed goad in hand.

As in the case of diet and clothing, housing, too, sharply differentiated the classes. The wealthy lived in opulence. As the century moved on, their conspicuous consumption grew. Carl Sartorius described a mansion in one of Mexico's smaller cities. The house was one story. One entered through a great gate beneath the archway over which was the porter's room or a part of the merchant owner's office. There was a square yard surrounded by a piazza. A fountain adorned the middle with vases of flowers everywhere. Each room opened onto this courtyard. The living room was in front next to the street. It contained fine furniture, religious artwork, and carpets. There were many chairs and sofas, presumably for entertaining family guests. The bedrooms had real beds with imported bed clothing. Opposite the entrance a smaller gate led to a second yard off of which were the stable, coach house, and apartments for the servants. In larger cities houses of the affluent often had two stories. The ground floor in these buildings was for shops or other businesses, while the second floor was for the family.

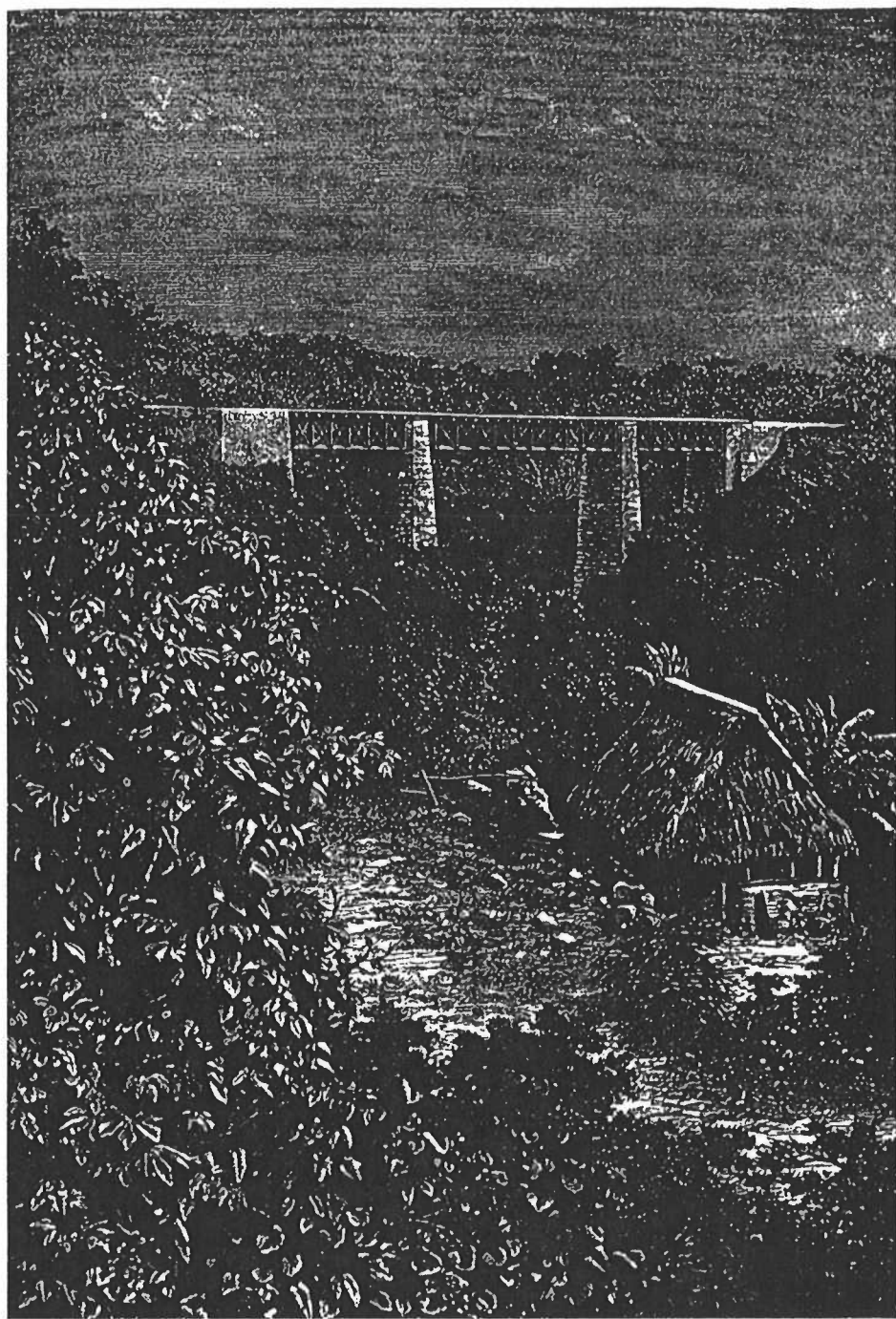
The house of Vicente Riva Palacio, well-known soldier-statesman and literary figure, located on the Alameda, had fifty rooms. One entered through a vestibule from which branched a spacious stairway leading to the living quarters. The stairs and the floors of the corridors were made of the finest Italian marble. Tropical plants decorated the halls and an aviary was filled with singing birds. Of the numerous rooms, there were three parlors, a grand salon, and two smaller ones. There was also an impressive private chapel adorned with luxurious drapes and beautiful religious ornaments. The dining room, measuring one hundred by fifty feet, contained furniture of mahogany and rosewood. The wooden floor consisted of other rare woods. Mirrors and massive sideboards filled the walls. On these shelves were thousands of pieces of china, crystal, and silver. There was a magnificent silver service sent to the owner's father Mariano Riva Palacio by the Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria for the former's efforts on behalf of the monarch's brother, Maximilian. The more than thirty bedrooms each had a bedspread of velvet, silk, lace, or crochet, each one more elegant than the last. The linen was hand stitched. The bedrooms also had brass bedsteads and canopies. The large living room had furniture with golden trim, fabulous mirrors and chandeliers, and rich carpets. The ceilings were thirty feet high. Finally, the family had its own theater, seating two hundred. Maintenance of this remarkable establishment required thirty-five servants.

In the north hacendados lived more modestly, perhaps, because transportation reduced the access to imported luxuries. Fanny Gooch describes one such plain adobe house not far from Saltillo in the 1880s. It was low and flat with pounded dirt floors. The parlor had homemade chairs all around the sides of the room. At one end was a built-in sofa that extended the entire length of the room. Seven hard, stiff pillows decorated with lace adorned it. A "gay chintz" covered the sofa. Since the sofa was high, two feet off the ground one had to almost leap on to it. There were also some homemade rocking chairs, which were more comfortable.

The typical middle-class home in Mexico City looked something like this according to social critic Guillermo Prieto:

A steep stairway led to a corridor paved with red varnished millstones. [The middle class usually lived on the second floor—a location of considerable importance, because of the flooding that periodically afflicted the city—and the servants occupied rooms on the first floor.] The corridor was embellished with cages filled with stuffed birds, squirrels, wind chimes, and earthen crocks packed with stored foods and vegetables. Landscapes . . . adorned the walls. Comfortable chairs and couches . . . furnished the principal chamber. Cuspidors occupied its corners, and a large brazier for cigarettes and heat stood on the floor. In the bedroom were a large bed of fine wood, easy chairs, and wardrobes. The small children of the family slept in the halls. Those of a small family slept with their parents in curtained compartments of the main bedroom. The dining room contained a washstand holding towels, soap, straw, and a scouring stone for scrubbing. Colored vegetables, pots and pans, and jars lined the kitchen walls . . . with strips of garlic and pepper for a festive air. A huge barrel of water stood at its center.

Housing for farmers in the countryside was little more than a hut. Because wood for construction or fuel was very expensive in these deforested or arid areas, neither lumber nor bricks were practical. (Wood was too costly for us in ovens that baked bricks.) The relative availability of wood dictated the range of building materials used in a particular region. Consequently, in temperate climates country people constructed their huts with adobe made from sun-baked straw and mud blocks. In the highlands houses consisted of unburnt brick (or stones plastered with mud) with a flat roof constructed of beams laid close together with a covering of carefully stamped, finely washed clay. Stone walls were built without mortar. In the tropics huts were comprised of saplings and leaves held together with mud. Occupants drove unhewn logs into the ground to support the beams and roof and used bamboo sticks for



Railroad bridge overlooking rural home

the walls. The normal hut measured twenty by fifteen feet with one room, no windows, and no flooring other than packed earth mixed with ashes. Doorways (without doors) provided ventilation and light. Most commonly roofs were made either with thatch or by laying rows of poles across the tops of walls, and then covering these with one or two feet of dirt and over the dirt a layer of pine boards. Where it was colder, roofs were covered with shingles. Native vegetation, like palm leaves or straw, served in the tropics.

The kitchen area, where a fire burned continuously, was outside or in a separate, smaller building. The ever-present metate for tortillas was beside the fire. Huts had no furniture. Mats known as *pétates* served as sleeping pallets. Better-off rural dwellers might have a fancier bed consisting of four mounds of clay crossed with rough boards. No one could afford bedding or mattresses. Men and women slept in their clothes, wrapped in serapes and rebozos in cold weather. Since most people had only the clothes they wore, there was no need for chests or closets. Pottery and baskets stored their possessions and food. The only decoration in the hut was a picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe or a saint. Most regions required no heating and no one could afford it anyway. The more prosperous *rancheros* lived in slightly less simple abodes. They might have a bench, table, and board beds with mats with skins for pillows. There were low stools around the table for mealtimes.

The Countryside

For most Mexicans the routines of life remained constant. Rural women arose at four to grind maize. They drew the water, brought the wood for the fire, cared for the children, prepared three meals, did the wash, and spun and weaved. They made pottery and then hauled it to the Sunday market. It was very common that, if the men hired on at the hacienda, the women's work was included either as a field hand or as a domestic in the hacienda house. Women received no pay. In the Veracruz coffee region, for example, the *ranchero's* wife concerned herself mostly with household and children, except in the three or four months of coffee harvesting and processing. As one traveler observed, "Picking the ripe berries, cleaning, and drying them is the work of women and children, and is all the easier, as they continue to ripen from November till March and the harvests can therefore be got in most leisurely." Market day each week in the village, when Indians from surrounding towns sold their produce and bought what they needed, provided a respite from the dull and rou-

tine. All was not work, for at the market women vendors had the opportunity to gossip and laugh with friends.

Perhaps the most important difference compared to the past was the number of people who were transients. Often there was not enough work in any one place for subsistence. In Guanajuato, for example, in the 1860s peons labored for miserable wages on haciendas for three months, then wandered from region to region during the rest of the year. “They lived for the day, without house, without family, without fate, on the margins of any notions of morality.”

On the haciendas life continued as it had since Independence with adjustments for such factors as labor shortages due to war. As discussed in chapter 1, there were four types of workers: permanent resident peons, known as *peónes acasillados* or *gañanes*, who comprised a minority of the workforce; temporary laborers employed at planting or harvest, who carried out most of the work, and who came from the ranks of inhabitants of neighboring villages, or small landowners who sought to supplement their incomes; tenants; and sharecroppers. Debt peonage was prevalent in a few areas, most notably Yucatán, where peons had to work without pay on Mondays. There were some efforts to mitigate this onerous institution. Maximilian, for example, outlawed the company store in 1865. As we will see, conditions on the haciendas in agricultural export regions worsened considerably after 1880.



Wash day

Even with the general outline presented above, it is not easy to reconstruct what it was like on an actual working estate. Fortunately, the fates have preserved a number of illuminating documents. We have detailed employment records for the early 1850s for the Hacienda de Bocas, located thirty-five miles north of San Luis Potosí. Bocas had between 350 and 400 permanent workers. The better-off minority of these had free title to land they used for a house, corral, and cultivation. These workers lived either on or around the hacienda casco (the hacendado's house). They were "subject to work discipline as a price for their rights." The best-treated permanent workers also received a corn ration.

One of the permanent workers, Pioquinto Liñán, was illustrative of the practices of the hacienda regarding this relatively privileged group of fifty-five. He earned six pesos a month, slightly less than 1.50 pesos a week with a weekly corn ration of fifteen liters. Since this was not enough to feed his family—one liter a day per adult was necessary for sustenance—Pioquinto purchased another seven or eight liters a week on account for 0.125 pesos each, leaving him with roughly fifty centavos a week to cover all the family's other expenses. The worker received a plot of 3,000 square meters for which he paid no rent. He bought seed for planting from the hacienda. Other purchases during the year included food, huaraches (sandals), leather pants, and a burial. His expenditures totaled just over 72 pesos for the year, approximately the same amount as his annual salary. Another group of 265 permanent workers earned a daily wage that totaled 1.30 pesos a week without a corn ration. It is likely that the more trusted permanent workers, like Pioquinto, supervised these men to see that they actually performed their assigned tasks. Pioquinto's kin, Jacinto Liñán, as one of this category of workers, spent much of his salary on corn. Although he had to expend 4 pesos on a funeral, he managed to end the year only a half peso in debt. The last group of permanent workers were known as *muchachos* (boys). They earned 3.75 pesos a month. They were probably young married men without children.

Temporary workers' circumstances on Bocas were not nearly as favorable. Depending on the season, they ranged in numbers from 100 to 500 and earned the equivalent of 10 pesos a month if they labored thirty days, which most did not. Nor did temporary workers have the guarantee of subsistence rations provided the permanent workforce. Many of Bocas's tenants also worked as temporary labor on the hacienda. It was necessary for temporary laborers to have had additional sources of income or sustenance, for otherwise they would have lived "on the edge of misery and hunger."

The 794 tenants on Bocas in 1852 fell into three categories, according to whether they rented pasture and cropland, only pasture, or only their home site. Approximately 200 sharecroppers were also on the hacienda's books. It appears that on Bocas, the hacendados selected hardworking peons already employed on the estate to become sharecroppers. Sharecroppers handed over half their harvest to the landlord. Although there were varying results for individuals, it is clear that neither tenants nor sharecroppers made ends meet without supplementing their incomes with temporary work for the hacienda.

Commercialization of agriculture altered the landscape. On the one hand it led to concentration of landholding and worsening working conditions. On the other, it provided considerable new opportunities. In the mid-1850s, for example, the landowners of Córdoba, Veracruz, renovated their plantations to grow sugar, coffee, and tobacco. The demand for workers to farm the new crops brought about a considerable influx of migrants. In the Chalco region north of Mexico City in the decade after the war with the United States, large landowners modernized through the introduction of new seeds, manure fertilizer, and modern implements to increase the yield of staple crops. At the same time, they began dairy operations. These innovations, like those in Veracruz, worsened an already existing labor shortage and exacerbated conflicts with neighboring villages, because of increased demands for water resources. Villagers challenged the estate owners in court and, when that failed, resorted to taking matters into their own hands. As a result, in the late 1840s and 1850s the central highland basins around the capital quite commonly broke out in violence.

In both regions commercialization created a niche for small farmers. A new group of producers known as *rancheros* arose in Veracruz on lands leased to them in perpetuity by town councils. These *rancheros* cultivated subsistence crops with small surpluses sold in local markets. Coffee proved the perfect commodity for family farms. One person could tend 5,000 trees. *Rancheros* grew subsistence crops in between the coffee trees or on small plots and, during the rainy months, planted beans, tomatoes, chiles, and bananas. One of the adaptations large landowners made in Chalco was to institute sharecropping arrangements, until then quite rare. Dismayed by low profits, and the fact that they could not attract workers with traditionally low wages, they turned to sharecropping because it did not require them to use scarce cash for wages. If the crop failed, the estate lost little. If the harvest was good, the estate obtained half the value for little investment. The tradeoff was to accept minimal profits in return for low risk.

Country people needed to supplement their incomes on the estates one way or another. Sharecropping was the only possibility and so they took the opportunity, and gained control over production. The problem was that when droughts or other climatic catastrophes ruined crops, sharecroppers suffered badly. In earlier times, country people earned their wages regardless of the outcome of the harvest. Now there were no such guarantees. Commercialization of agriculture, then, increased the insecurity of small producers, while increasing the profits and economic power of the estate owners.

Entertainment

As miserable as statistics and anecdotal evidence depict everyday life in Mexico, all was not grim. People found ways to enjoy their lives. The Church, family, drinking, and gambling were the most common sources of everyday entertainment for people of all classes. The solemn Church masses were spectacles in and of themselves. The rites and rituals, resplendent priests, and majestic music surely were the best entertainment of the time. While no parish in the capital nor anywhere else duplicated the magnificence of the great cathedral in Mexico City, there were many inspiring churches elsewhere to stir the people. Even in villages with their modest chapels, a visiting clergyman might put on a good show without the trappings of opulence.

Religious fiestas took up a large number of days; in Aguascalientes in the 1860s there were forty per year. They were both occasions of solemn consideration and joyous fun. The cities, towns, and villages prepared carefully for these celebrations. Streets were repaired and cleaned. Processions marked the special days. On Palm Sunday the march represented Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem. On Good Friday the crucifixion procession took place. Repentant sinners paraded half naked with crowns of thorns. Mexico City celebrated Corpus Christi in "uncommon splendor." The archbishop conducted high mass in the great cathedral in the Zocalo after which he led a grand parade from the church through adjacent streets, walking under a canopy of white linen decorated with a red border. Everyone who was anyone—presidents, generals, cabinet ministers—appeared in full regalia. The procession was a time to show off. The wealthy displayed their fine clothes, perhaps imported from Paris. The surrounding homes were decked out with carpets, flowers, flags, and streamers. A vast crowd made up of people of different races, colors, and costumes watched the pageantry. What a sight!



Going to Mass

Corpus Christi in a large Indian village was more modest than celebrated on the main square in Mexico City, but impressive nonetheless. In the square in front of the church the people constructed a green avenue of trees, branches, and flowers at the top and sides. Flower altars stood at each corner of the plaza. Flowers were everywhere. Wonderful scents burned. Animals were sacrificed.

All Saints and All Souls or the Day of the Dead, celebrated in late October and early November, required an enormous effort. The celebrants burned massive numbers of candles and consumed large quantities of food. Poor Indians expended years of earnings in remembrance of loved ones who had passed on. The night of the last day of October families decorated their homes with flowers and candles and set out a colorful mat on which they lay a feast to lure the dead children back: chocolate, sweet maize porridge, stewed chicken, tortillas, and maize bread shaped into animals made for this day only. The next day the family repeated the ritual, adding other dishes too hot for children, like turkey mole, and tamales. On this day they offered liquor. The Day of the Dead celebrations indicated that many Mexicans knew death well and they did not fear it.

After the Reform religious processions were banned from the streets (though it is not clear when the laws were first enforced nor is it evident that enforcement was widespread). This did not put much of a damper on celebrations, however, for there were enough feast days and festivals to keep people quite busy.

Drinking was an important aspect of religious celebrations and, perhaps, for many a crucial outlet for alleviating the pain of daily life. As seen in chapter 9, it became a serious problem among the poor as the alienation of urban life and industrialized working conditions became widespread at century's end. Made from the maguey (agave) plant, pulque had been the alcoholic drink of the region since Toltec times (1000 CE). This cactus has leaves of up to ten feet in length, a foot wide, and eight inches thick. After some years it sends up a giant flower stalk twenty to thirty feet high, on which grow greenish yellow flowers. The plant dies after it blooms. Just before the plant is about to emit its stalk the Indians cut into the plant in order to extract the central portion of the stem. The incision leaves only the thick outside rind, forming a natural basin two feet deep and a foot and a half in diameter. The sap that would feed the stem, called *aguamiel* (honey-water), oozes into the core and is extracted. A small amount is taken to ferment for ten to fifteen days. This becomes the *madre pulque*, which acts as a leaven inducing fermentation in the aguamiel. Within twenty-four hours it is pulque. As one draws off the pulque, one adds aguamiel to the mix. A good maguey yields eight to sixteen liters of aguamiel a day for as long as three months. Although the pulque has a lumpy consistency and tastes something like stale buttermilk and smells like rotted meat, it is quite nutritious and many believe it helps digestion. The alcoholic content is six percent. Frederick Ober quoted the following verse:

Know ye not pulque,
That liquor divine?
Angels in heaven
Prefer it to wine.

Many observers of the time believed gambling was a Mexican obsession. Cockfighting was a passion (see Santa Anna). Certainly, it was a nineteenth-century entertainment industry. These fights necessitated considerable preparation. Handlers bred and selected the cocks carefully, fed them strictly, and trained them assiduously. The event required an arena, consisting of a six-foot diameter area fenced in by three-foot boards with benches around it. From