

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: DISTINCTION, CULTURE, AND POLITICS IN
MEXICO CITY'S MIDDLE CLASS, 1890-1940.

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This dissertation looks at Mexico City's middle class from 1890 to 1940. During the latter part of the Porfirio Díaz administration (1876-1910), the middle class grew as the city became a commercial and administrative center. Sociologists both criticized and praised the middle class and its role in the country's future. Members of the middle class distinguished themselves from the Porfirian elite and lower classes through bodily behaviors learned from urban conduct manuals and short stories. The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) was a devastating blow to the middle class, which rallied around issues of housing, employment, and transportation. In the neighborhood of Santa María la Ribera, residents petitioned for urban services and infrastructure improvements. Continuing a long history of civic engagement, the city's middle class publicly organized in response to the anti-clerical policies of the Plutarco Calles administration (1924-1928). Economic and political difficulties hindered the efforts of post-revolutionary municipal and federal leaders to win state loyalty from Mexico City's public employees. At the same time, new mass media, fashions, and popular culture of the 1920s and 1930s challenged existing class distinctions and gender norms. Educational opportunities opened up wider prospects

for the middle class, or those seeking middle-class status. Technical schools and the National Polytechnic School offered one set of possibilities. The National Preparatory School and the National University offered another. The Lázaro Cárdenas administration (1936-1940) aimed to unite the middle class and the working class. As the state bureaucracy grew in the 1930s, Cárdenas brought public employees into a close relationship with the National Revolutionary Party (PNR), which later became the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM). By the end of the Cárdenas era, many sectors of the middle class felt politically marginalized. In contrast, middle-class public employees became beneficiaries of the country's new corporate state.

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MEXICO CITY'S MIDDLE CLASS, 1890-1940.

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2011

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Mary Kay Vaughan whose unwavering support and sure guidance kept me afloat. She has been a remarkable advisor to whom I feel much gratitude.

For their generous financial support, I thank the University of Maryland History Department, the University of Maryland Graduate School, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

For their patience and help while pursuing my research, I am indebted to the staff of various archives I consulted in Mexico City.

Through the research and writing of this dissertation, I received the support of family, friends, and colleagues. I especially thank my mother Agneta and father Peter for their encouragement during the long road of my education.

Dr. Van der Heide made the possibility of finishing this dissertation a reality. While I wrote these words, he guided me in writing new chapters of my life.

Finally, my husband David Carletta has been a constant source of strength, always believing in me and in this dissertation. I will always be grateful.

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Introduction: The Making of Mexico City's Middle Class

Since sociological thought emerged in the late nineteenth century, thinkers, writers, observers and statesmen have posited a particular role for the social category of the middle class in the historical development of nations. Beginning with Max Weber, the middle class was the anchor of modern development. Situated between the rich and the poor, the middle class was essential to processes of capital accumulation such as savings and thrift, to production through a strong work ethic and self-discipline, and to prudent consumption. Its members led the way for market fluidity and flexibility through individualization and education and training, and for democracy by valuing order and accountability. In 1958, following the lead of much modernization literature, historian John J. Johnson analyzed Latin America's early twentieth-century "middle sectors" as harbingers of the region's democracy and modernization.¹

Recently, several excellent monographs have examined the historical construction of the Latin American middle class. Soledad Loeza identifies the Mexican middle class as a strongly conservative and deeply Roman Catholic sector that rejected the direction of post-revolutionary governments. In Peru, David Parker shows how white-collar work became associated with a Peruvian middle class. Patrick Barr-Melej lays out the important role played by the middle class in twentieth-century Chilean cultural nationalism. Maureen O'Dougherty, Brian Owensby, and Cristina Peixoto Mehrtens demonstrate how Brazil's middle class

¹ John J. Johnson, *Political Change in Latin America: The Emergence of the Middle Sectors* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958).

defined itself in relation to consumption, politics, and residential and recreational space.² All these studies present a multi-faceted view of Latin American's middle classes that challenge the roles and behaviors sociologists have theoretically attributed to them. These middle classes were at times anti-modernizers, involved in patron-client relationships, and supportive of authoritarian rule.

My dissertation on Mexico City's middle class from 1890 to 1940 builds on and challenges these studies. I demonstrate how as in Peru occupational stratification expanded the white-collar professions, particularly public employment, by the turn-of-the-century. But, in Mexico following the Revolution of 1910, the expansion of the concept of the "working class" threatened the traditional working and middle class distinction. As in Chile, the middle class had since the late nineteenth century defined itself against a Europhile elite through a strong sense of nationalism. Yet, after the Revolution, the inclusion of the Indian, *campesinos*, and working class into the national pantheon complicated the Mexican middle-class identity. I also build on the Brazilian case studies in demonstrating how cultural and material consumption aided social stratification. At the same time, the beginnings of a mass consumer market and state-supported popular culture threatened to blur middle-class boundaries.

The dissertation also presents a diverse middle class in Mexico. Soledad Loaeza identifies the middle class only in relation to dissident Roman Catholics.

² Patrick Barr-Melej, *Reforming Chile: Cultural Politics, Nationalism and the Rise of the Middle Class* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Maureen O'Dougherty, *Consumption Intensified. The Politics of the Middle-Class Lives in Brazil, 1900-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Soledad Loaeza, *Clases medias y política en México* (México, DF: El Colegio de México, 1999); Cristina Peixoto Mehrrens, "Urban Space and Politics: Constructing Social Identity and the Middle Class in São Paulo, Brazil, 1930s-1940s," (PhD Diss., University of Miami, 2000); Brian Owensby, *Intimate Ironies: Modernity and the Making of the Middle-Class Lives in Brazil* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); David Parker, *The Idea of the Middle Class: White-Collar Workers and Peruvian Society, 1900-1950* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

While my study does not dismiss them, I demonstrate that the middle class was far more varied and substantial. The middle class also had a different relationship to politics than proposed by Loaeza. Rather than an autonomous class who wanted limited state intervention, the revolutionary period and the 1920s show a desire by its members to seek relief and assistance from the state. In fact, portions of the middle class owed their existence to state formation and largesse through government employment and public educational opportunities and would have accepted more support had the government been willing and able to provide it.

In the recent past, these empirical studies have been enriched and potentially complicated by new work on gender and on culture, particularly in the areas of entertainment, fashion, sports, and nationalism. My study builds on studies of the Porfiriato that have looked at class identity and self-presentation in relation to print literature, performance, manners, and bodily control.³ My work also adds to new studies on 1920s and 1930s Mexico that analyze how new music, dance, and dress challenged existing gender norms and class identities.⁴ These recent works approach the concepts of identity and meaning as inherently unstable, never static, and in

³ Victor Macías-González, “*Hombres de mundo: la masculinidad, el consumo, y los manuales de urbanidad y buenas maneras*” in *Orden social e identidad de género México, siglos XIX y XX*, eds. María Teresa Fernández Aceves, Carmen Ramos Escandón, and Susie Porter (México, DF: CIESAS, 2006), 267-297; Susanne Eineigel, “Visualizing the Self: Modernity, Identity, and the *Gente Decente* in Porfirian Mexico,” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2003); Valentina Torres Septién, “Manuales de conducta, urbanidad y buenos modales durante el Porfiriato. Notas sobre el comportamiento femenino,” in *Modernidad, tradición y alteridad: La ciudad de México en el cambio del siglo*, eds. Claudia Agostini y Elisa Speckman (México, DF: UNAM, 2001).

⁴ Ageeth Sluis, “City of Spectacles: Gender Performance, Revolutionary Reform, and the Creation of Public Space in Mexico City, 1915-1939,” (PhD Diss., University of Arizona, 2006); Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano, eds., *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Elsa Muñiz, *Cuerpo, representación y poder. México en los albores de la reconstrucción nacional, 1920-1934* (México, DF: UAM Azcapotzalco, 2002).

process of becoming.⁵ Representational practices, mainly through visual culture, attempted to stabilize the open meanings of class, gender, and nation.⁶

This dissertation approaches social identities as multifaceted and constructed through complex interrelationships between different spheres of experience, including workplaces and neighborhoods, political and social lives, and popular and dominant cultures. I also emphasize the changing nature of Mexico City's middle class as both a practice and a concept from the 1890s to the two decades following the Revolution (1920-1940.) Change came from members themselves as well as outside influences like the consumer market, the Roman Catholic Church, and the state. Consequently, middle-class boundaries were historically shifting and disputed ones that were continually produced and transformed.⁷ Thus, this study contributes to an international shift in approach to class as a category of analysis that seeks to understand how members constructed individual and group identities through language, material life, daily practices, social interaction, and personal experience. This literature has explored the middle class through material culture and consumption,⁸ and comportment, the body, and representation.⁹

⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2000); John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 2.

⁶ Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, eds., *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

⁷ Lóic J.D Wacquant, "Making Class: The Middle Class(es) in Social Theory and Social Structure," in *Bringing Class Back In: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives*, eds. Scott G. McNall, Rhonda F. Levine, and Rick Fantasia (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991).

⁸ Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth Century Interior* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999); Alan Kidd and David Nicholls, eds., *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain, 1800-1940* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1991); Jesus Cruz, "Building Liberal Identities in 19th Century Madrid: The Role of Middle Class Material Culture." *The Americas* 60:3 (January 2004): 391-410; John Henry IV Hepp,

My dissertation brings new research to current work that seeks to understand the emergence of a middle class as a transnational but locally differentiated phenomenon. At times the middle class appears strikingly similar around the globe. Comparative studies have shown shared values and experiences in several countries.¹⁰ Yet national contexts and local discourses shaped a native experience and sensibility. Drawing inspiration from new theoretical models for understanding modernity in a global context, recent work seeks to make visible other, or alternative, narratives for the middle class.¹¹

At the same time, some scholars assert the centrality of these traditionally peripheral case studies to understanding the middle class. They reject judging these experiences against a supposedly original or authentic one found in Western Europe and the United States. For example, Harry Harootunian correctly points out that modifiers such as “alternative” or “divergent” imply a supposed original modernity based in Europe and the United States.¹² Ricardo López makes a similar argument in

The Middle-Class City: Transforming Space and Time in Philadelphia, 1876-1926 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

⁹ Andrea Volpe, “Cartes de Visite Portrait Photographs and the Culture of Class Formation,” in *The Middling Sorts: Exploration in the History of the American Middle Class*, eds. Burton J Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston (Routledge: New York, 2001).

¹⁰ Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*. Vols. 1-4. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Linda Young, *Middle-Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia and Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

¹¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed. *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Bruce M. Knauft, ed. *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

¹² Harry Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 163.

regards to the history of the global middle class.¹³ In exploring how global ideas and goods were received in the specific context of Mexico City, my study contributes to research on the local experience of the transnational. I build on recent scholarship on Latin America that, while not expressly concerned with the middle class, traces global phenomenon and national contexts that informed a modern way of behavior, thought, and sentiment. Scholars reveal how transnational movements impacted middle-class formation and culture, such as the influence of new professions and social science models, feminism and child congresses, mass media, and educational reforms and familial law that yielded a new attitude toward the family, childhood, and adolescence.¹⁴ In my study, Mexican sociologists, statesmen and social engineers used prescriptions and models based on an imagined European middle class. But Mexico City's middle class understood and experienced transnational ideas based on their own conceptions of class, gender, and race in a time of revolution and cultural nationalism.

¹³ A. Ricardo López with Barbara Weinstein, "We Shall Be All: Toward a Transnational History of the Middle Class," in *The Making of the Middle Class: Toward a Transnational History*, eds. A. Ricardo López with Barbara Weinstein (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁴ On new professions and social science models, see James Woodard, "Marketing Modernity: The J. Walter Thompson Co. and North American Advertising in Brazil 1929-1939," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82:2 (May 2002): 257-290; Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Michael A. Ervin, "The 1930 Agrarian Census in Mexico: Agronomists, Middle Politics, and the Negotiation of Data Collection," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 87/3 (2007): 537-570. On feminism and child congresses, see Donna J. Guy, "The Politics of Pan-American Cooperation: Maternalist Feminism and the Child Rights Movement, 1913-1960," *American Historical Review* 104:5 (December 1999); Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995). On mass media, see Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation: A Political History of Comic Books in Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Anne Rubenstein, "Raised Voices at the Cine Montecarlo: Sex Education, Mass Media, and Oppositional Politics in Mexico," *Journal of Family History* 23/3 (July 1998): 312-323. On new attitudes toward family and children, see Ann S. Blum, *Domestic Economies: Family, Work, and Welfare in Mexico City, 1884-1943* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

In Chapter One, I document the hopes commentators placed in the sector of professionals, office workers, merchants, and artisans that expanded rapidly in Mexico City under conditions of economic growth fostered by the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz (1876-1910). I stress as well their disdain at what they perceived to be the failure of designated and self-identified members of this class to live up to ideal behaviors: they were profligate, short-sighted, and lacking in entrepreneurial spirit. For the middle class itself, insecurity around social distinction placed an inordinate amount of attention on visual codes of the body.

If commentators anticipated that middle-class failures in behavior could be corrected through continued economic growth or state policy, both the economy and the state proved to be weak allies in the short run. In Mexico City the Revolution of 1910 challenged the very existence of the middle class as competing armies invaded and laid waste to the capital. As I demonstrate in Chapter Two, while revolutionary leadership and the cadres that staffed post-revolutionary governments came from and thus augmented professional outlets for the middle class, from the 1910s well into the 1920s, fledgling governments faced repeated mobilizations by middle-class groups, including public employees, neighborhood residents, renters or distraught consumers. They demanded services and relief for survival and improvement like employment, food, housing, transportation, and timely payment of wages. If self-reliance and autonomy are seen as classical middle-class values, the desperation of Mexico City residents left little room for shame: they expected the government—municipal and federal—to come to their aid.

In Chapter Three, I examine life in the Colonia Santa María La Ribera during, before, and after the revolution. Built in the late nineteenth century as a model neighborhood for clerks and professionals, small businessmen and artisans, military and religious personnel, Santa Maria nurtured a lively civil society organized around mutual aid societies, civic and religious associations dedicated to self- and community improvement, and a patriarchal private sphere of home, family, and sentimentality. Severely challenged by the revolution, residents sought from the municipal government relief that would allow them to survive and help them to restore services and facilities. For the most part deeply religious and associated with priests and religious orders, many residents suffered a deep blow when the post-revolutionary state, under the leadership of Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), declared war on the Catholic Church which he and other revolutionaries saw as a threat to the autonomy of a secular state and to the progress of modern society. Santa María became a center of the organized Catholic movement against the government in defense of religion and freedom of expression.

If the upheaval of revolution and the post-revolutionary state's challenge to religion threatened members of the middle class as it had been constituted in the Porfiriato, other processes challenged them as well in spaces of leisure, education, and work. In Chapter Four, I look at the world of entertainment and consumption as it blurred class boundaries and challenged traditional gender roles. New movie houses, live theaters, dance halls, and fashions came to be shared by different social classes. In them "decent" women acquired a new presence and place. The middle class had to struggle with accepting and limiting women's public presence, finding a way to

distinguish between the “modern girl” and the prostitute, acknowledging a new heterosexual space for youth, and maintaining distinctiveness from those they considered their social inferiors. A proliferation of cultural nationalist art and entertainment offered new possibilities for women to become collectors of folk art, take part in risqué behavior, and join the art world. Men dressed up on weekends as charros to cure the attack on virility posed by precarious, boring office work and newly empowered wives and daughters. Others toted pistols as they painted government walls with revolutionary murals, or formed exquisite literary circles permeated with homoerotic refinement. On the other hand, many—men and women alike—clung to the image of the Virgin de Guadalupe to defend not only religion but also conservative social values. Wildly differing ways of life in the post-revolutionary decades divided the middle class according to beliefs, values, and politics.

New or expanded spaces of formal education likewise challenged old class and gender distinctions. They opened opportunities, redefined channels for advancement, and altered the gender and occupational nature of the labor force. In Chapter Five, I look at how the post-revolutionary government democratized public education through vocational schools serving men and women, the middle and working classes, and the poor. Women’s training in domestic arts and industries and clerical skills had contradictory implications for middle-class status: on the one hand, it created a model of modern scientific motherhood as a marker of class distinction while on the other hand, it sent many women into the male domain of office work. The government tried to encourage technical, industrial and skilled trades training for middle-class men in order to advance modern production. While these opportunities

may have attracted the sons of artisan entrepreneurs who thought of themselves as middle class, the identification of middle class with a disdain for manual labor seems to have hardened in the 1920s. The hardening was associated with the on-going proletarianization of artisan crafts and the rise of a militant working-class movement for which some artisans and skilled tradesmen provided leadership. As a result, middle-class men or those seeking middle-class status filled schools offering training in office and commercial work.

Education also contributed to stratification within the middle class. While many entered vocational schools, a small, but expanding number, including women, entered the National Preparatory School (*Escuela Nacional Preparatoria*, or ENP) to prepare for university-level professional training. The ENP became a place not only for new practices of heterosexual sociability but for discussing and analyzing new ideas of the self, society and politics. The ENP was not simply a social sorter and incubator of a new elite. By the end of the 1920s, its professors, students, and graduates articulated a major political split in middle-class thought. Many joined the presidential campaign waged in 1929 by ex-Minister of Education José Vasconcelos. The Vasconcelos campaign fought against the anti-religious policies, the corruption and praetorianism of the post-revolutionary state and favored electoral political democracy and classically liberal freedoms. The campaign drew strong middle-class support from all over Mexico. Still other prominent professors and graduates of the ENP provided leadership and expertise to the state. For them, the government's abuse of political democracy was less important than its promise to further social democracy and economic growth.

In Chapter Six, I show how educational policy in the 1930s aggravated divisions within an expanding middle class. When Narciso Bassols, an instructor at the ENP and Minister of Education from 1931 to 1934, reinvigorated anti-religious education and introduced sex education, sectors of the middle class organized vociferously. Their protests and boycotts resulted in the cancellation of sexual education and forced Bassols to resign. A constitutional reform and the Six Year Plan of the National Revolutionary Party (*Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, or PNR) that brought Lázaro Cárdenas to the presidency in 1934 introduced socialist education, which was anti-religious in content, and committed to social redistribution through labor and agrarian reform. Public protests throughout the country forced Cárdenas to back down on the anti-religiosity of socialist education. But he upheld a new rhetoric of class that defined the middle and working classes as harmonious “productive classes.” He sought to reorient and expand professional and technical training for national development and inter-class solidarity. A new National Polytechnic Institute (*Instituto Politécnico Nacional*, or INP) introduced or expanded existing technical careers and assumed responsibility for public vocational training centers. Created as a rival to the National University, the IPN was part of a struggle within an expanding middle class and between government and university authorities. Leadership at the National University resisted state efforts to “socialize” its teaching in favor of the principle of freedom of thought and university autonomy.

In the 1930s, sectors of the middle class joined quasi-fascist organizations like the Confederation of the Middle Class (*Confederación de la Clase Media*, or CCM) to express their fear and anger over the radicalization and authoritarianism of

government policy, their sense of having been left out of social protections and rights, and their commitment to conservative social values and hierarchy. Much of their anger and concern focused on the condition of public employees, who constituted one of the largest sectors of the middle class.

Chapter Seven looks at changes faced by public employees between 1917 and 1940 in conditions of work, labor organization, and gender relations within a vastly expanded government bureaucracy at the federal and municipal levels. Although post-revolutionary governments between 1917 and 1926 wanted to introduce values of savings and thrift to its captive audience of employees, they could barely pay their salaries or keep them in their jobs. Employee protests were common. Not until 1926, under the government of Plutarco Elías Calles, was the federal government able to introduce a civil service law that guaranteed pensions. This law, subsequent legislation, and informal procedures acted not only as a form of forced savings and greater job security but also as a form of discipline not historically or sociologically associated with the middle class. In the midst of intense religious, social and political conflict, the state required the loyalty of public employees to its policies and to its newly formed political party, the PNR. While partially honoring classical middle-class values of hard work and merit, the government reinvigorated old practices of clientelism, nepotism, and personalism and introduced new ones of surveillance and mistrust. These factors, combined with the new and controversial presence of women office workers and the humdrum routine increasingly identified with bureaucratic labor, created a problematic work environment particularly for the older male office

worker. However, by the end of the Cárdenas period, public employees configured the heart of an expanded middle class and the institutionalized revolution.

By 1938, the Cárdenas government faced strong middle-class opposition. In the run-up to the 1940 election sectors of the middle class joined the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, or PAN), founded by conservative Roman Catholics under the leadership of Manuel Gómez Morín (rector of the National University, 1933-34). According to scholars like Soledad Loaeza, the PAN offered the only political expression for the middle class. But, the middle class was far more diverse. Some sectors favored the moderate right-wing presidential candidate Juan Andreu Almazán who ran under the National Unification Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario de Unificación Nacional*, or PRUN). Others supported the Party of the Mexican Revolution (*Partido Revolucionario Mexicano*, or PRM) candidate as the Cárdenas government sought to dilute the opposition by bringing the middle-class public employees into the party. Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) distanced himself from his predecessor's socialism and extreme nationalism, pacified the church, opened up educational and economic opportunities, and allowed relative freedom of the mass media. After 1940 and particularly with rapid economic growth after 1945, a diverse and expanded middle class had greater room in the political arena and in the social and cultural life of Mexico City.

Chapter 1: Fashioning a Promising Social Category: Mexico City's Porfirian Middle Class

Introduction

In a time of relative political stability and economic growth during the administration of President Porfirio Díaz (1867-1910), Mexican intellectuals and politicians debated Mexico's future. For many, the country's promise depended on the condition of Mexico's middle class. They agreed that the middle class was crucial to economic and social progress and the evolution of a political democracy. They disagreed, however, on the state of Mexico's middle class. Some writers criticized its members as spendthrifts who cared more about appearance than substance. Others praised the class's membership as representing the epitome of virtue, morality, and national pride. The intellectual categorization of the middle class offered an arbitrary ideal based on imagined European standards. In Mexico City, this growing middle class asserted itself as bearers of culture, respectability and national pride.

These residents of the federal district included the traditional middling class of professionals, small businessmen, and high-end artisans, as well as a growing number of office workers in the public and the private sectors. Yet the respectability, honor, and decency that signaled middling status were not innate traits. Rather, manners and comportment were cultural markers that required an individual's attention to their display and performance. Many fledgling members of the middle class looked to novels and short stories to help map out middle-class sensibilities. By providing prescriptions of behavior and hygiene, popular conduct manuals served as guides to bodily conduct. The roving and voyeuristic eye found in the pages of books revealed

a fascination with visual culture and spectacle found in photography, early silent movies, and consumer culture. Mexico City's new suburbs like Santa María la Ribera provided a spatial mapping of class, while neighborhood civic and religious organizations provided important means of class identification and social networks.

Porfirian Intellectuals Imagine Mexico's Middle Class

Seeking to map out the social hierarchy of Mexico, positivist intellectuals used a system of demarcation based on race, labor, diet, clothing, and sexual behavior. Sociologist Andrés Molina Enríquez divided Mexico's social classes by ethnicity. The *mestizo* (mixed race) characterized the middle class rather than *indio* (indigenous) lower classes and *criollo* (Spanish-descended) upper classes.¹⁵ Similarly, writer and educator Justo Sierra remarked that the middle class had its roots in the *mestizo*.¹⁶ In evolutionary terms, the *mestizo* majority would emerge with a middle-class profile.¹⁷

Mexican intellectuals also sorted social classes by forms of employment. Molina Enríquez categorized middle-class *mestizos* as directors, professionals,

¹⁵ Andrés Molina Enríquez, "Las clases sociales mexicanas durante el Porfiriato," in *Las clases sociales en México* (México, DF: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1985 [1968]), 60-68. Andrés Molina Enríquez (1865-1940) was a positivist sociologist. The text is an excerpt from his book *Los grandes problemas nacionales* published in 1908. See also Robert M. Buffington and William E. French, "The Culture of Modernity," in *Oxford History of Mexico*, eds. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 412.

¹⁶ Justo Sierra, *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People*, trans. Charles Ramsdell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 360.

¹⁷ Justo Sierra quoted in Moisés González Navarro, "El Porfiriato: La vida social," vol. 4, ed. 1 of *Historia Moderna de México*, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México, DF: Editorial Hermes, 1957), 387.

employees, army personnel, overseers, small property owners, and ranchers.¹⁸ Professionals with a small clientele, second-class public employees, school directors, journalists, and commercial employees defined the middle class for Manuel Casas.¹⁹ Other writers listed members of the middle class as men of agriculture, small business and industry, public employees, and professionals.²⁰ Jorge Vera Estañol described “decent people” (*gente decente*) as an expanding middle class, composed often by mestizos who felt a repulsion to all manual or mechanical work and who were “intelligent, educated, ambitious [and] who sought to mix with the rich and comfortable classes [and] dress like them.”²¹

Other thinkers identified the middle class by their clothing style, eating habits, and sexual behaviors. According to sociologist Julio Guerrero, the middle-class man dressed in pants, a vest, a cashmere shirt, a plaid coat, and a felt hat. His female counterpart wore a traditional shawl (*rebozo*) in the house and a finer black shawl on the street. They drank *pulque* like the lower classes, but distinguished themselves by eating with utensils, using paraffin to light their homes, and employing domestic help. While promiscuity set apart the lower classes, middle-class artisans and low-level commercial employees and government clerks practiced polygamy. Guerrero

¹⁸ At the same time, Molina Enríquez maintained that in Mexico a true middle class did not exist. He argued that mestizo directors, professionals, and employees were in fact a privileged class who lived off workers (*trabajadores*). See Molina Enríquez, 68.

¹⁹ Jesús Romero Flores, *La revolución como nosotros la vimos* (México, DF: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1963), 47.

²⁰ Moisés González Navarro, “El Porfiriato: La vida social,” vol. 4, ed. 1 of *Historia Moderna de México*, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México, DF: Editorial Hermes, 1957), 388.

²¹ Quoted in John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001) 56. Jorge Vera Estañol (1873-1958) was an upper-class lawyer and politician.

characterized middle-class men as frequently unfaithful, fickle, feeble and with “incredulous weak volition.” Their wives, although vain, remained faithful and religiously devout. Outside of their knowledge of the catechism and the lives of saints, the women knew little about science or the profane arts. Instead, they filled their time with frivolous theater and parties.²²

Criticisms of Mexico’s middle class reveal the prejudices and idealized notions of intellectuals. Justo Sierra explained the vices of the middle class by blaming individuals of lower social levels who sought middle-class status. Bureaucracy and education allowed for a “constant infiltration between the social classes” that hampered any cure for their alcoholism and superstition.²³ In another line of criticism, an editorial of the newspaper *El Imparcial* blamed middle-class poverty on clerical education that imbued individuals with the virtue of generosity.²⁴ For his part, author José Tomás de Cuéllar used caricature and satire to criticize the bourgeois hedonism of the middle class and its poor imitations and failed attempts at refinement. In particular, he attacked families of “new money,” products of the city’s growing commerce who formed part of an incipient and heterogeneous middle class.²⁵

²² Moisés González Navarro, “El Porfiriato: La vida social,” vol. 4, ed. 1 of *Historia Moderna de México*, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México, DF: Editorial Hermes, 1957), 384-85. See also Buffington and French, “The Culture of Modernity,” 423.

²³ Justo Sierra, *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People*, trans. Charles Ramsdell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 360.

²⁴ *El Imparcial*, November 22, 1908, p. 1.

²⁵ José Tomás de Cuéllar, *The Magic Lantern: Having a Ball and Christmas Eve*, trans. Margaret Carson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a selective list of novels and shorts stories about the middle class, see Marcelo Pogolotti, ed., *La clase media en México* (México, DF: Editorial Diogenes, 1972).

In 1908, President Díaz echoed some of these complaints in his interview with American journalist James Creelman. Díaz listed the defects of the middle class as oversleeping and arriving late to work, using familial influence to obtain government employment, being frequently ill, refusing to miss bullfights, endlessly entertaining themselves, having style with no substance, marrying young and having many children, spending more than they earned, and “drugging” themselves with usury in order to celebrate *posadas* and saints’ day parties.²⁶

Echoing the president’s sentiments, contemporary critics had little sympathy for the middle class’ woes during a series of economic crisis beginning at the turn-of-the century.²⁷ Instead, newspaper articles blamed the vain habits of the middle class. One writer condemned the employee who earned hundred-fifty pesos monthly, but bought a new suit and tie twice a month. The same employee attended the theater twice a week, strolled frequently on the Paseo de la Reforma, invited his friends to drink and eat at his expense, and subscribed to the opera. A loan allowed the employee to afford a carriage, a house, and a legion of servants.²⁸

On the other hand, some Porfirian commentators lauded Mexico’s middle class. A newspaper editorial in *El Tiempo* described the middle class as Catholic, anti-American, hardworking, patriotic, and honest taxpayers who exemplified

²⁶ Moisés González Navarro, *Sociedad y cultural en el porfiriato* (México, DF: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994), 147.

²⁷ See Eugenio Sancho Riba, “Las condiciones economicas en los ultimos años del Porfiriato y la clase media,” *Heredia* 5:9-10 (1980): 9-32.

²⁸ *El Imparcial*, October 11, 1900, p. 1. On further criticisms of middle-class spending, see *El Imparcial*, May 9, 1900, p. 1; *El Imparcial*, May 20, 1900, p. 1; *El Imparcial*, November 19, 1900, p. 1. One article stated clearly that “saving is the highest expression of domination that a man can exercise over himself.” See *El Imparcial*, May 11, 1900, p. 1.

moderation and dignity.²⁹ Justo Sierra extolled the men of the middle class and their leadership, especially during the mid-nineteenth century constitutional reform movement.³⁰ A vocal educator and statesman, Sierra considered the middle class responsible for the Porfirian ideological turn toward positivism. He also praised President Díaz, whom he considered both a product and producer of Mexico's modern middle class.³¹ According to Sierra, the humble middle-class origins of Díaz made him a good ruler. In an ironic comment in light of his own autocratic rule and in contrast to his criticism of middle-class behavior, Díaz told James Creelman that the middle class was “the active element of society [who] sustained true democratic institutions.”³²

The Changing Urban Economy and Decline of the Artisan Class

By the end of the nineteenth century, economic and social transformations brought by industrialization transformed the working lives of many of Mexico City's artisans who had long considered themselves a part of the middle sector.³³

²⁹ Moisés González Navarro, “El Porfiriato: La vida social,” vol. 4, ed. 1 in *Historia Moderna de México*, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México, DF: Editorial Hermes, 1957), 388. Ezequiel Chávez (1868-1946) was a lawyer and educator.

³⁰ Justo Sierra cited in Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, trans. Josephine H. Schulte (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), 30.

³¹ All citations from Justo Sierra, *The Political Evolution of the Mexican People*, trans. Charles Ramsdell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 360-361. These writings of Sierra first appeared as two parts of the book *México y su evolución social* commissioned by President Díaz and published between 1900 and 1902.

³² Moisés González Navarro, “El Porfiriato: La vida social,” 389.

³³ There is extensive literature on artisans in the colonial period. See, for example, Jorge González Angulo Aguirre, *Artesanado y ciudad a finales del siglo XVIII* (México, DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983). For the nineteenth century, see Carlos Illades and Adriana Sandoval, *Espacio social y representación literaria en el siglo XIX* (México, DF: UAM Ixtapalapa, 2000), esp. chapter 4, “Imágenes del trabajo”.

Industrialization impacted artisan crafts at different times and in varying degrees.³⁴ A 1910 census demonstrates that food and beverage workers continued to belong to traditional occupations, such as those of making tortillas, candy, and biscuits, while chemical workers included traditional artisans, such as soap and candle makers. Textile artisans suffered by far the worse decline with the introduction of textile factories. By 1898, Mexico had 125 cotton textile factories and artisan occupations like shoemakers, hatmakers, and weavers, declined 37 percent, 35 percent, and 42 percent respectively. However, the number of seamstresses increased 45 percent over the twenty-year period. This may reflect large numbers of women who sewed piecework for large department stores, including a growing number of middle-class women who turned to sewing to supplement household income in times of financial necessity.³⁵

Artisans involved in the market of high-end goods and services remained strong due to a robust consumer demand for specialty work and products. This sturdy market was likely the result of a growing number of consumers who benefited from a growth in commercial and administrative employment. Artisan occupations that held steady or increased in numbers included those related to areas of construction and renovation, such as carpenters, plasterers, cabinetmakers, and master builders; jobs related to highly-skilled decorative work, including decorative painters, guilders, bookbinders, silversmiths; technical skills, such as watchmakers and printers; and,

³⁴ Donald B. Keesing, "Structural Change Early in Development: Mexico's Changing Industrial and Occupational Structure from 1895 to 1950," *The Journal of Economic History* 29/4 (December 1969): 716-738.

³⁵ Keesing, "Structural Change Early in Development," 720.

lastly, to high-quality textile workers, including dressmakers, tailors, and rug makers, and furniture upholsters.³⁶

In general, economic boom and bust cycles affected the stability of artisan professions. For example, guilders and silversmiths dropped by 22 and 26 percent respectively between 1900 and 1910, which reflected the growing economic crisis that hit Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century. Overall, the number of high-value artisans as a percentage of all middle-class occupations steadily declined from 28 percent in 1890 to 19 percent in 1910. Some of these artisans and their families were forced into factory work. Numerous studies argue that Mexico City's artisans became part of and identified as the proletarian class.³⁷ Accordingly, historians have argued that artisans in general began to lose their secure position in Mexico's social, political, and economic life.³⁸ Yet studies may have exaggerated artisans' decline. As historians became more interested in workers and unionization, they ignored the number of artisans who served as the backbone of the Catholic workers' movement.³⁹

A short-lived newspaper *La Clase media* published between 1907 and 1909 for Mexico's artisan class reveals a proud attitude among craftsmen and -women who

³⁶ Unfortunately, the census material does not differentiate between employees and owners of artisan workshops.

³⁷ For an overview of the historiography on cross-class comparison and labor history in Latin America, see Rodney D. Anderson, "Guadalajara's Artisans and Shopkeepers, 1842-1907: The Origins of a Mexican Petite Bourgeoisie," in *Five Centuries of Mexican History*, eds. Virginia Guedea and Jaime E. Rodríguez O. (Irvine, CA: University of California, 1992), 286-299.

³⁸ John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997 [1987]), 55.

³⁹ Manuel Ceballos Ramírez, "Las organizaciones laborales católicas a finales del siglo XIX," in *Estado, Iglesia y Sociedad en México, Siglo XIX*, eds. Álvaro Matute, Evelia Trejo, and Brian Connaughton (México, DF: UNAM, 1995), 367-398.

considered themselves members of Mexico's middle class. The newspaper was an organ of the government-backed mutual aid society *El Gran Círculo de Obreros*, which was concerned with the uplift of the artisan class. An ongoing column of the newspaper entitled "Conversations with the Workers" extolled the virtues of hard work, savings, temperance, and abstinence from smoking. The figure of the artisan represented a strong work ethic and independence free from class exploitation.⁴⁰ The lack of evident contradiction between a manual worker and a member of the middle class suggests that non-manual work was not a prerequisite of middle-class membership at this time. One article maintained that there was no differentiation between manual and intellectual work because "it was the same to handle a pen as to work a machine."⁴¹ The figure of the artisan under the banner of the middle class contradicts the assumption of Hispanic culture as traditionally disdainful of manual labor.⁴²

The rhetorical uplift found in the newspaper *La Clase media* reflects the struggle for survival of artisan craftsmanship in a period of changes to the labor force. One article reminded parents of the importance of teaching a trade to their children in order to instill a strong work ethic and good habits.⁴³ Yet young people apparently

⁴⁰ "Trabajo y ahorro," *La Clase media*, January 1, 1909. See also "El trabajo," *La Clase media*, June 22, 1908; "El trabajo," *La Clase media*, July 30, 1908; "Idea general de trabajo" *La Clase media*, September 8, 1908; and "La dignidad de trabajo," *La Clase media*, January 9, 1909.

⁴¹ "Los heroes del trabajo," *La Clase media*, February 1, 1909.

⁴² Michael Katz makes the argument that at least prior to industrialization the difference in prestige between non-manual and manual occupations may not always have been as great as researchers have assumed. Michael B. Katz, "Occupational Classification in History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3/1 (Summer 1972): 69.

⁴³ "Lo que olvidan muchos padres," *La Clase media*, June 15, 1908.

showed a lack of interest in artisan and technical trades. Indeed, many articles reveal a fear that young people were shunning artisan trades and choosing instead to seek office employment. In 1910, an article lamented that “modern young people feel aversion for the honorable work of the workshop and fields.” Instead, they were seduced by the hope of obtaining a professional title. They preferred to sit in a government office or stand behind a store counter. Thus, the fields were left uncultivated, and the workshops deserted, and industry in a state of infancy and poverty.⁴⁴

In defense of the artisan craft, some writers discredited office work as effeminizing. One article, which pointed out the difference between blue-collar workers (*obreros*) and white-collar workers, called the latter “señoritos,” a disparaging and effeminate term. While the obrero was a man who worked hard and produced something useful, the señorito produced nothing and lived off the work of others. An inept and pretentious employee, the ostentatious and lazy señorito treated the hours at the office like a social gathering (*tertulia*) and ended the so-called laborious day in the cantina.⁴⁵

Yet the newspaper writers increasingly referenced the public office employee in the pages of the newspaper. Some articles, like “Public employees are not pariahs,” even defended government employees whom they categorized as members of Mexico’s middle class.⁴⁶ The appearance of the office employee in the pages of a newspaper oriented primarily toward the artisan provides further evidence beyond the

⁴⁴ “La juventud y del taller,” *La Clase media*, July 3, 1910.

⁴⁵ “Obreros y Señoritos,” *La Clase media*, July 1, 1908.

⁴⁶ “Los empleados públicos no son parias,” *La Clase media*, October 10, 1909.

census material of a corollary relationship between the decline in artisans and rise in middle-low professionals. Artisan families likely began to send their sons and daughters to school in order to escape the downward social mobility of factory work. As evidenced by the newspaper *La Clase media*, some sons no longer followed in the footsteps of their fathers. Instead, they chose to become white-collar office workers.

Middle-Class Cultural Formation: Education and the Importance of Manners

A structural analysis of occupations related to market, state, and urban expansion offers one way to understand the emergence of a modern middle class. An analysis of how individuals defined their middle-class position according to cultural markers offers another. Porfirian educators aimed to have schools impart the values and manners befitting of middle-class status. Textbooks outlined civic and moral responsibilities to the family and the nation, while identifying moral prescriptions and modes of conduct essential to middle-class identity. Students learned that self-discipline expressed through hard work, honesty, cleanliness, and orderly life formed the foundation for social order.⁴⁷

Convinced that schooling was a means to impart social and class values, middle-class parents took their children's educational experience seriously. This was especially true for parents who had the option to send their children to private schools. In his memoirs of growing up in Porfirian Mexico City to a self-described middle-class family, Ramón Beteta remembers his parents' arguments over their

⁴⁷ Mary Kay Vaughan, "Ideological Changes in Mexican Educational Policy, Programs, and Texts (1920-1940)," *Los intelectuales y el poder en México*, eds. Roderic A. Camp, Charles A. Hale, and Josefina Zoraida Vázquez (México, DF: Colegio de México, 1991), 516.

children's schooling.⁴⁸ His father had lived in a tenement as a child, but his mother came from a family with money. Beteta's cousins on his mother's side attended Mascarones, a Jesuit school in Santa María la Ribera for children of wealthy families. Beteta's father, a staunch liberal, wanted his sons educated in a secular school. Beteta's mother objected vigorously to secular schools that she declared were for little paupers and the children of housemaids. How could her sons go there, she remarked, when "God only knows what diseases they might pick up, and what 'little animals' they might bring home!"⁴⁹ Beteta ended up in a newly-opened school in the well-to-do neighborhood of San Rafael where his mother was relieved to know that most of the children came from "good families." Although not all the children were rich, Beteta remembers that school officials made sure that none of the students were really poor." The school's strict discipline meant days of remaining motionless and silent, fulfilling military-style orders, and passing cleanliness inspections.

Etiquette manuals offered another way to learn the values and mannerisms befitting proper citizenship and middle-class life. Written by the Venezuelan Manuel Antonio Carreño and first published in 1854, the *Compendio del Manual de Urbanidad y Buenas Maneras* quickly became a popular text throughout Latin America. By 1897, some nine editions had been published in Mexico City by Librería

⁴⁸ Ramón Beteta (1901-1965) founded the National University's School of Economics where he was a professor from 1924-1942. He was the campaign director for Mexico's President Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-1952). His various political appointments included General Director of the Department of National Statistics in the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (1933-1935), Subsecretary of the Ministry of International Relations (1936-1940), and Minister of Finance (1946-1952).

⁴⁹ Ramón Beteta, *Jarano*, trans. John Upton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970), 25.

Madrileña.⁵⁰ Carreño's *Manual de Urbanidad* proved popular as major societal/spatial shifts took place: the transformation of the city center as an administrative and commercial hub, migration to the capital, changes in occupational stratification, and the development of new urban spaces. New faces appeared in the streets of the capital as members of the lower classes and peasants, displaced by railroads and suffering from a lack of access to land, migrated to Mexico City, to find employment.⁵¹ A burgeoning state bureaucracy opened its doors to artisan sons and daughters who hoped to maintain or to assume middle-class status through their white-collar employment. Rapid changes in the city's population and employment structure transformed urban life and blurred traditional lines of class. Conduct manuals provided a crucial means to access cultural capital in a society with great social fluidity.⁵² The prescriptions helped them see and be seen according to a visual hierarchy of taste, class, and respectability.

⁵⁰ The manual has since been continually republished. All citations refer to Manuel Antonio Carreño, *Compendio del Manual de Urbanidad Y Buenas Maneras* (México, DF: Editoria Clásica, 1963). I will subsequently refer to it as the *Manual de Urbanidad*.

⁵¹ Migrants into Mexico City also included merchants, lawyers, or individuals who had occupations connected with administrative and artistic professions. Alejandra Moreno Toscano and Carlos Aguirre Anaya, "Migrations to Mexico City in the Nineteenth Century: Research Approaches," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 17/1 (February 1975).

⁵² Valentina Torres Septién, "Manuales de conducta, urbanidad y buenos modales durante el Porfiriato. Notas sobre el comportamiento femenino," in *Modernidad, tradición y alteridad: La ciudad de México en el cambio del siglo*, eds. Claudio Agostini y Elisa Speckman (México, DF: UNAM, 2001). See also Beatriz González Stephan, "Modernización y disciplinamiento: La formación del ciudadano: Del espacio público y privado," in *Esplendores y miserias del siglo XIX: Cultura y sociedad en América Latina*, eds. Beatriz González Stephan, Javier Lasarte, Graciela Montaldo y Maria Julia Daroqui (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1994); Beatriz González Stephan, "Escritura y modernización: la domesticación de la barbarie," *Revista Iberoamericana* 60 (January-June 1994): 1-22.

Private Lives Under Public Scrutiny

The notion of respectability in Manuel Carreño's *Manual de Urbanidad* hinges on the regulation of the body and the dichotomies of inside/outside, clean/dirty, and public/private. Prescriptions that attempt to secure the stability of the body's boundaries defined the Mexican middle-class body against the lower-class body, which lacked control of or shame about its openings of reproduction, digestion, and excretion.⁵³ Hands in the orifices of the mouth, eyes, and nose give cause for horror and disgust. Carreño explicitly warned the reader that it was a grave mistake to "impregnate the fingers into the wetness of the mouth."⁵⁴ As one of the most visible openings of the body, the mouth and the act of eating caused great concern because of their ability to destabilize the boundary between the external and the internal.⁵⁵ Table manner etiquette turned eating into a highly regulated activity and ensured propriety during one of the body's most transgressive activities.

Hygiene also helped to distinguish between dirty and disorderly bodies and clean and normative ones. In the *Manual de Urbanidad*, the reader was urged to examine his/her nails often in order to clean them at the moment they had lost their "natural whiteness."⁵⁶ The text defined cleanliness as a natural marker of a "civilized" body. An entire chapter entitled "Cleanliness" was dedicated to the use of proper hygiene to protect against threats of contamination. Each part of the body required

⁵³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), 317.

⁵⁴ Carreño, *Compendio del Manual*, 33.

⁵⁵ Pamela Gilbert quoting Maggie Kilgour in *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 20. Gilbert discusses eating in the context of metaphors for reading.

⁵⁶ Carreño, *Compendio del Manual*, 33.

particular methods of care with soap, water, and brushes.⁵⁷ Rules partitioned the body into separate areas of concern and regiment by time and place.⁵⁸ Cleanliness required access to water and soap and the privilege of both time and space. Bathrooms were a luxury that few families could afford. While some houses had bathtubs of tinplate or wood lined with metal, most Mexico City residents went to public bathhouses. The city's limited distribution of water made cleanliness a challenge, yet served as one of the most visible markers of respectability and good citizenship.

Self-regulation and bodily hygiene changed an individual's relationship to the body. Hygiene guidelines promoted the body as an object of self-care and improvement. But the fear of the outside gaze that appears frequently in Carreño's *Manual de Urbanidad* also suggests notions of shame and honor that had long been a part of Mexican society. Carreño evoked the fear and horror that "an accident" in the middle of the night may expose the reader's naked body to the shame of an outsider's gaze.⁵⁹ The awareness of possible failure in the eyes of others heightened the fear of exposure, embarrassment, and humiliation. Shame promised a painful experience of self-consciousness, resulting from a sudden recognition of a discrepancy between one's own behavior and that of one's peers.⁶⁰

Rules of respectability applied in the privacy of the home as well as elsewhere reassured the reader that a person's private behavior matched his or her public

⁵⁷ Carreño, *Compendio del Manual*, 34.

⁵⁸ Carreño, *Compendio del Manual*, 32.

⁵⁹ Carreño, *Compendio del Manual*, 31.

⁶⁰ Rita Felski, "Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame and the Lower Middle Class, *PMLA* 115/1 (January 2000): 33-45.

persona. The emphasis on the need for self-control beyond the eyes of others reveals an internalization of the “disciplinary power” famously described by Michel Foucault.⁶¹ Thus, even in the privacy of the home and out of sight from others, men were never to appear in bad shoes, in a sleeveless shirt, or without a tie. Women had to take even greater care to never appear slovenly.⁶² At night, clothes were to be changed with honest modesty. One should never appear uncovered (*descubiertos*), even while sleeping.⁶³

Carreño’s repeated warnings of an external eye or outsider’s look, particularly in relation to the window, emphasized the categories of class and gender as acts of performance and sets of manipulated codes rather than essential aspects of identity defined.⁶⁴ The window invoked an image of a display case as well as a performance space or stage in which individuals were seen and identified. Thus, the metaphor of the window also called attention to the spectator who had the power both to affirm and question markers of gender, class, and sexuality.⁶⁵ Carreño cautioned against appearing frequently in windows, doorways, or on balconies that faced towards the street.⁶⁶ A woman who exhibited herself too comfortably in the public eye invited

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 138.

⁶² Carreño, *Compendio del Manual*, 48.

⁶³ Carreño, *Compendio del Manual*, 45.

⁶⁴ For understandings of gender as performance, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁶⁵ Carreño, *Compendio del Manual*, 49, 90.

⁶⁶ Carreño, *Compendio del Manual*, 89.

criticism and a questioning of her virtue.⁶⁷ The manual played a dual role in simultaneously teaching readers not only how to perform, but also how to read the visual codes of gender and class in others.⁶⁸ Members of the middle class learned to identify the “we” hailed by the conduct manual as they moved about the urban streets.⁶⁹

Readers of Carreño’s popular etiquette book intersected with the privileging of the visual in late nineteenth-century culture. Magic lanterns, photography, and the debut of early silent cinema offered new types of scopophilic pleasures and spectatorial experiences. By 1865, there were twenty-three photography studios in Mexico City.⁷⁰ The first cinema opened in 1896. By 1905-1906, the city boasted thirty-four cinemas and eleven theatres.⁷¹ In a similar fashion, novel glass-making technology allowed for the production of large glass sheets for use in museums and department stores.⁷² The invisible wall of solid crystal transformed the viewing

⁶⁷ The nineteenth century craze for exhibitions and world’s fairs simultaneously led doctors to define exhibitionism as a pathology. The label “exhibitionist” for a pathological individual was coined in 1888. See Sylvia Molloy, “The Politics of Posing,” *Hispanisms and Homosexualities*, eds. Sylvia Molloy and Robert Irwin (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 143.

⁶⁸ In her study of literary realism and photography in late nineteenth-century Britain, Nancy Armstrong makes clear that both text and image belonged to the same cultural project that showed readers how to play the game of modern identity from the position of observers. Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁶⁹ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),” trans. Ben Brewster, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

⁷⁰ See Patricia Massé Zendejas, *Simulacro y elegancia en tarjetas de visita: Fotografías de Cruces y Campa* (México, DF: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1998), 41.

⁷¹ See Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad en México, 1896-1930* (México, DF: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 1996), 65.

⁷² For a study of nineteenth-century Mexican architecture, see Israel Katzman *La arquitectura del siglo XIX en México* (México, DF: UNAM, 1973). For a general history of nineteenth-century construction materials and architecture, see Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time, and Architecture* (Cambridge, MA:

experience as the modern observer became more passive and distanced from the object of its gaze.

In addition to Carreño's conduct manual, other forms of popular fiction emphasized the roaming gaze and the importance of the visual in judging class pretensions and gender respectability. Like the conduct manual, short stories aided readers in their attempts to negotiate urban spaces and their self-fashioning. In one of Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera popular short stories, "The Streetcar Novel" (*La Novela de Tranvía*), the narrator traveled through the city in a streetcar.⁷³ Through the text, the reader joined the main character as a *flâneur*, the nineteenth-century urban character who strolled through the city observing its inhabitants and other amusements. Justo Sierra described the verb "to flâneur" as "to wander jostled by people, leaning against the store display windows...gazing into the interiors of houses."⁷⁴ Gutiérrez Nájera turned the roving eye of the flâneur into a printed digest and offered middle-class readers public scenes for private consumption.⁷⁵ The eyes of the chronicler acted as a window through which the reader could look at the city and its inhabitants. This type

Harvard University Press, 1946). For a discussion of the museum as an early form of exhibitionary architecture, see Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁷³ Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, "La Novela de Tranvía," *Cuentos completos y otra narraciones* (México, DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1958), 154.

⁷⁴ Justo Sierra quoted in Julio Ramos, *Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, trans. John D. Blanco (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 128.

⁷⁵ Vanessa Schwartz discussing Walter Benjamin, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 27.

of gaze fascinated late nineteenth-century readers, who eagerly consumed repeated publications of Gutiérrez Nájera's short story.⁷⁶

While male and female members of the middle class read published chronicles, both genders were not entitled to the same gaze. The flâneur was a male nineteenth-century urban character whose class and gender privilege turned the city into possibilities of geographic, if not sexual, exploration of “unknown worlds and virgin regions.”⁷⁷ He could gaze upon the city without calling into questioning his respectability.⁷⁸ Middle-class females, on the other hand, risked potential speculation on their class-status and feminine virtue by going out in public. Despite her well-dressed appearance, the woman on the tram in Gutiérrez Nájera's story became the object of the narrator's speculation that she was on her way to meet her lover.

Although the gaze of the female stroller was considered sexually provocative and belonged to the prostitute, *flânerie* was not simply for the privileged bourgeois male. In Mexico City, as in Europe, it was a gaze that female members of the middle class could experience in popular nineteenth-century texts and cultural activities.⁷⁹ In addition, philanthropic societies opened up working-class homes to the scrutinizing

⁷⁶ The short story “La novela de tranvía” was published four times in periodicals between 1882-1888 and included in two anthologies, one in 1883 and the other in 1898.

⁷⁷ Gutiérrez Nájera, 155. Numerous works exist on the character of the flâneur, particularly in Western Europe. See, for example, Walter Benjamin, “The Flâneur” in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁷⁸ Although the city remained largely the domain of the male writer, more research on turn-of-the-century female writers such as María Enriqueta and Laura Méndez de Cuenca might give insight into women's urban experience. For a British example of the female writer as a *flâneuse*, see Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷⁹ For example, the woman's magazine *El Correo de la Señoras* published *La novela de tranvía* in 1887.

gaze of middle-class women as charity workers while department stores offered them a safe space to look at and linger over the objects on display.

Late nineteenth-century modernization and urbanization changed the visual practices of the members of the middle class. The modern city multiplied visual stimuli and situated viewers within a context of rapidly changing images. Justo Sierra remarked how the stroller in the city “wander[ed] with the certainty of perpetual distractions for the eyes.”⁸⁰ The department store demanded a similar fleeting and distracted form of looking with its multiplicity of objects on display. New forms of travel, including the train and the streetcar, produced a similar type of impressionistic perception as well as provided a new panoramic gaze, later captured by the eye of the movie camera.⁸¹ Gutiérrez Nájera’s “The Streetcar Novel” exemplified this new type of looking. In a similar way to the cinema, the narrator sat within the contained and stationary space of the streetcar while the scenes of the city moved across the rider’s – and the reader’s – vision. Similarly, in the short story entitled “Having a Ball,” (*Baile y cochino*) by José Tomás de Cuéllar, the young woman Enriquetta watched the outside world from her window in which “everything was in motion, creating fleeting images that barely left an impression on her retina before being erased by another image, and then another, in a never-ending vertigo.”⁸² Short stories contained in de Cuéllar’s book *The Magic Lantern* (*La linterna mágica*) including “Having a

⁸⁰ Justo Sierra quoted in Ramos, 128.

⁸¹ In Western Europe, writers remarked that the speed of train travel caused the landscape to look like streaks of colors. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), 59-60.

⁸² José Tomás de Cuéllar, *The Magic Lantern*, 53. The short story “Having a Ball” (*Baile y cochino*) was first published in 1889 in Mexico City.

Ball,” reflected the influence of photography. The scenes in the short stories read like snapshots that exposed the private lives of the characters. In “Having a Ball,” the reader joined the narrator’s voyeurism of private scenes that included tiptoeing into a woman’s bedroom.

Consumerism, Class Respectability, and Threats to Middle-Class Gender

While male writers peered behind the doors of the home and even into women’s boudoirs, an increasing number of middle-class women ventured out of the home to work, study, shop, and enjoy the city’s amusements. The boundaries of the middle-class home became more porous than ever before, as entertaining, shopping, theater going, promenading, home visiting, and philanthropy increasingly became the norm. Philanthropic societies provided legitimate grounds for women’s increased public participation by expanding their traditional role as caregivers. New entertainment and leisure spaces drew women out of the domestic sphere. They attended the theatre and went to the cinema, rode bicycles and learned to roller skate.⁸³ Owners of Mexico City’s roller-skating rink offered women a discount to encourage them to participate despite concern expressed by “respectable” families.⁸⁴ Department stores offered *señoras decentes* an opportunity to meet friends and spend leisure time outside the home.⁸⁵

⁸³ William H. Beezley, *Judas and the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico*. See also early photographs in Gustavo Casasola, *Seis siglos de historia gráfica de México, 1325-1976*, vol. 2 (México, DF: Editorial Gustavo Casasola, 1968).

⁸⁴ Buffington and French, “The Culture of Modernity,” 429.

⁸⁵ Steven B. Bunker, “‘Consumers of Good Taste’: Marketing Modernity in Northern Mexico, 1890-1910,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 13/2 (Summer 1997): 227-269.

Traditionally, a woman's place in the home and exclusion from the paid workforce signaled her family's middle-class status. Her role as the so-called "guardian angel of the home" protected and ensured her virtue and purity from the social and moral contagion of the street. Porfirian educators and writers rested the moral burden of nation building on women as the mothers and educators of future citizens. A mother's role involved inculcating in her children a time discipline, respect for authority, work ethic, and belief in progress.⁸⁶ Women read Carreño's *Manual de Urbanidad* for principles of proper home management, including order, methods, time keeping, and cleanliness.⁸⁷ Women's behavior served as a key indicator of the family's status to outsiders. Carreño cautioned female readers to appear serious and solemn in public so that they would not attract attention to themselves. Women who imitated the "confident air" of men appear "immodest and unrestrained"⁸⁸ and were suspected of being prostitutes.

Dazzling new products like those celebrated at the opening of the department store El Palacio de Hierro in 1891 increasingly enticed women out of the home.⁸⁹ Along with window displays and elaborate architecture of department stores like El Puerto de Veracruz and El Centro Mercantil, magazines and postcards produced seductive and enticing images of the modern lifestyle. Throughout the city,

⁸⁶ William E. French, "Prostitutes and Guardian Angels: Women, Work, and the Family in Porfirian Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72/4 (November 1992): 529-553.

⁸⁷ Carreño, *Compendio del Manual*, 42 and 43.

⁸⁸ Carreño, *Compendio del Manual*, 29.

⁸⁹ On consumer culture elsewhere in Mexico, see Steven B. Bunker, "Consumers of Good Taste." See also Jürgen Buchenau, "Marketing 'Necessities': The Casa Boker and the Emergence of the Department Store in Fin-de-Siècle Mexico City," in *North Americanization of Latin America?: Culture, Gender, and Nation in the Americas* (Stuttgart, Germany: Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, 2004): 89-108.

advertisements and announcements covered building walls, creating a varying “spontaneous collage” as new material was pasted daily.⁹⁰ Newspaper ads enticed consumers with the latest watches, sewing machines, office supplies, corsets, hair tonics and, by 1908, new inventions like typewriters and gramophones.⁹¹ Alluring visual images of turn-of-the-century consumer culture crafted the idea that a modern and cosmopolitan lifestyle lay within the shopper’s reach.

Yet for all the consumer hype that emerged at the turn-of-the century, modesty and self-restraint in appearance and behavior continued to provide visual indicators of gendered virtue and respectability. According to Carreño’s *Manual de Urbanidad*, those who exaggerated manners, dressed in flamboyant clothes, and wore too much jewelry and make-up were considered “disorderly,” or women who led a life gone wrong (*las mujeres de vida equivocada*).⁹² The association of certain types of dress and conduct with the figure of the prostitute, who was continually although implicitly evoked throughout the manual, powerfully symbolized the counter-image of the respectable middle-class woman. The prostitute was linked to the working-class woman. The same discourse which desexualized women of the middle class hyper-sexualized lower-class women, making them “naturally” promiscuous.⁹³

⁹⁰ Unveiled by the Mexico City municipality in 1874, glass kiosks plastered with flyers, posters, and public notices stood in the Zócalo and Alameda. Julieta Ortiz Gaitán, “Mandatos seductores: Publicidad y consumo como símbolo de modernidad en la ciudad de México (1900-1930),” in *Miradas Recurrentes I: La ciudad de México en los siglos XIX y XX*, ed. María del Carmen Collado (México, DF: UAM/Instituto Mora, 2004), 84-101.

⁹¹ See, for example, various advertisements in *El Imparcial*, November 22, 1908.

⁹² Carreño, *Compendio del Manual*, 26-27.

⁹³ For a discussion of how Porfirian era writers used the prostitute as an example of the moral and cultural degeneracy of lower-class families and neighborhoods, see William E. French, “Prostitutes and Guardian Angels.”

An emphasis on a moderation in style and unassuming behavior was also true for men. Writers considered the use of excessive jewelry and immoderate consumption in men as effeminate. In a manual from 1874, José J. Rivas stressed that refined and educated men should only wear a pocket watch and chain, and if married, a ring.⁹⁴ A guidebook on style for governors and political bosses warned against the undue use of cosmetics and other products used to enhance appearances.⁹⁵ Subdued presentation represented self control, a marker modern manliness of the late nineteenth century.

Men who overindulged in their concern for their appearance were derogatorily referred to as “chickens” (*los pollos*). The term likely connoted effeminacy in direct opposition to the cock, a traditional symbol of potent masculinity. According to contemporaries, these men were the equivalent of the dandy who walked the streets of London or New York. The prototype was described as a thin, pale, young man with a large stiffened and curled moustache. He had disheveled curled hair with a fringe that reached the eyebrows and was combed up on the sides with a perfume or oil. He wore a half-buttoned shirt that showed off a small celluloid or gold cross and a padded jacket that enhanced his figure. He wore tight pants with fringed sides and lustrous black boots. Accompanying accessories included tight leather gloves, a scarf, eyeglasses, and a top hat. With flamboyant behavior, he attended the theater and opera to attract the attention of admirers. He lived by the motto of working the least

⁹⁴ Macías-González, “*Hombres de mundo*,” 288. See also Consolación Salas, “Las revistas masculinas mexicanas a principios del siglo XX,” in *La prensa en México. Momentos y figuras relevantes (1810-1915)*, eds. Laura Navarrete Maya and Blanca Aguilar Plata (México, DF: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), 162-176.

⁹⁵ *Manual of governors and jefe políticos* (1878) cited in Macías-González, “*Hombres de mundo*,” 275.

possible and spending time causing foolish mischief and courting women.⁹⁶ The condemnation of the *pollo* reveals a contemporary concern that overindulgence would endanger Mexican masculinity. While excessive consumption threatened to breed “loose” public women, for men, overindulgence led to effeminacy, if not homosexuality. For both, immoderation labeled the individual a transgressor of appropriate gender and sexual behavior.

The young men of the late Porfiriato represented a grave social problem for writer and critic José Tomás de Cuéllar. De Cuéllar considered the *pollos* as bums (*vagos*) and a quarrelsome lot that joined together to commit all kinds of abuses. They persistently tried to seduce poor girls. Promised comfort and luxury, the girls would end up in prostitution. De Cuéllar identified *pollos* as youth between the ages of twelve and eighteen who wasted their lives in immoral habits. He argued that many of *pollos* would have normally become honorable artisans. But they had been swayed to abandon the workshops for work in the bureaucracy, with little concern about its concomitant misery and sparse and insecure remuneration. De Cuéllar advised the middle class to incline itself to the workshop rather than law, engineering, or medicine.⁹⁷ Despite the criticism by de Cuéllar and others, many young men took to working in the offices of the expanding Porfirian administration.

Mexico City Expansion

Gutiérrez Nájera’s *flâneur* and de Cuéllar’s *pollos* traversed a metamorphizing cityscape at the end of the nineteenth century. The Díaz administration erected stately

⁹⁶ González Navarro, “El Porfiriato: La vida social,” 395-396 and 466-467.

⁹⁷ González Navarro, “El Porfiriato: La vida social,” 468-9.

public buildings alongside new grand structures of commercial enterprise. Long into the nineteenth century, the city had kept much of its traditional pre-industrial mixture of residences, commerce, and trades around the Zócalo. Travel accounts and autobiographies describe the mixed nature of neighborhoods in which colonial mansions housed an elite family in one and several tenants in the other. The tenement (*casa de vecinidad* or *vecindad*) commonly had a vertical hierarchy, housing lawyers in spacious quarters around a front patio, and soldiers, washerwoman, and domestic servants behind. In his autobiography, Miguel Macedo, a *científico* who served in the Díaz administration, described growing up in a second-floor apartment above a butcher and a shoemaker.⁹⁸ The colonial character of the city typified by mixture of wealthy and poor residents disappeared by the end of the late nineteenth century.⁹⁹ Small artisan shops were pushed out of the center into neighborhoods south of the Alameda and south and northeast of the Zócalo. Some of the small craft shops disappeared completely with the advent of industrialization and factories on the outskirts of the city center. Exceptions included fashion industries on the west side of the Zócalo, such as jewelers, tailors, and seamstresses who mainly sewed in workshops or their homes for the big department stores. Small print shops also remained clustered on the streets southwest of the Zócalo.

⁹⁸ Miguel Macedo, *Mi barrio: ensayo histórico sobre la ciudad de México* (México, DF: Editorial Cultura, 1930).

⁹⁹ John Lear, "Mexico City: Space and Class in the Porfirian Capital, 1884-1910," *Journal of Urban History* 22/4 (May 1996): 454-492; R.M. Morse and J.E. Hardoy, eds., *Rethinking the Latin American City* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Centre, 1992).

In keeping with the country's economic growth at the end of the nineteenth century, the Díaz administration instituted dramatic changes to the capital city.¹⁰⁰ The government financed public works that paved and widened streets, erected new monuments and public buildings, and installed new sewage systems and public lighting.¹⁰¹ Wide tree-lined boulevards gave the city a Parisian-look and represented the elite's desire to see itself and the nation as refined and modern. Such cosmopolitanism required Europeanized citizens. In 1887, the city ordered street newspaper sellers to wear footwear and a decent suit, followed five years later by a restriction of indigenous male clothing on the streets. During the centennial celebrations of 1910, a similar ordinance forced all indigenous men to wear pants.¹⁰² Like earlier attempts to regulate space and public behavior, many of the efforts to Europeanize the Indians did nothing to change their status or improve their living conditions.¹⁰³

Following the 1856 Reform Laws that expropriated church property, new real estate opportunities emerged in the capital. The elite and middle classes abandoned the multiclass downtown area for residential neighborhoods (*colonias*) on the western

¹⁰⁰ Israel Katzman demonstrates that building construction and demolition in Mexico City jumped from less than 100,000 buildings between 1790 and 1870 to over 600,000 buildings in 1870. Foreign investment accounts for much of this large increase. See Israel Katzman, *La arquitectura del siglo XIX en México*, 19.

¹⁰¹ On Porfirian Mexico City, see Barbara Tenenbaum, "Streetwise History: The Paseo de la Reforma and the Porfirian State, 1876-1910," in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, eds. William Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William French (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1994), 127-150; Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, "1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the *Centenario*," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28/1 (February 1996): 75-104.

¹⁰² Moisés González Navarro, "El Porfiriato: La vida social," 396-397.

¹⁰³ Pamela Voekel, "Peeing on the Palace: Bodily Resistance to Bourbon Reforms in Mexico City," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 5/2 (June 1992): 183-208.

periphery of city, primarily in the area bordering the Paseo de la Reforma.¹⁰⁴ The exodus of elite and middle-class families was only one factor in altering the face of the downtown area, which became increasingly devoted to commerce and finance rather than housing and production. High rents and deliberate policies of demolition pushed many workers and urban poor from the downtown core to a dense fringe of tenements nearby, as well as working-class and popular *colonias* on the southern and eastern edges of city.

A transport network allowed the middle class to move beyond Mexico City's downtown district. Until 1858, the only form of transport consisted of slow horse-drawn vehicles that were useless during the rainy season when roads were made impassable. Urban public transportation developed with the introduction of streetcars first pulled by horses and mules and later powered by steam. Electrified trolleys began operating in 1896 through a system that utilized overhead cables. The increasing convenience and declining fares of electric cars made it more feasible for professionals of more moderate means to move to the suburbs. Fares in 1910 ranged from five centavos for travel around the city, to thirty centavos for travel to outlying areas. The cost remained prohibitive for many wage earners despite the fact that second-class fares were 30 to 50 percent less than first class. In 1907, records indicate

¹⁰⁴ This tree-lined boulevard – first laid out under Emperor Maximilian's rule between 1864 -1867 and later inaugurated in 1877 – played a key role in encouraging investors to plan elite residential subdivisions along its path. On the elaboration of the Paseo de la Reforma, see Barbara Tenenbaum, "Streetwise History," in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*.

that 72 percent of the capital's residents paid first class, revealing that streetcars were not yet accessible to the masses.¹⁰⁵

As the twentieth century approached, Mexico City increasingly reflected a spatial grid according to class divisions. Wealthy families established the elite neighborhoods of Condesa, Cuauhtémoc, and Roma. The smaller lots in the colonias of Guerrero and Santa María la Ribera attracted middle-class artisans and white-collar employees. Class-specific neighborhoods like Santa María la Ribera, discussed in Chapter Three, aided the articulation of a middle-class identity. In their everyday relationships with schools, shops, markets, theaters, and churches, residents expressed values related to education, family, and faith. The neighborhood provided a communal space to organize around patriotic festivities, religious observances, and civic issues like the improvement of urban services. Social organizations and political mobilization demonstrated cultural capital, social networks, economic power, and class authority.

Conclusion

Life in Mexico City at the turn-of-the nineteenth century provided a fertile stage for a growing middle class of shopkeepers, high-end artisans, and office employees. Yet city life was fraught with concerns about how to distinguish between those who deserved middle-class status and those who merely “passed” as genteel. In a society undergoing profound economic and social shifts, markers of birth no longer proved sufficient to distinguish class status. The hypersensitivity to the complex and

¹⁰⁵ The widening of avenues facilitated population mobility and promoted suburban development. See Manuel Vidrio C., “Sistemas de transporte y expansión urbana: los transvías,” in *Ciudad de México: Ensayo de construcción de una historia*, ed. Moreno Toscano (México, DF: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1978). See also John Lear, “Mexico City: Space and Class in the Porfirian Capital, 1884-1910.”

confusing codes of class stemmed in part from the threat to an individual's honor. Inappropriate dress and behavior in the home and on the street could call into question a person's respectability. Visual codes took on unprecedented prominence, but appearances could be deceiving. Vigilance and scrutiny of others and oneself created an atmosphere of anxiety and shame. However, the most serious threats to this nascent group were still to come. The outbreak of the Revolution in 1910 would bring great challenges for members of the middle class, who were to face violence, disease, food shortages, and unemployment.

Chapter 2: Revolutionary Promises for a Suffering Middle Class, 1913-1928

Introduction

The “order and progress” of the Porfirian dream came to an end when the armed conflict of the Mexican Revolution entered the streets of Mexico City in 1913. Included among the many victims suffering hunger and uncertainty were residents who had joined the ranks of the nascent middle class under the relatively stable dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1877-1911). The story of this “forgotten” sector in the histories of the Revolution brings to light the centrality of the middle class in the promises made by the first post-revolutionary administrations. Influenced by a transnational discourse on the importance of a middle class to national progress, Mexican politicians and intellectuals heralded this sector as the future of the nation’s development and stability. In the wake of revolutionary destruction, government projects economically supported members of the middle sector in order to build an ideal middle class worthy of its European and American counterparts. But economic and social conflicts hindered efforts to make these projects a reality. In the continuing chaos of the 1920s, the middle class rallied to have these promises fulfilled as they mobilized as voters, tram users, renters, and neighborhood residents. In the process, members forged a diverse set of interests that some claimed represented middle-class values. Contrary to traditional characterizations of the middle class as a passive and apathetic sector of Mexican society, self-identified members of the middle class took

an active part in establishing themselves within an enlarged political, social, and cultural public sphere.

The Revolution Comes to Mexico City

When the Carrancista troops entered Mexico City “the individuals of the middle class stayed in our houses. Entering the city were men of the proletariat class, brown [*atezado*] *campesinos*, some dressed in multicolored clothes and some almost with no clothes. Our dreams of a cultured Mexico had been in vain. This that marched before our eyes was Mexico, the true in all its terrible reality, the one that demanded justice, education and bread.” (Genaro Fernández MacGregor, *El río de mi sangre*, 243)

Mexico City became the site of revolutionary factions fighting for its control between 1914 and 1915. Two years before in 1913, the *Decena Trágica* (the army’s coup against the first revolutionary government of Francisco I. Madero) had brought armed conflict to the streets of the nation’s capital for the first time. Hunger became a daily reality, as fighting in the countryside destroyed harvests and displaced rural workers. Disease and death stalked the city. Carts made daily rounds to pick up corpses and the city’s biggest department store offered special prices on mourning clothes.¹⁰⁶ Confusion surrounded the circulation of multiple types of monetary bills issued by the various revolutionary divisions. Shortages produced long lines everywhere, including in front of pawnshops. In 1915, one lawyer, who had worked under Díaz’s administration, now stood on the street selling tripe. He urged the

¹⁰⁶ For personal recollections of this period, see Francisco Ramírez Plancarte, *La ciudad de México durante la revolución constitucionalista* (México, DF: Botas, 1941).

middle class to give up its “ridiculous egoism.” In his current circumstances, he had found a deep appreciation for the poorer classes and admired their humility.¹⁰⁷ Fears of urban chaos grew as people watched peasant revolutionaries followed by a steady stream of refugees enter the city and occupy houses and churches.¹⁰⁸ In his memoirs, Francisco Urquizo remembered that the world turned upside down: “It was the revolution that arrived for the first time in the City of the Palaces; they were the people of below who rose up, [sully] with their dusty feet the staircases of Italian marble, the carpets, the enclosed parquet flooring, and the fine imported furniture ... a multitude of unknown people, coming from the North inhabiting our salons, sleeping in our beds, eating off our dishes, and using our cars and our servants.”¹⁰⁹

If violence in the countryside led to food shortages in the city, changing factional control of the city impeded the arrival of provisions.¹¹⁰ Between October 1914 and April 1915, the price of beans rose from 20 centavos to 1.50 or 2.00 pesos per kilogram.¹¹¹ According to Carlos Rivas Coronado, in 1915 the rich stopped attending parties and balls, while the middle class searched for the most efficient means to obtain their basic needs.¹¹² Along with the working class and poor, members

¹⁰⁷ Ramírez Plancarte, *La ciudad de México*, 398.

¹⁰⁸ Ramírez Plancarte, *La ciudad de México*, 398.

¹⁰⁹ Francisco L. Urquizo, *Recuerdo que... Visiones aisladas de la Revolución* (México, DF: Ediciones Botas, 1934), 335-336.

¹¹⁰ Zapatistas impeded the delivery of provisions and of water from the south and Villistas cut provisions coming from the west. In 1915, Conventional and Constitutional forces alternated in the occupation of Mexico City. Erica Berra Stoppa, “La expansión de la Ciudad de México y los conflictos urbanos. 1900-1930” (PhD diss., El Colegio de México, 1982), 230.

¹¹¹ Berra Stoppa, “La expansión de la Ciudad de México,” 231.

¹¹² Carlos Rivas Coronado, *Los horrores del carancismo en la ciudad de México* (México, DF, 1915), 17.

of the middle class had wait in long lines. Bread, tortillas and beans became luxury items, and to obtain them required many hours, sometimes days, of standing in line.¹¹³ José María Benitez remembers how as a boy he was sent in search of bread. He describes one encounter with a bread line 100 meters long at nine o'clock at night as people waited for the bakery to open the next morning. From the line came "voices, shouts, blasphemies [that] filled the street [and] great columns smelling of sweat, the smell of the multitude, [and] the stink of ragged clothing."¹¹⁴ Salvador Rivero y Martínez also recalls how people waited a night and two days for the arrival of coal they then rationed. The situation was so bad, people simply broke down in tears without explanation.¹¹⁵

Many died of hunger and epidemics. Manuel Servín Massieu recounts the stories his mother told of life in Mexico City during the Revolution. In the course of a few months, their comfortable life based on the father's military salary came to an end. The house became a sad place where their unemployed father, once impeccably dressed, wandered around in disheveled attire with unkempt beard and long hair. He would leave to find provisions, only to have the children watch painfully as he returned empty-handed. The children, particularly the younger ones, became undernourished, weak, and frightened. With his engineering background, the father built jugs of laminated clay that could be heated by electrical current, which the older

¹¹³ Ramón G. Bonfil, "El asalto de los empeños," *Mi pueblo durante la revolución*, vol. 1 (México, DF: Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares, Dirección General de Culturas Populares, Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1985), 59, 61.

¹¹⁴ José María Benitez, *Ciudad* (México, DF: Librería Porrúa, 1942), 26-27.

¹¹⁵ Salvador Rivero y Martínez, *Entropía: Calor humano de una ciudad (México 1920-1930)*, vol. 1 (México, DF: Librería Porrúa, 1982), 11, 14.

children sold in the city. Despite their mother's best efforts, the beans and vegetables were not enough to save two of the children from dying of malnutrition and typhus.¹¹⁶

Other families took handouts, sent their children out to work, and pawned their goods. Jesús Colín Castañeda remembers the Zapatistas gave out bean stew near the San Lázaro train station. His mother lined up for the soup and brought it back to the house despite her sister's reprimands.¹¹⁷ José María Benitez was sent by his middle-class family to work as a helper at a family friend's grocery store.¹¹⁸ For others, pawnshops offered a way to alleviate the condition of extreme poverty.¹¹⁹ When his father fled to El Paso, Texas during the presidency of Victoriano Huerta (1913-1914), the mother of Angel Miguel Tovar sold and pawned household objects to supplement the salary of sixteen pesos a month brought home by her seventeen-year-old daughter who worked in the Secretaría de Gobernación.¹²⁰

Poverty also meant improvising basic needs like clothing. The father of José María Benitez bought boots off a soldier for his son. They cut off the top of the boots and filled the ends with bits of rags. Still too large, the boots were very uncomfortable. Benitez recalls that he "understood that these boots were going to

¹¹⁶ Manuel Servín Massieu, "Las historias de los viejos," *Mi pueblo durante la revolución*, vol. 1 (México, DF: Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares, Dirección General de Culturas Populares, Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1985), 42-45.

¹¹⁷ Jesús Colín Castañeda, "Viendo llover balas. La Revolución en la capital," *Mi pueblo durante la revolución*, vol. 1 (México, DF: Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares, Dirección General de Culturas Populares, Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1985), 29.

¹¹⁸ Benitez, *Ciudad*, 139.

¹¹⁹ Ramón G. Bonfil, "El asalto de los empeños," 59 and 61.

¹²⁰ Angel Migel Tovar, "El México que yo viví," *Mi pueblo durante la revolución*, vol. 1 (México, DF: Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares, Dirección General de Culturas Populares, Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1985), 79.

change my habits, my thoughts, and even the rhythm of my walk.”¹²¹ At school, he took great care to maintain an unusual and weak posture to avoid stumbling. He worried that his schoolmates would find out that he was using the boots of a soldier.¹²²

Families bought goods on credit and pawned household goods. Ramón Beteta’s mother got credit from a storekeeper, milk vendor, Spanish baker, and Indian woman who delivered tortillas. At the Monte de Piedad, Mexico City’s public charitable pawnshop, Beteta’s family pawned their household possessions. Pawning was particularly a middle-class activity, since the poorest did not have extra possessions to pawn.¹²³

Beteta’s family had to sell their house, which was a severe blow to his mother, for whom her home represented economic security and social position. The family moved to the town of Azcapotzalco, a much more modest district far from the city center. Their new house had only one storey and lacked basic conveniences. At the nearby school, Beteta was the only child who wore shoes. While his family tried to maintain the appearance of respectability, Beteta makes clear they lived on illusions. Under patched and repatched trousers, he wore no underwear. Within his shoes, carefully polished with blacking cream and spit, his toes protruded from his

¹²¹ Benitez, *Ciudad*, 245,

¹²³ Similarly, during the late colonial era residents from lower and intermediate ranks of the city commonly raised cash by securing loans with possessions like clothing, tools, and jewels as collateral. Marie Francois, “Cloth and Silver: Pawning and Material Life in Mexico City at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century,” *The Americas* 60/3 (January 2004): 325-362. See also Cynthia E. Milton, “Poverty and the Politics of Colonialism: ‘Poor Spaniards,’ Their Petitions, and the Erosion of Privilege in Late Colonial Quito,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 85/4 (November 2005): 595-626.

stockings.¹²⁴ When his mother's relatives found out the family's state, they received a standing invitation to eat supper there every evening.¹²⁵ For many months, Beteta and his family could count on that one meal a day. He hitched rides on the streetcars from the colonia of Santa María la Ribera to Azcapotzalco. He dreamed of becoming a lawyer like his father, but worried that his family's condition would force him to quit school.¹²⁶

Contemporaries lamented the economic misery of the middle class who, they claimed, suffered worse than others. In the right-leaning newspaper *Omega*, an article pointed out the differences between the working and middle class. According to the article's author, the working class suffered less because their customs allowed them to take any road to survive. Many of them, at one time artisans and honorable workers, became criminals. Faultless women fell into prostitution. In contrast, the man of the middle class preferred "to see his family die of hunger than feed them by robbing and perhaps splattering someone's blood." The middle-class woman also preferred misery and death to dishonor.¹²⁷

Petitioning for Assistance from a Sympathetic Revolutionary Government

The eventual winners of the revolutionary struggle pledged promises of relief and compensation for the middle class. On August 30, 1915, when Venustiano Carranza's Constitutionalist army occupied Mexico City for the fourth and definitive

¹²⁴ Ramón Beteta, *Jarano*, trans. John Upton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970), 57.

¹²⁵ Beteta, *Jarano*, 13.

¹²⁶ Beteta, *Jarano*, 68.

¹²⁷ "El hambre en México," *Omega*, September 3, 1918, p. 4.

time, General Pablo González addressed the difficulties of the middle class in his first decree. He condemned the commercial sector for the high prices of basic necessities. The decree's second and third point concerned white-collar labor issues, such as the excessive work demanded of employees [*empleados*] and the unjust firing of honorable and long-time *empleados* without compensation that hurled families into desperation and misery. The Carrancista general promised Sunday as an obligatory day of rest, an eight-hour work day, and an end to firing without just cause and without notice.¹²⁸

Earlier on March 31, 1915, Carranza had decided that instead of going after price-gaugers, the administration would buy basic goods (*articles de primera necesidad*) and sell them at cost.¹²⁹ Carranza's administration opened municipal government stores (*expendios municipales*), which sold price-regulated goods for distressed consumers of the middle class. These shops were a welcome relief during this "Year of Hunger," satirized in the year's two most successful theatre reviews: His Majesty Hunger (*Su majestad del hambre*) and Country of Cardboard Boxes (*El país de los cartones*).¹³⁰ Carranza's decision to support the middle class appeared to follow a recommendation from U.S. business interests. A 1915 American magazine article entitled "The Necessity to Build a Middle Class in Mexico" apparently interested the administration, which had the article translated into Spanish.¹³¹ The

¹²⁸ Ramírez Plancarte, *La ciudad de México*, 561-562.

¹²⁹ Artículos de primera necesidad, 1915, Centro de Estudios de Historia de México (CONDUMEX), [CEHM] Archivo Carranza, Fondo XXI, carpeta 33, leg. 3587.

¹³⁰ See Mauricio Magdaleno, *Retórica de la Revolución* (México, DF: INEHRM, 1978), 20.

¹³¹ "La necesidad de crear una clase media en México," CEHM, Archivo Carranza, fondo XXI, carpeta 61, leg. 6855, doc. 1 (November 1915). The archival folder cites the article as originating from

author urged U.S. dollar diplomacy, in other words, investment in Mexico's middle class, especially in property owners and small industrialists.

Seeking relief from high prices, Mexico City residents scrambled to petition for government-issued cards that entitled them to shop at state-run stores. Letters to the municipal government in 1915 and 1916 petitioning for the cards testified to the difficulties confronting self-identified members of the middle class. The letters arrived in beautiful handwriting, carefully typed, scrawled on postcards, or scribbled on coarse paper. Many writers began by identifying themselves as members of the middle class: "I belong to the middle class and have few resources to feed my family" began a typical letter. After condemning businessmen who had raised prices out of the reach of the middle class, another petitioner cited the price of coal, which had risen from two pesos to ten pesos, and the price of eggs, which had risen from five centavos to fifteen centavos each.¹³²

Commercial and public employees often wrote as a group on company or government office letterhead. Others had their bosses petition on their behalf. E. Perusquia wrote asking for store cards for two of his employees.¹³³ Medical surgeon Dr. Manuel Ortiz wrote requesting help and complaining about the difficulties he and his colleagues faced as "poor professional members of the middle class."¹³⁴ Many

Everybody Magazine, a U.S. periodical published by early mudraking journalist Lincoln Steffens from 1899-1929. I have been unable to locate the original article. All translations are from the Spanish translation.

¹³² Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad de México, Mexico City [AHCM], Ayuntamiento, caja 404, exp. 773 (April 22, 1914).

¹³³ AHCM, Ayuntamiento, Reguladora de Comercio, vol. 3861, exp. 1 (January 15, 1916).

¹³⁴ AHCM, Ayuntamiento, Reguladora de Comercio, vol. 3860, exp. 6 (October 1, 1915).

expressed their gratitude for the *expedios*, praising the government for helping to alleviate their precarious situation.¹³⁵ A city newspaper reported on the success of the *expedios* and announced the opening of four more stores for residents of the colonia of Santa María la Ribera in October 1915.¹³⁶ According to one account, 30,000 cards had been issued by January 1916.¹³⁷

As a possible indication that the food crisis had passed, in 1916, most petitioners who solicited *expedio* cards did so in order to buy material for clothing, like calico and cashmere, as well as stockings and shoes.¹³⁸ Agustina Caudillo de Velázquez wrote that the high prices of clothing adversely affected the middle class.¹³⁹ Viriginia J. de Sánchez, a resident of the Santa María la Ribera neighborhood, lamented that high prices meant she was unable to present herself in public due to the scarcity of clothing.¹⁴⁰ *Expendio* cards, as employees in one government office explained, would allow them to present themselves in the office in decent attire.¹⁴¹ The equation of the lack of proper clothing with suffering may seem

¹³⁵ AHCM, Ayuntamiento, Reguladora de Comercio, vol. 3856, exp. 19 (January 12, 1916). Cited letter written by the Empleados de la Oficina de la Dirección General de la Enseñanza Técnica. For more letters, see AHCM, Ayuntamiento, Comisión artículos de primera necesidad, vol. 523; AHCM, Artículos de Primera Necesidad, Empleado, Junta Reguladora de Comercio, vols. 1013- 1015; AHCM, Solicitudes y tarjetas, Comisión de empleados públicos, Reguladora de Comercio, vol. 3856; AHCM, Solicitudes y tarjetas, Comisión de particulares, Reguladora de Comercio, vols. 3860 – 3861.

¹³⁶ “Habrán Cuatro Nuevos Expedios para la Clase Media,” *El Mexicano*, October 27, 1915, p. 3.

¹³⁷ AHCM, Ayuntamiento, Reguladora de Comercio, vol. 3861, exp. 7 (January 25, 1916).

¹³⁸ Cashmere, a frequent request among petitioners, was a typical fabric used in middle-class attire. See Jesús Romero Flores, *La revolución como nosotros la vimos* (México, DF: México Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1963), 15.

¹³⁹ AHCM, Ayuntamiento, Reguladora de Comercio, vol. 3861, exp. 7 (January 25, 1916).

¹⁴⁰ AHCM, Ayuntamiento, Reguladora de Comercio, vol. 3860, exp. 4 (March 10, 1916).

¹⁴¹ AHCM, Ayuntamiento, Reguladora de Comercio, vol. 3856, exp. 1 (January 18, 1916).

exaggerated, but for members of the middle class the inability to appear decently in public signaled the loss of social and class distinction.

Petitioners took great pains to explain why they deserved relief. They pointed to rapid inflation and shortages of basic goods. They consciously marked themselves off from the lower classes, whose poverty reformers often blamed on laziness, drunkenness, and a propensity to crime.¹⁴² In presenting their neediness, petitioners acknowledged a vertical relationship between themselves and the government administrator or political official they petitioned. At the same time, they asserted a horizontal affiliation that proved their worthiness and eligibility. The latter claim depended on a shared language between writer and reader whereby the meaning behind “decent” and “middle class” was understood. The letter writers assumed that the reader, presumably a government administrator or political official, also belonged to the middle class and understood the precarious nature of respectability.

Middle-class Protests and Neighborhood Action in the 1920s

On June 1, 1917 a popularly elected municipal government (*ayuntamiento*) was installed for the first time in Mexico City. The new arrangement of municipal power allowed direct representation from the eight districts of the city. For some members of the middle class, particularly small businessmen and professionals, the Revolution brought the long desired right to take part in municipal politics. Francisco Madero had gained middle-class liberal support when he campaigned against Porfirio

¹⁴² Cynthia Milton also finds this for the late colonial period. See Milton, “Poverty and the Politics of Colonialism,” 603, 605.

Díaz on the issue of municipal reorganization and direct representation. In 1914, various revolutionary factions issued decrees establishing the free municipality (*municipio libre*) as the basic territorial and political unit of the country. The delivered promise of representative government led to tremendous political competition for municipal control in Mexico City. Between 1918 and 1923, two parties, the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC) and the Partido Nacional Cooperatista (PNC), fought for command of the ayuntamiento, creating intense internal political struggle and frequent disorder.¹⁴³ The Revolution also empowered and radicalized the working-class movement. Labor unions fought for demands by taking to the street and protesting. In 1921, 310 strikes were recorded. Over the next three years the number dropped, but still remained high. In 1922, there were nearly 200 and at the end of President Obregón's term in 1924 the city faced nearly 125 strikes.¹⁴⁴

Political struggles over the allocation of urban services became key to the redefinition of social and political order.¹⁴⁵ Decisions about where in the city to direct much-needed services, like lighting, paving, and housing had important social and political implications in this volatile climate, as postrevolutionary administrations

¹⁴³ On the history of the ayuntamiento, see Berra Stoppa, "La expansión de la Ciudad de México," esp. Chapter Two. See also Jorge H. Jiménez Muñoz, *La traza del poder: historia de la política y los negocios urbanos en el Distrito Federal: de sus orígenes a la desaparición del Ayuntamiento, 1824-1928* (México, DF: Dedalo, Codex, 1993).

¹⁴⁴ Berra Stoppa, "La expansión de la Ciudad de México," 482.

¹⁴⁵ A number of scholars have made this argument. See Georg Leidenberger, "Las huelgas tranviarias como rupturas del orden urbano. Ciudad de México, de 1911 a 1925," *Formas de Descontento y Movimientos Sociales, Siglos XIX y XX*, eds. José Ronzón y Carmen Valdez (México DF: UAM, 2005), 139-166. Diane Davis argues that the government in the 1920s made special overtures to those employed within or in need of urban services. See Diane E. Davis, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994).

attempted to consolidate control over Mexico's most important political and commercial center.¹⁴⁶ The government's efforts to revive the local economy and restore urban infrastructure directly benefited the middle classes, especially small shopkeepers and employees who relied on prosperity and services for their livelihood. The collaboration between national political leaders and local populations around urban development was important for purposes of restoring urban services and consolidating political power vis-a-vis the middle class.¹⁴⁷ Filled with politics and ideology, the city's space was never merely an innocent backdrop.

Acting on political constituents' complaints was not an easy task.¹⁴⁸

Throughout the 1920s, municipal-level political struggles, large deficits, shortage of funds, and disorderly government offices hindered progress. Deep financial debts at the federal and local level hampered projects to rebuild and increase urban services to a populace whose numbers and needs overwhelmed the existing infrastructure. Unprecedented numbers of migrants flooded the city to escape the destruction of the Revolution. Among them were self-identified members of the middle class from provincial towns. In fact, some members of the Consultative Council (*Consejo Consultivo*), the municipality's political body after 1929, acknowledged that they

¹⁴⁶ In the 1920s, urbanization was a top priority for municipal and federal politicians who linked the nation's progress to the state of its cities, particularly Mexico City. For discussion on the modern city and its proponents, see *Boletín Municipal*, 1921, AHCM.

¹⁴⁷ See Diane Davis, *Urban Leviathan*, 20-101.

¹⁴⁸ Lack of progress was also blamed on employee corruption. On corruption among public employees, see "Expulsion de 'Coyotes' en las Oficinas Municipales," *Boletín Municipal*, March 31, 1926: 1-2, AHCM; "La Moralización de los Empleados Municipales," *Boletín Municipal*, October 31, 1925, 3, AHCM; "La Moralidad Debe Ser la Norma del Empleado," *Boletín Municipal*, February 28, 1927: 37, AHCM.

were not Mexico City natives. These members spoke of working to improve a city in which not they but their children were born.¹⁴⁹

Massive migration into the city produced unplanned growth, overcrowded neighborhoods, housing shortages, escalation of rents, land speculation, and an increased concentration of urban property in fewer and fewer hands. Rent prices became one of the principal issues that mobilized a large number of lower- and middle-class people, since a vast majority of the middle class rented rather than owned property.¹⁵⁰ In 1921, only four to six percent of the population owned property in the city, a number mirrored in middle-class colonias like Santa María la Ribera.¹⁵¹ The high number of renters attested to the political failure of the first post-revolutionary administrations, whose promises of housing were often more rhetoric than reality. Even the projects to construct colonias destined for employees and workers with the goal of making them property owners did not meet expectations. One problem was the soaring price of land. For example, after three years, land prices in the government-created neighborhood of Pervavillo jumped to six pesos per square meter, four times its initial value.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ *Actas y Versiones del Consejo Consultivo*, January 29 – April 24, 1929, 8, AHCM.

¹⁵⁰ Monthly rents increased from an average of 6.50 pesos to 14.00 pesos between 1916 and 1920. See Berra Stoppa, “La expansión de la Ciudad de México,” 456.

¹⁵¹ The number of property owners in District VII, to which Santa María belonged, was 3.26% in 1921. Santa María had one of the lowest rates of property owners, followed only by District I with 3.09%. The average rate in the city was 3.5 - 3.7%, with the highest in District VIII at 7.02%. Berra Stoppa, 385. For rent figures and homeownership in the city, see John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 481-482.

¹⁵² Massive migration into the city also resulted in neighborhood overcrowding, leading longtime residents to complain of “*paracaidismo*” (parachuting), whereby migrants illegally occupied empty property lots. See Berra Stoppa, “La expansión de la Ciudad de México,” 149. For housing problems in the 1930s, see Patrice Elizabeth Olsen, “Un hogar para la revolución: patrones, y significado del desarrollo residencial,” *Miradas recurrentes*, vol. 1, *La ciudad de México en los siglos XIX y XX*, ed.

Rent increases provoked much vocal protest among the city's high number of renters. As early as 1916, a group of mainly middle-class small businessmen formed the Renters' League of the Federal District (*Liga de Inquilinos del Distrito Federal*) to demand reasonable rents. Rents between 1916 and 1920 reveal the rising burden on city's residents. In 1916, the average rent was 6.50 pesos. Two years later, the rent jumped to 8.6 pesos. The average rent reached 14 pesos in 1920.¹⁵³ By 1922, newspaper accounts mentioned working-class renters joining the movement. Nevertheless, newspaper descriptions continued to point out that the majority of the protesters were renters who lived in "two or three-room houses for the middle class," rather than working-class tenement housing. Berra Stoppa describes the renters' movement as "interclass," led by elements of the radicalized petite bourgeoisie.¹⁵⁴ Marching in the streets and sending petitions to various levels of government, the movement demonstrated how the middle class mobilized within the notion of a new moral economy in which they appealed to the revolutionary state for help to meet their basic needs.¹⁵⁵

María del Carmen Collado (México, DF: UAM; Instituto Mora, 2004), 132-165.

¹⁵³ Berra Stoppa, "La expansión de la Ciudad de México," 456.

¹⁵⁴ Berra Stoppa, "La expansión de la Ciudad de México," 610.

¹⁵⁵ For comments about the middle-class nature of the movement, see *El Democrata*, March 12, 1922, cited in Berra Stoppa 504, ft. 590. Leadership of the league was taken over in 1922 by the Mexican Communist Party created that same year. The change in leadership led to the expulsion and resignation of many of the league's middle-class members. Yet poorer residents of even middle-class neighborhoods, including Santa María la Ribera, took part in rent strikes in which they refused to pay rent and hung black and red banners from their houses. See Berra Stoppa, "La expansión de la Ciudad de México," chapters 12, 13, and 14. See also Esther Martina Vázquez Ramírez, *Organización y resistencia popular en la ciudad de México durante el crisis de 1929-1932* (México, DF: INEHR, 1998), 86-93.

Sectors of the middle class united into the Mexican Renters' Cooperative (*Cooperativa Inquilinaria Mexicana*), created in 1930 with the main objective of defending the middle class from the economic crisis of 1929. The majority of the cooperative's members were small businessmen and artisans accompanied by a smaller number of bureaucrats. Their most important objective was to achieve conciliation between renters and property owners.¹⁵⁶ The cooperative and representatives in Congress asserted that the giving of housing to the working class and the middle class was part of the same revolutionary justice that had parceled out land for the peasant (*campesino*). Representative Angel Ladrón de Guevara clearly stated the need to "recover the rights of the urban sectors like the workers and middle class, who now represented a social force key to the strengthening of the State."¹⁵⁷

Transportation issues also mobilized working members of the middle class who depended on the tramway system to commute to work. The nearly yearly tram strikes, first in 1911 and then in 1921, 1922, 1923, and 1925, brought the city to a near halt. In 1922, the municipal government suggested closing two-thirds of schools when teachers could not reach their workplaces. The next year, one journalist described how the city slowed down with shops, theatres, factories, and schools functioning at half speed. It left middle-class employees stranded in the streets of the

¹⁵⁶ This group differed from other popular organizations in its respect for the interests of property owners as well as its declaration to be an apolitical group. The middle-class organization may have been inspired in reaction to the anarchist working-class renters' movement. Vázquez Ramírez, *Organización y resistencia popular*, 90.

¹⁵⁷ Vázquez Ramírez, *Organización y resistencia popular*, 91.

city center unable to get home.¹⁵⁸ Many users of the tram services supported the strikers and projected their grievances toward the foreign owners of the privately-owned tramway company. According to Georg Leidenberger, their support reflected less their labor solidarity and more their dissatisfaction with the tram services, prices, access, schedules, safety, and behavior within the trams. For the first time, self-identified members of the middle class formed part of a new public opinion and reflected in the press.¹⁵⁹ Middle-class consumers appeared in these conflicts not only as victims but also as new actors in the public sphere.

Middle-class men and women actively participated in the tumultuous politics of the 1920s, a period complicated by the emergence of new social groups like union members and migrants, who demanded the fulfillment of revolutionary promises and competed for government resources. While studies have emphasized the emergence of new actors representing the working or popular classes in negotiation with the state, members of the middle class also formed part of this expanding public sphere. Disruption of services, rising rents, and recurring strikes threatened the precarious economic position of the middle class and rallied its members to add their voice to an enlarged sphere of public opinion and popular politics.

¹⁵⁸ “El servicio de las tranvías se paralizó ayer a las 24,” *El Excelsior*, January 21, 1923: 1a, p. 1, 10; “Tranvías quieren que los camiones suspenden el tráfico inmediatamente,” *El Excelsior*, January 22, 1923: 1a, p. 1, 8.

¹⁵⁹ For a detailed study of the strike, see Georg Leidenberger, “Habermas en el Zócalo: La Transformación de la Esfera Pública y la Política del transporte público en la Ciudad de México, 1900-1947,” *Actores, espacios y debates en la historia de la esfera pública en la ciudad de México*, eds. Cristina Sacristán and Pablo Piccato (México, DF: INH-UNAM; Instituto Mora, 2006), 179-197.

Political Organizing Among the Middle Class in the 1920s

Federal politics marked the political landscape of Mexico City. As the capital's residents took an active part in the presidential campaigns of the 1920s, political parties emerged with the term *middle class* as part of their name for the first time in Mexican history. The use of the word *middle class* by politicians and self-appointed middle-class spokespersons provides insight into contemporary understandings of who and what constituted Mexico's middle class. Though short-lived, these parties' very existence demonstrates a growing political voice of individuals who defined themselves as middle class. Such mobilization contrasts with the charges of passivity and apathy that contemporary politicians and intellectuals often leveled at the middle class.

On January 10, 1921, a petitioner from the "Protective Society of the Middle Class" (*Sociedad de Protectora de la Clase Media*) asked the Obregón administration (1920-1924) for help in acquiring a large building. The author, A.I. Puga, described members of the middle class as the "heroes of pain and bitterness" whose sufferings had been forgotten. Puga made clear that he was not asking for a handout: "It is not public charity on which we want to live," he wrote. While Puga did not make clear the reason for the building, his intention seemed to have been to form a mutual aid society.¹⁶⁰

In 1922, the Pro Middle Class Resistance League (*Liga de Resistencia en Pro de la Clase Media*) asked for an audience with President Obregón. After the request was denied and almost a year later, another letter reminded the president that the

¹⁶⁰ Sociedad Protectora de la Clase Media, 1921, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City [AGN], Caja 262, OC 805-S-1.

Resistance League “will play an important role in the next presidential elections.”

The writer made clear his credentials in asking for support, declaring that he had been a long-time revolutionary since the time of President Francisco Madero.¹⁶¹ The reason why Obregón denied or ignored the League’s request for support remains unclear. According to Salvador Rivero y Martínez, the Obregón administration repeatedly supported the middle class in its efforts to organize in defense of its rights.¹⁶²

An article in the conservative newspaper *Omega* breathed a sigh of relief at the establishment of a middle-class political party in 1923. The article’s author asked, “Are we going to see who belongs and who does not belong to the middle class?” He then described members of his class as “all who take life on the easy side and never expose [themselves] to the rigors of those who struggle and sweat mightily to earn their bread.” On the other hand, the middle class also did not work itself to death to become millionaires. Members of the middle class, he concluded, were those who “make social calls, play the piano in family tertulias, and attend semi-literary reunions.”¹⁶³

The middle-class political parties that surfaced leading up to the election of 1924 largely supported the candidacy of Plutarco Calles, who had spoken out strongly during his campaign in support of the middle class.¹⁶⁴ Small parties at this time

¹⁶¹ AGN, OC 711-C-5, May 12, 1922 and March 9, 1923. The author acknowledged that it was the third time he had written to President Obregón, but he was desperate to get the president’s personal attention.

¹⁶² See Salvador Rivero y Martínez, *Entropía: Calor humano de una ciudad (México 1920-1930)*, vol. 1 (México, DF: Librería Porrúa, 1982), 259 (August 1922).

¹⁶³ “El Partido de la Clase Media,” *Omega*, September 28, 1923, p. 1, 3.

¹⁶⁴ Salvador Rivero y Martínez writes that “Calles declared in favor of the middle class and proletariat, those that are the backbone of Mexican society” in May 1924. See Rivero y Martínez, 422. For speeches about the middle class given by Calles, while President of Mexico, see “Las clases

included the Revolutionary Constitutionalist Party (Revolutionary Middle Class) (*Partido Revolucionario Constitucionalista (Clase Media Revolucionaria)*),¹⁶⁵ Confederation of Parties of the Middle Class and the Worker (*Confederación de Partidos de las Clase Media y Obrera*),¹⁶⁶ and the Confederation of Unions of the Middle Class (*Confederación de Sindicatos de la Clase Media*).¹⁶⁷ The latter party, represented by Alejandro Sodi, Salvador Mendoza, and Alfredo de Urrieta, “pursued the true and effective betterment of the Mexican Middle Classes.”¹⁶⁸ These leaders proposed the creation of a center that would support Calles’ candidacy.¹⁶⁹ The Sub-Secretary of the Calles presidential campaign congratulated the Confederation of Unions of the Middle Class, remarking that the Revolutionary Constitutionalist Party showed that Calles had popularity not only within the proletarian classes, but also within the “thinking class” (*clase pensantes*).¹⁷⁰ This political party belonged to the

trabajadoras son el nervio de la nación” and “La clase media depone su abulia,” Plutarco Elías Calles, *Pensamiento político y social. Antología (1913-1936)*, ed. Carlos Macías (Mexico, DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988).

¹⁶⁵ On the declaration of their support for Calles, see Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca, Mexico City [FAPECFT], Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Fondo Plutarco Elías Calles [FEC], fondo 03, series 0402, g: 87, exp. 5, inv. 1222, leg. 2 (2/2). Cardo González Montero was the president of the Revolutionary Constitutionalist Party. For a list of the Executive Committee members, see PEC, exp. 65, inv. 5476, leg. 1 (November 13, 1923).

¹⁶⁶ On their declaration of their support for Calles, see FAPECFT, FEC, fondo 03, series 0402, g: 87, exp. 5, inv. 1222, leg. ½ (October 31, 1923). Alejandro Sodi was the president of Confederation Parties of the Middle Class and the Worker.

¹⁶⁷ Ante-proyecto de Confederación de Sindicatos de la Clase Media, Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca, Mexico City [FAPECFT], Archivo Fernando Torreblanca, Fondo Plutarco Elías Calles [FPEC], exp. 87, inv. 3461, leg. 1, f: 2-6 (1923).

¹⁶⁸ Confederación de Sindicatos de la Clase Media, AGN, O-C 725-C-52 (1924).

¹⁶⁹ Ante-proyecto por Ruben Marti. FAPECFT, FPEC, exp. 87, inv. 3461, leg. 1, f: 2-6 (October 31, 1923).

¹⁷⁰ FAPECFT, FEC, f: 03, s: 0406, g: 88, e: 7, f: 1287, leg. 1 (1924) f: 18 (April 28, 1924). According to a letter written in 1924 by E. Ogarrio to President Obregon, Alejandro Sodi had faced charges and

Alliance of Revolutionary Parties (*Alianza de Partidos Revolucionarios*), which included the Labor Party (*Partido Laborista Mexicano*) and National Agrarian Party (*Partido Nacional Agrarista*).¹⁷¹ In 1924, the Alliance held power in Mexico City's municipal government.¹⁷²

Middle-class women also organized to support the candidacy of Calles. Under the leadership of Elena Iriarte y Drusina, the Feminist Association of the Middle Class "Leona Vicario" (*Agrupación Feminista de la Clase Media "Leona Vicario"*) was a small organization of twenty-one with an office in the neighborhood of Santa María la Ribera.¹⁷³ The association's leader was married to C. Ernesto Iriarte y Drusina, a member of the National Progressive Association (*Agrupación Progresista Nacional*) and honorary president of Revolutionary Association of the Middle Class "Free Chauffeurs" (*Agrupación Revolucionario de la Clase Media "Chofers Libres"*). Iriarte y Drusina was raised on a ranch by a father who was a lawyer who served the local poor and nearby Indians. She credited her father for "inculcating *la Patria* in her soul [...] because in those indigenous I saw portraits of pain and bitterness of the people."¹⁷⁴ Iriarte y Drusina had been an acquaintance, if not friend, of Calles since

jail for falsifying money and being a swindler in 1915. Proof, he wrote, was in a 1916 publication of "*Ilustración Semanal*" in which Sodi appears in jail. See AGN, O-C 307-S-33 (October 23, 1924).

¹⁷¹ Other parties belonging to the alliance included the Liberal Constitutionalist Party (*Partido Liberal Constitucionalista*), National Railroad Workers Party (*Partido Nacional Ferrocarrilero*), Civic Progressive Party (*Partido Civico Progresista*), and the Radical Worker Party (*Partido Radical Obrero*). See *Boletín Municipal*, January 29, 1924.

¹⁷² Berra Stoppa, "La expansión de la Ciudad de México," 53.

¹⁷³ FAPECFT, FEC, fondo 03, series 0402, g: 87, exp. 5, inv. 1222, leg. 2 (2/2) f: 96 (1924). The office was likely in the home of Iriarte y Drusina located on Magnolia Street in the colonia of Santa María la Ribera. Another founding member was Sara N. Blake.

¹⁷⁴ Speech given in the State of Mexico, April 27, 1924, FAPECFT, FEC, fondo 03, series 0402, g: 87, exp. 5, inv. 1222, leg. 2 (2/2) f: 96 (1924).

the time she lived in Hermosillo, where her husband had worked as an army paymaster.¹⁷⁵

According to Iriarte y Drusina, the candidacy of Calles allowed women of the middle class to support an honorable candidate. In an interview published in the newspaper *El Demócrata* in May 1924, Iriarte y Drusina discussed how she wanted to awaken the feminine conscience through protests, women's conferences, pamphlets, movies, and visits to the houses and offices where women worked.¹⁷⁶ In a speech given in Tacubaya, just outside of Mexico City, she proclaimed women's right to be heard and to vote. Iriarte y Drusina also spoke out in favor of labor laws and met with members of the Regional Confederation of the Mexican Worker (*Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana, or CROM*), the Socialist Union of Students and Workers (*Union Socialista de Estudiantes y Obreros*), and the Mexican Labor Party (*Partido Laborista Mexicano*).¹⁷⁷

The public activities of the Feminist Association of the Middle Class included outright campaigning for Calles. During the Spring Festival in May 1924, the women took part in the parade of automobiles. They rode in two cars owned by Iriarte y Drusina's husband.¹⁷⁸ Adorned with visible propaganda of the candidate Calles, the

¹⁷⁵ *El Demócrata*, May 9, 1924, FAPECFT, FEC, fondo 03, series 0402, g: 87, exp. 5, inv. 1222, leg. 2 (2/2) f: 96. For a letter to Calles expressing her support, see FAPECFT, FEC, fondo 03, series 0402, g: 87, exp. 5, inv. 1222, leg. 2 (2/2), f: 99-100 (May 11, 1924).

¹⁷⁶ *El Demócrata*, May 9, 1924, FAPECFT, FEC, fondo 03, series 0402, g: 87, exp. 5, inv. 1222, leg. 2 (2/2) f: 96.

¹⁷⁷ FAPECFT, FEC, fondo 03, series 0402, g: 87, exp. 5, inv. 1222, leg. 2 (2/2), f: 101-103, f: 104 and f: 106.

¹⁷⁸ Berra Stoppa, "La expansión de la Ciudad de México," 328-329. A car for rent (*coche de alquiler*) cost 1.50 pesos for short distances and up to 3-5 pesos for longer distances. In comparison, buses

cars transported the women dressed in *china poblana* costumes driven by men dressed as *charros*. They distributed propaganda to 3,000 men “receiving applause and acclamations of the multitude.” In the afternoon, they gave out 4,000 more leaflets. They happily reported to the director of the pro-Calles campaign that they had not encountered any trouble or hostility among the popular masses.¹⁷⁹

Overtly named middle-class political parties reappeared during the 1928 federal election. The Anti-Reelection Party of the Middle Class – Pro-Serrano (*Partido Antireelectionista de Clase Media – Pro-Serrano*) emerged to support the candidacy of General Francisco R. Serrano, a military general who ran in opposition to the reelection of President Álvaro Obregón.¹⁸⁰ Meanwhile, the National Progressive Association of the Middle Class (*Agrupación Progresista Nacional de la Clase Media*) campaigned for municipal government seats.¹⁸¹ Despite the appearance of middle-class political parties at the federal and local levels, sectors of the middle class felt increasingly marginalized. The decision to disband the municipality of Mexico City in 1929 at first seemed to worsen the situation. However, the new political system put in its place promised more representation for the middle class. The creation of an advisory council called the Consultative Council (*Consejo Consultivo*) consisted of handpicked representatives from large and small business

charged 0.12 centavos and electric tranvias 0.10 centavos. Berra Stoppa, “La expansión de la Ciudad de México,” 345.

¹⁷⁹ FAPECFT, FEC, fondo 03, series 0402, g: 87, exp. 5, inv. 1222, leg. 2 (2/2) (1924).

¹⁸⁰ Letter to Gral Francisco R. Serrano signed by President Jesús E. Valdez and Secretary Lic. A. Patiño Martínez, “Partido Antireelectionista de Clase Media.” Pro-Serrano, FAPECFT, Archivo Fernando Torreblanca, Fondo Fernando Torreblanca [FFT], f: 13, s: 010212, g: 44, exp. 137, i: 993 (September 22, 1927).

¹⁸¹ *Boletín Municipal*, May 31, 1926, AHCM.

and industry, professionals, tenants, property holders, public and private employees, workers, mothers' associations, and peasants. This conscious effort to make overtures to the middle class resulted in the privileged industrial labor movement having to participate side by side with wide variety of other social groups, including shopkeepers, factory owners, professionals, and property owners.¹⁸²

The Cristero Rebellion in Mexico City

Aggressive anti-clerical campaigns begun under President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928) generated a vociferous Roman Catholic response and spurred much of the middle-class Catholic laity, particularly women, to organize and defend their faith. Thus, another voice was added to the strident declarations of striking renters, political campaigners, and working-class marchers that made up the vigorous post-revolutionary public sphere. The confrontation between the state and Roman Catholics commenced in 1925 when Calles began to implement the anticlerical articles of the Constitution of 1917, which legally entrenched a secular state and attacked the Roman Catholic Church's juridical status. The revolutionary constitution of 1917 restricted clergy rights and the Church's role in primary education. The passage of the "Calles Law" in June 1926 further legalized the ongoing seizures of Church property, the closure of religious orders, the banning of religious education, and the deportation of clergy. In protest, the Catholic hierarchy closed churches and

¹⁸² The 1928 Ley Orgánica del Distrito y de los Territorios Federales gave the Consejo Consultivo juridical status. The body of politically-appointed representatives had the official purpose of assisting Mexico City's mayor in governing the capital. The group had no legislative power. The representatives were handpicked in conjunction with the mayor, who was also presidentially appointed. Diane Davis, *Urban Leviathan*, 69, 71.

campesinos took up arms initiating the three-long year violent conflict known as the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929).¹⁸³

In Mexico City, the National Defense League for Religious Freedom (*Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa*, or LNDLR, or La Liga) formed in March 1925 to fight the anticlerical measures of the Calles administration. The Liga organized protests supporting freedom of education and of the rights of Roman Catholic citizens. A heterogeneous coalition, the Liga was composed of the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Ladies' Association, the Congregation of Mary, the Nocturnal Adoration Society, Catholic trade unions, and the Catholic Young Men's Association.

The cadres of the Liga consisted of middle-class lawyers, engineers, doctors, civil servants, and men of the Church. Except for one businessman, lawyers made up the principal leadership. Most of the leaders, including president Rafael Ceniceros y Villareal and vice-president Palomar y Vizcarra, came from Mexico's traditionally strong Catholic provinces although they had lived in Mexico City for many years. In the past, many of the Liga's key figures had supported the National Catholic Party (*Partido Nacional Católica*) and President Francisco Madero. In the 1920s, the predominantly youthful membership of men and women was between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five years old.¹⁸⁴ Women also played a large role in the Liga mobilizations

¹⁸³ On the history of the Cristeros, see Jean A. Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People Between Church and State, 1926-1929*, trans. Richard Southern (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

¹⁸⁴ Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa [LNDLR], Boletín 26, April 4, 1927 in AGN, IPS, vol. 229, exp. 7, fs: 3-4.

The Calles administration kept a close eye on the Liga through a steady stream of reports from police officers and government spies. An early report from 1925 contained a history of the Liga and background information on its most prominent members.¹⁸⁵ Undercover government agents infiltrated Liga meetings and those of other Catholic organizations like the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Ladies' Association, and Catholic Young Men's Association. For example, one agent attended the bi-weekly meetings of the Liga gatherings held at the Cine Trianón, out of which he produced a summary of topics discussed along with a list of names of people in attendance.¹⁸⁶

Liga members coordinated an intense campaign of fundraising, protest, civil disobedience, and legal action. Members collected money, medicine, food, and weapons for armed resistance in the countryside.¹⁸⁷ Stamps with pro-Catholic and anti-Calles messages, as well as "pro-patria" certificates, likely served as forms of fundraising.¹⁸⁸ Other activities included highly visible protests in which women often played a leading role. At one such protest, groups from various neighborhoods assembled to write messages on green, white, and red paper that they tied to similarly

¹⁸⁵ Informe de Agente 18, AGN, IPS, vol. 228, exp. 33, fs: 20-24 (April 7, 1925).

¹⁸⁶ AGN, IPS, vol. 228, exp. 33, fs: 83. On the meeting at Cine Trianón, see AGN, IPS, vol. 228, exp. 33, fs: 61.

¹⁸⁷ While the capital did not see the type of bloody conflict that occurred elsewhere, Mexico City played a key role in efforts to raise funds and smuggle ammunition. On January 7, 1928, María Goyaz established one of the first women's brigades in Mexico City in order to buy and smuggle easily-obtainable ammunition. Jean Meyer describes the Liga's members as recruited from the middle and lower classes. María Goyaz, for example, was a junior employee. See Jean A. Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People Between Church and State, 1926-1929*, trans. Richard Southern (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 132, 136.

¹⁸⁸ On the stamps, see Centro de Estudios de Historia de México (CONDUMEX), Mexico City [CEHM], Cristeros. Fondo CLXXXII, Los impresos, C3 L188-L189-L190. For the "pro-patria" certificates, see CEHM, Cristeros, Fondo CLXXXII, Los impresos, C11 L1077.

colored balloons. On December 4, 1926, each neighborhood leader released the balloons at the appointed hour of noon. Three hundred balloons filled the sky over Mexico City with the colors of the Mexican flag. The messages invited residents of the city to join the Liga in denouncing President Calles.¹⁸⁹

In July 1926, the Liga called on the citizens of Mexico to boycott tax payments and luxury spending in order to paralyze the social and economic life of the country.¹⁹⁰ Women took an active role in distributing the Liga's boycott propaganda. Most likely, women's association with consumerism made them a special target of the campaign. Spy reports written for President Calles and Secretary of Economy Luis Napoleón Morones detailed the Liga's inner workings. The Catholic Ladies' Association named commissions of young women to boycott commercial houses.¹⁹¹ Leaflets called on Catholics to abstain from attending the theatre or cinema, using a car, traveling in first class, visiting the barber or hairdresser, or buying sweets, fruit, soft drinks, whims, and cigarettes. They were also urged to refrain from buying flowers, books, music, and dresses.¹⁹²

In an effort to demonstrate the boycott's success, the leaflet cited the economic difficulties of five cinemas. Ticket sales at the Majestic, which normally took in 800

¹⁸⁹ María de los Angeles Limón y Lascuráin, interview with author, Cuernavaca, Mexico, April 17, 2007. According to participant Cristina Limon Lascuráin, the commotion caused by the balloons brought Calles out onto the balcony of the presidential palace. He worried that the protest was the work of his political rival Álvaro Obregón. María Cristina Limón y Lascuráin, "Una remembranza de tiempos inolvidables" (1998, unpublished manuscript in author's possession), 13-14.

¹⁹⁰ Circular No. 2-A (July 14, 1926), Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de México [AHAM] Base de José Mora y del Río, 1909-1928, caja 31, exp. 31.

¹⁹¹ Informes para Luis N. Morones. FAPECFT, FEC, f: 3, serie 08, exp. 2, inv. 1392, leg. 1 (1/1) (August 30, 1926).

¹⁹² Impulse a los Cobardes. AGN, IPS, vol. 228, exp. 33, fs: 122-123.

pesos daily, plummeted to 189 pesos in the first week of August. Other cinemas like the Parisian went from 800 pesos to 129 pesos before finally closing.¹⁹³ For the rest of the year 1926, the Liga published statistics that they claimed proved the campaign's success in crippling businesses.¹⁹⁴ That same year, the city reported the closure of two cinemas in colonias Roma and Juarez, although twenty-six continued to function.¹⁹⁵ While the Liga did not meet its objective of paralyzing the Mexican economy, its efforts forged a united urban Catholic front that aided the Cristero cause.

Catholics and non-Catholics alike remarked on the lack of faithful compliance with the boycott by individuals of the middle- and upper classes. According to Rivero y Martínez, many stores wrapped purchases in newspaper for Catholics who broke the boycott.¹⁹⁶ The conservative newspaper *El Hombre libre* blamed the failure of the boycott on egoism and a lack of solidarity, especially among *empleados* who would not scale back on their favorite diversions, or wear a used suit, or change their dining habits.¹⁹⁷ Others felt that the boycott only hurt small businesses and the poorer classes.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ LNDR pamphlet, AGN, IPS, vol. 228, exp. 33, fs: 227-228 (November 7, 1926).

¹⁹⁴ LNDR newsletter, AGN, IPS, vol. 228, exp. 33, fs: 227-228 (August 14, 1926). The newsletter claims that five cinemas suffered declining revenue. See also AHAM, Base Pascual Díaz Barreto, caja 41, exp. 2 (August 14, 1926).

¹⁹⁵ *Memorias del Ayuntamiento*, 1926, AHCM.

¹⁹⁶ Rivero y Martínez, *Entropía*, vol. 2, 82 (December 1926).

¹⁹⁷ "Algo más sobre el boicot en 1926," *El Hombre Libre*, February 1, 1935, 1.

¹⁹⁸ Such sentiment was expressed in the one-step foxtrot called "El Boycot" by Ricardo García de Arellano: "The boycotters are walking / very sadly and injurious / because without motive or cause / falls the "SANCTION" / The musician, the unemployed / and the poor small businessman / carry the face of contrition / the lack of "NUTRITION.""" AGN, Prop. Art y Lit. c. 465, exp. 3407, f: 2 (1926).

Many Catholics involved in Liga activities faced police scrutiny. Some ended up in jail. The participation of large numbers of women in public protests tested notions of female honor, particularly the middle-class idea of women's place in the private sphere. In February 1926, the Mexico City police violently repressed a group of demonstrating Catholic women. In response, the Central Committee of the *Damas Católicas* urged Mexicans to tie black ribbons on the doors of their homes or work places.¹⁹⁹ Active Catholic women feared government spies, who reported on "suspicious" activities and neighbors, who collaborated with government agents. The bulk of the illegal activities of Catholic women involved efforts to maintain religious services and religious schooling. Their defense of the Faith meant real experiences with imprisonment, often with their young daughters in tow.²⁰⁰

The Liga's boycott may have exasperated the Mexican government, but not enough for it to make concessions. Apparently, former President Obregón said cynically that far from prejudicing the economy, the boycott favorably lowered inflationary conditions.²⁰¹ The economic situation of 1926 was already dire due to bad harvests, a fall in petroleum production, a slump in the price of henequen, and the fall in the price of silver on the world market. Wealthy Catholics, fearing the impact of an economic slowdown on their own businesses, succeeded in convincing the Vatican and certain leaders of the Liga to abandon the boycott. Manuel Gómez

¹⁹⁹ "Un Liston Negro," Archivo Histórico de la Unión Femenina Católica Mexicana [AHUFCM], caja 18, exp. 38 (February 25, 1926).

²⁰⁰ Amalia López Reyes, "Problema religioso en México y su repercusión en la colonia Santa María la Ribera," (paper presented at the Third Community Colloquium entitled "Una mirada a la Santa María la Ribera," Mexico City, November 26-27, 2003, recorded on cassette tape and held at the Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City).

²⁰¹ Rivero y Martínez, *Entropía*, vol. 2, 82 (December 1926).

Morín, future founder of the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, or PAN) and head of the State Bank (*Banco Central*) founded by President Calles, led the opposition to civic or armed resistance.²⁰²

In 1926, the Calles administration also expedited new laws elaborated by Secretary of Education José Manuel Puig Casauranc that further limited the action of private and religious schools. Under the threat of law, these schools were forced to secularize and to incorporate themselves into the Secretary of Education. Authorities disallowed school names that indicated religious identity, closed school chapels, and stripped the classrooms of all religious paraphernalia. School directors could not be religious ministers of any kind and had to subject themselves to official vigilance.²⁰³ Many religious schools closed out of refusal to incorporate into the state system.²⁰⁴

National Parents' Union (*Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia*, or UNPF), an organization created in 1917 with a self-defined middle-class membership, responded. Although officially secular, the National Parents' Union was closely united with the Roman Catholic Church and coordinated parental action in all schools, but principally in private ones.²⁰⁵ The Union proclaimed the right of parents by natural law to educate their children in conformity with their own beliefs.²⁰⁶ By

²⁰² See Jean A. Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People Between Church and State, 1926-1929*, trans. Richard Southern (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 80.

²⁰³ On the history of religious and public education in this period, see Patience A. Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003).

²⁰⁴ In 1932, private secondary schools were obligated to adjust to the same terms as the primary schools. See Soledad Loaeza, *Clases medias y política en México* (México, DF: El Colegio de México, 1999), 118.

²⁰⁵ Valentina Torres Septién, *La educación privada en México, 1903-1976* (México, DF: El Colegio de México; Universidad Iberoamericana, 2004), 50, 94.

²⁰⁶ Torres Septién, *La educación privada en México*, 94, 107.

1929, the Union felt itself triumphant after a presidential decree recognized the UNPF parents as part of a newly created Council of Primary Education for the Federal District (*Consejo de Educación Primaria para el Distrito Federal*).²⁰⁷

Conclusion

Protests by Catholics over the right to practice their faith and receive religious education launched them into the public sphere as they participated in civic debates about what values would inform a modern Mexico.²⁰⁸ They entered a public sphere already galvanized by protests over the dearth of urban services and housing, and rise in crime. After suffering during the Revolution, middle-class residents took an active role in the politics of urban reconstruction. Early political decrees and government programs like the *expedios municipales* highlight the importance the new post-revolutionary governments placed on the middle class for state consolidation. This post-revolutionary government attention is not surprising, considering that the revolutionary leadership was itself middle class in origin. Accordingly, the administrations of Obregón and Calles took part in a larger transnational discussion that considered the middle class to be a crucial sector for national development strategies.

The middle class struggled to reposition itself within the newly expanded post-revolutionary public sphere that incorporated the traditionally marginalized

²⁰⁷ Loaeza, *Clases medias y política en México*, 103.

²⁰⁸ Stephen J.C. Andes, "Catholic Social Movements, the Vatican, and the Political Sphere: Mexico City and Santiago de Chile, 1915-1925" (paper presented at the Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies, Flagstaff, Arizona, April 9-12, 2008).

popular groups (*el pueblo*). Letters from Mexico City residents to post-revolutionary administrations reveal a sector self-identified as middle class partly through its ability to conspicuously display class standing through “decent” clothing. Petitioners appealing for government help did not consider such requests threatening to their class position. Indeed, they continued an old tradition of subjects appealing to the ruler for aid to secure their caste/class distinction. At the same time, the Revolution brought promises by military leaders and guaranteed basic rights under the Constitution of 1917. In this new moral economy, the middle class joined other Mexicans in demanding affordable rents, housing, and urban services.

In the volatile climate of the 1920s, the middle class entered the public sphere in diverse political and tactical ways. The middle class never acted as a unified front. They represented a range of political positions from supporting Calles during the 1924 election to joining the Vasconcelos anti-reelectionist campaign against Calles’ appointed candidate Pascual Ortiz Rubio in 1929. Some members of the middle class joined militant street protests and unions associated with working-class movements. Others eschewed such tactics and chose to petition for urban services like lighting and paving. Such calls for material help surfaced at the neighborhood level. Neighborhoods also initiated highly organized responses to Calles’ anti-clerical policies. In the colonia Santa María la Ribera, residents worked to improve and defend their neighborhood and in the process articulated a middle-class identity.

Chapter 3: The Neighborhood of Santa María la Ribera

Introduction

One of Mexico City's first suburban neighborhoods (*colonias*) to develop in the mid-nineteenth century, Santa María de la Ribera attracted middle-class merchants, artisans, professionals, and office workers. Using the neighborhood of Santa María as a case study, the chapter shows a middle class oriented around neighborhood associations, parks, schools, churches, and cultural centers that shaped the "pedestrian rhetoric" of the neighborhood.²⁰⁹ Social geographers like David Harvey and Edward Soja remind us to see space as an important category of analysis. They draw on the work of Walter Benjamin, who understood the nineteenth-century arcade as not a "grid of reference or location" but "a way of life, a metaphoric allusion to a form of sensibility." Benjamin's understanding of space as a "way of seeing" allows us to consider how space both produced and expressed identity.²¹⁰

The neighborhood served as a space to organize beautification projects, patriotic festivals, religious festivities, and social activism. Residents' activity belies common claims of the middle class as apathetic and Mexican civic culture as weak. Numerous religious organizations and ardent Roman Catholic residents in the neighborhood joined the resistance to the state's forced secularization policies of the 1920s and 1930s. Other organizations arranged civic events and patriotic celebrations.

²⁰⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 107.

²¹⁰ Michael Keith and Steve Pile, "Introduction," in Michael Keith and Steve Pile, eds. *Place and the Politics of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 8. See David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Edward W. Soja, *Post-Modern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989).

Residents united in efforts to beautify and defend their neighborhood. Both as liberals and Catholics, the middle class actively participated in neighborhood life.

The Neighborhood of Santa María la Ribera, 1860-1915

In 1859, two brothers of the Flores family sought permission to establish a pretty village on the western outskirts of the city center where residents could benefit from the capital's conveniences while at the same time enjoy the "open space and good air of the countryside." In their petition to the municipality, they described a neighborhood with regular blocks of spacious streets, a park (*alameda*), a market, a church and a school. They wanted to sell lots of land at a moderate price so that people of little means could acquire property while still being able to work in the city.²¹¹ The area was conveniently located between the main thoroughfare of the Avenida de San Cosme and the Buenavista railway station.²¹² The existence of 81 wells by 1882 was a wonderful asset in a city with frequent water shortages. Despite its auspicious location, the population of the colonia developed slowly.

Only after 1880 did the colonia begin to expand with the arrival of running water and installation of some lighting. City expansion projects in the 1870s brought a tramway service to the neighborhood. The opening of small industries also stimulated growth. This meant that the colonia became more socially diverse as workers lived and worked in the new factories. A census from 1882 lists a

²¹¹ AHCM, Ayuntamiento, Colonias, vol. 519, exp. 2 (1859). See also AHCM, Ayuntamiento, Colonias, vol. 519, exp. 1 (1858) and exp. 14 (1891).

²¹² See María Dolores Morales, "La expansión de la ciudad de México en el siglo XIX, El caso de los fraccionamientos," in *Ciudad de México: Ensayo de construcción de una historia*, ed. Moreno Toscano (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1978), 146. See also Richard Morse, ed., *The Urban Development of Latin America, 1750-1920* (Stanford, CA: Latin American Center, 1971).

brickmaking factory, the Chambón silk factory that produced shawls, La Malinche and Lo Cubano chocolate factories, a sweets factory, and the Pasamanería Francesa, a lacemaking and ribbonmaking factory.²¹³

Between 1882 and 1890, the population of the colonia nearly doubled from 3,372 to 6,000.²¹⁴ The middle-class population of clerks and bureaucrats became the main targets of the real estate market. By the turn-of-the century, residents represented a range of occupations, including small industry and property owners, businessmen, professionals, military and religious men, artisans, and bricklayers. They escaped the city center where much of the middle class continued to live. In 1903, the municipal government in discussing the city's housing remarked that the middle class suffered in dense and expensive housing in the center. In particular, private and public employees lacked "comfortable and hygienic living quarters." But the government acknowledged that the emigration of many families towards the colonias had led "the middle class ... to construct housing, generally of one floor but spacious, in the colonias of Guerrero and Santa María."²¹⁵

Commercial development of outlying neighborhoods specifically for families of government employees, artisans, and lower-end professionals led to the construction of new styles of residential single-dwelling buildings. Long and narrow building lots, prevalent in colonias like Santa María, led to the construction of homes

²¹³ Berta Tello Peón, *Santa María la Ribera* (México, DF: Editorial Clío, 1998), 43-45.

²¹⁴ Tello Peón, *Santa María la Ribera*, 43.

²¹⁵ "La extensión y la densidad de la población," *Boletín Municipal*, October 13, 1903, 1-2, AHCM. The colonia Guerrero constructed on the other side of the Buenavista train station to the east of Santa María first attracted largely a working-class population, but quickly also became home to clerks and bureaucrats.

that consisted of a row of rooms coming off a long narrow corridor. Other layouts required family members to move within the house through doors connecting one room to the next, starting with the living room facing the street, followed by bedrooms and a bathroom. At the back of the home, the kitchen often opened onto a small, enclosed patio and small garden, or faced out to a narrow patio that ran alongside the corridor of the rooms.²¹⁶ Some wealthier families built two-story homes with rooms encircling a large patio of stone columns and arcades. Interiors included neo-colonial decorative motifs with lobed arches, tiled facades, and complex moldings. The buildings' street facades were lavishly decorated with brick, channeled stucco, or even masonry facing, and elaborate windows and balustrades indicating the economic status of its owners.²¹⁷

In the early years of the neighborhood's development, single-family houses (*unifamiliares*) dominated. Over time, the neighborhood also boasted multifamily buildings (*multifamiliares*) for those families unable to afford the former but nevertheless desirous of modern housing outside the traditional city center. Slightly above the grade of tenement housing (*vecindades*), the multifamily buildings consisted of two-storey, simple stucco-covered buildings. They housed several families in apartments of two or more rooms and often accommodated shops and businesses on the ground floor. More financially secure individuals or families lived

²¹⁶ See Carlos Obregón Santacilia, *50 años de arquitectura mexicana, 1900-1950* (México, DF: Patria, 1952). The descriptions also come from my visits to Santa María la Ribera between January-April 2007.

²¹⁷ See Vicente Martín Hernández, *Arquitectura doméstica de la ciudad de México, 1890-1925* (México, DF: UMAM, 1981). See also Rosalva Loreto López, *Casas, viviendas y hogares en la historia de México* (México, DF: Colegio de México, 2001).

in the rooms at that front and back of the buildings, which were often larger and more expensive to rent.

Housing architecture and design reveal how Mexico City's middle class conceived of public and private space. The decline in the presence of workshops in homes indicates that many artisans no longer lived and worked in the same place, dividing the private world of the family and public world of work. Most of these homes functioned separate from economic production, meaning that professional, white-collar workers, prosperous artisans, and shopkeepers left home each day for an office, store, or workshop. In Mexico City, as elsewhere, a growing number of homes that contained rooms for specific functions, such as bathrooms, bedrooms, and a sitting or living room.²¹⁸ In addition, a general trend toward a small number of bedrooms indicates families with fewer children and/or fewer extended family members living with them. Many new families were migrants to Mexico City in search of work, leaving extended family behind in provincial towns.²¹⁹

Interior furnishings and decorations revealed a middle-class understanding of the home as a place of rest and comfort as well as emotional investment.²²⁰

²¹⁸ On middle-class homes in nineteenth-century Spain, see Jesus Cruz, "Building Liberal Identities in 19th Century Madrid: The Role of Middle Class Material Culture," *The Americas* 60/3 (January 2004): 391-410. On the relation between domestic architecture and the middle class in the United States, see Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988).

²¹⁹ On changes to private houses that reflected changes in the family, see Diana Hernando, "Casa y Familia: Spatial Biographies in Nineteenth-Century Buenos Aires," cited in Jean Franco, "Women, Fashion, and the Moralists in Early-Nineteenth-Century Mexico" in *Critical Passions: Selected Essays*, eds. Mary Louise Pratt and Kathleen Newman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 461-475.

²²⁰ In his study of domestic life in Victorian England, John Tosh argues that the home shifted from a "pattern of residence or web of obligations [to] a profound attachment" and became a "privileged site of subjectivity and fantasy." John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 4.

Throughout the nineteenth century, female family members adorned homes with handiwork like crocheted pieces bedecked with ribbon, lace, and embroidered flowers.²²¹ Tables and shelves hosted glass candy bowls, porcelain, and earthenware figurines. Entranceways, corridors, balconies, and patios never lacked potted plants, earthenware pots, and birdcages.²²² The enthusiasm for birds and plants may have hearkened from the provincial origins of many middle-class families. By the end of the century, photo albums served as sentimental reminders of relatives left behind. Portraiture paintings and photographs of family members hung alongside religious calendars as well as lithographs of Mexican geographical and archeological sites.²²³

By the 1890s, Santa María was a vibrant community revolving around schools, churches, markets, theaters, cinemas, museums, and the main square called the *alameda*. The neighborhood boasted a high density of public, private, and religious schools. Institutions of learning reflected the importance residents placed on schooling and erudition. Many families chose to send their children to the neighborhood's private schools. Santa María also had a number of institutions of higher learning, including the public Superior Normal School (Escuela Normal Superior), the School of Higher Education (Escuela de Altos Estudios) and the National School of Music (Escuela Nacional de Música).²²⁴ In 1896, the Jesuit-run

²²¹ See Emma Cosío Villegas, "La República restaurada. La vida social," vol. 3, ed. 1, in *Historia Moderna de México*, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México, DF: Editorial Hermes, 1957), 463.

²²² See Emma Cosío Villegas, "La República restaurada, 462.

²²³ Cristina Barros and Marco Buenrostro, eds. *Vida cotidiana: Ciudad de México, 1850-1910* (México, DF: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y Artes, 1996), 65, 69.

²²⁴ The Normal School (Escuela Normal Superior) later became a part of the Faculty of Arts and Letters (Facultad de Filosofía y Letra) of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad

Scientific Institute of Mexico (Instituto Científico de México) opened in the Mascarones building located in southern corner of the neighborhood. The school offered a solid foundation in religion and morality as well as modern, scientific instruction that followed the curriculum of the National Preparatory School (Escuela Nacional Preparatoria).²²⁵

Other institutions of knowledge reflected the residents' emphasis on edification. The colonia boasted two museums: the Museum of the Institute of Geology (Museo del Instituto de Geología) constructed for the 1910 centennial and the Museum of Natural History, known as the Chopo Museum (El Museo del Chopo). The latter was nicknamed the Crystal Palace (El Palacio de Cristal) because of its innovative architecture that combined iron, steel, and glass. In the 1910 centennial celebrations, the building housed the Japanese art and industry exhibit. It became the National Museum of Natural History in 1913.²²⁶ The ubiquitous presence of educational institutions in Santa María complemented a long list of well-known professionals and writers who lived in the neighborhood. Described in one memoir as the "cradle of distinguished people," the neighborhood included among its residents notable lawyers, engineers, doctors, generals, critics and historians like Jesús Galindo y Villa. Many writers also lived at some point in Santa María, including Federico

Nacional Autónoma de México, or UNAM) and moved to the University City (Ciudad Universitaria) in 1954. The music school remained in the neighborhood until 1979.

²²⁵ See Valentina Torres Septién, *La educación privada en México, 1903-1976* (México, DF: El Colegio de México, 1997).

²²⁶ The National Museum of Natural History moved to another part of the city in the 1950s, at which point the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) restored the building. The building now holds temporary expositions of science and arts, including music, theater, dance, and experimental theater.

Gamboa, Mariano Azuela, Carlos González Peña, Jaime Torres Bodet, and Carlos Pereyra.²²⁷

Shouts from the public markets and singing voices from church pews made up the everyday sounds of life in the neighborhood. Housewives and servants made daily trips north to the Dalia Market or south to San Cosme Market, an iron structure built in the Porfiriato that served the residents of both Santa María and San Rafael.²²⁸ Two parishes, El Espíritu Santo on the west side and La Sagrada Familia on the east side, offered daily masses to the faithful. In the evenings and on weekends, young men strolled around the main square (*alameda*) hoping to catch the eye of the famously beautiful women of Santa María whose movements vigilant family members and scrupulous brothers supervised.²²⁹ From the architecturally Moorish-inspired pavilion at the center of the park, musicians often filled the air with orchestral music.²³⁰ Entrepreneurs and organizations frequently requested city licenses to sell beer, soft drinks, sweets, and ice cream, as well as host children's dances in the park.²³¹

²²⁷ Salvador Rivero y Martínez, *Entropía: Calor humano de una ciudad (México, 1920-1930)* vol. 1 (México, DF: Porrúa, 1982), 79. In 1915, Mariano Azuela wrote the most famous novel of the Mexican Revolution, *The Underdogs (Los de Abajo)*, as well as several novels about Mexico's petite bourgeoisie. His son, Arturo Azuela, has written a series of novels dedicated to the neighborhood of Santa María: *Tamaño del infierno* (1974), *La casa de las mil vírgenes* (1983), *Los ríos de la memoria (Inventiones en Santa María la Ribera)* (2003), and *Alameda de Santa María* (2003).

²²⁸ A third market opened on the west side in 1925. Salvador Rivero y Martínez, *Entropía: Calor humano de una ciudad (México, 1920-1930)* vol. 1 (México, DF: Porrúa, 1982), 77.

²²⁹ Salvador Rivero y Martínez, *Entropía: Calor humano de una ciudad (México, 1920-1930)*, vol. 1 (México, DF: Porrúa, 1982), 80.

²³⁰ Architect José Ramón Ibarrola constructed the Moorish pavilion for the New Orleans International Exposition in 1884. Afterwards, the pavilion was transported to Mexico City's central park (*alameda*) where it served as the headquarters of the state lottery (Lotería para la Beneficencia Pública). For the 1910 centennial, the pavilion was restored and placed in the main park (*alameda*) of Santa María la Ribera.

²³¹ AHCM, Ayuntamiento, Diversiones Públicos, vol. 813, exp. 1768 (March 21, 1918).

Like other families of Mexico City, those of Santa María took excursions to Dolores Cemetery, where they enjoyed a view of the city, or to the capital's main square, where balloon vendors' shrill whistles hoped to catch the attention of children and parents. Ramón Beteta recounts how on Sundays his father took the children on long walks ending at the capital's main square, where they sat on a bench and listened to a military band. Deeply patriotic, the elder Beteta was fascinated by the charro costume that came to signify Mexican identity. Much to Beteta's chagrin, his father insisted that his son don the charro suit during their Sunday walks. He taught his children to not feel "ashamed of wearing the typical sombrero of our Motherland."²³²

Nights and weekends, residents of Santa María sought out the neighborhood's varied entertainment and amusements. Theaters like the Bernardo Garcia Theater, just off the main square, presented plays and vaudeville shows. In 1912, the theater owner petitioned for a license to show movies.²³³ A year later, he requested a license to give free dance classes.²³⁴ In response to the latter request, the city commissioner wrote that he did not see a problem with granting the license since the colonia's best families would not "scandalously stir up trouble."²³⁵

In April 1912, the Gómez Rivera Salon situated on Carpio Street advertised a "Great Gala Function." The show boasted duets by Flor de Lis and Conchita Campos and performances by Professor Picam. A three-round Jiu-Jitsu fight featured the

²³² Beteta, *Jarano*, 13, 16.

²³³ AHCM, vol. 1392, exp. 748 (February 15, 1912).

²³⁴ AHCM, vol. 1399, exp. 1289 (April 14, 1913).

²³⁵ AHCM, vol. 1399, exp. 1289 (April 17, 1913).

“colossal mulatto” Mr. Johnson. Audiences could watch art films and plays like “Some Country Days in Chapultepec” and “Halley’s Comet.” Tickets cost twelve to thirty centavos with half-price admission for children.²³⁶ The local theater competed with the hot air balloons, pantomimes, and wrestling matches of the circuses and street theaters (*carpas*) like Circo Treviño and Feria de Sevilla that performed on the edges of the colonia.²³⁷ The theaters also competed with the popular new moving pictures that appeared at the end of the nineteenth century. The neighborhood had three movie houses by 1910.²³⁸

Community Organizing in Porfirian Santa María la Ribera, 1890-1910

Historians of working-class Mexico City have argued that types of residences and neighborhoods helped foster a class identity. John Lear argues that the creation of distinct working-class and popular neighborhoods, where residents lived, worked, consumed, and socialized in late nineteenth-century Mexico City, set the stage for growing assertiveness and class-recognition among workers and the urban poor.²³⁹ Similarly, V.M. Hernández asserts that poor and working-class Mexicans began to elaborate a new sense of community in tenement houses. Yet he denies this process of

²³⁶ AHCM, vol. 1392, exp. 799 (April 25, 1912).

²³⁷ Permission para verificar ascenciones de globo. ACHM, *Diversiones Públicas*, vol. 1393, exp. 887, (1911-1912). See also ACHM, *Diversiones Públicas*, vol. 1398, exp. 1196 (1912-1913) and AHCM, *Diversiones Públicas*, vol. 813, exp. 1792 (July 17, 1919). For the licensing of a “Greek-Roman wrestling match,” see ACHM, *Diversiones Públicas*, vol. 1398, exp. 1200 (1912-1913).

²³⁸ See ACHM, *Diversiones Públicas*, vol. 1383, exp. 96, (1906) and vol. 1387, exp. 370 (1910-1911); ACHM, *Diversiones Públicas*, vol. 1391, exp. 702 (1911-1912). Petitions for movie house business licenses occurred as early as 1899. AHCM, *Diversiones Públicas*, vol. 805, exp. 922 (1899).

²³⁹ John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 485-486.

class identification and community spirit to the middle class because its members' housing and neighborhoods fostered a greater sense of independence.²⁴⁰ While middle-class homes promoted more individuality and autonomy in comparison to life in tenement houses, middle-class residents certainly cultivated a sense of class belonging and pride through participation in their neighborhood's civic and religious life.

Neighborhood organizations, like the spatial parameters of the colonia itself, provided a means to articulate class identity and a sense of belonging. While civic organizations were not the only factor responsible for class identity formation, associational life played an important role.²⁴¹ Neighborhood organizations sought to obtain and improve urban services for purposes of safety, health, and beautification.. Residents participated in sacred and secular realms, often intertwining their civic and religious lives. One such individual, Reverend José María Troncoso, exemplified the range of neighborhood participation in Santa María as a man both of the cloth and of science, and as model of civic virtue.

The Private Committee for the Improvement of the Colonia of Santa María la Ribera took charge of improving community aesthetics and hygiene. Efforts included upgrading lighting and laying grass in the main square (*alameda*).²⁴² Fear of

²⁴⁰ V.M Hernández, *Arquitectura doméstica de la Ciudad de México, 1890-1925* (México, DF: UNAM, 1981), 143.

²⁴¹ In his study of middle-class formation in nineteenth-century Leeds, R.J. Morris claims that voluntary organizations essentially created the British middle-class identity. R.J. Morris, *Class, Sect, and Party: The Making of the British Middle Class: Leeds, 1820-1850* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

²⁴² Junta Privada de Mejoras en la Colonia de Sta. María de la Ribera. AHCM, Ayuntamiento, Asociaciones, vol. 388 (Feb, 4, 1902). On the laying of grass, see ACHM, Gobierno del Distrito: festividades, vol. 1609, exp. 122 (1906).

epidemics and disease provoked demands for improvements in drainage and for the paving of streets. In 1900, district VII, to which Santa María belonged, benefited from one of the lowest mortality rates in the city. The area was listed only after district VIII, which included the upper-class neighborhoods of San Rafael, Juárez, Roma, and Condesa.²⁴³ But residents worried about the poor sanitation and drainage problems in a neighborhood that lay to the north of Santa María. The industrial neighborhood of El Chopo needed vast improvements.²⁴⁴ In 1911 reports described El Chopo as largely underdeveloped and emitting harmful waste into nearby lots and ditches.²⁴⁵

Neighborhood committees were also organized around civic holidays and patriotic festivities. The member-elected local Patriotic Committee (*Junta Patriótica*) coordinated two days of festivities for Mexico's Independence Day. In 1905, the committee spent over 800 pesos on the celebration. Military bands, fireworks, balloons, and an all-night dance in the San Cosme Market entertained the celebrants. Other events included acrobatics, a traditional flower war, horse and bicycle racing, climbing a greased pole with ropes (*dos cucañas con ropas*), toy car racing.²⁴⁶ Two years later, the committee noted similar activities, as well as the reading of the

²⁴³ District VII registered 32 per 1,000 and district VIII recorded 30 per 1,000. The highest mortality rate in Mexico City was in district II with 77 per 1,000. See "La mortalidad comprada de los cuarteles de la capital," *Boletín Municipal*, March 6, 1903, AHCM.

²⁴⁴ "La mortalidad comprada de los cuarteles de la capital," *Boletín Municipal*, March 6, 1903, AHCM.

²⁴⁵ Moisés González Navarro, *Población y sociedad en México, 1900-1970*, vol. 1 (México: UNAM, 1974), 143, 145-6.

²⁴⁶ Festividades de 15 and 16 septiembre. AHCM, vol. 1608, exp. 104 (September 5, 1905). For the festivities in 1900, see ACHM, vol. 1612, exp. 274 (1900).

Proclamation of Independence by prominent residents and the traditional shout of Independence. Other civic holidays, like Cinco de Mayo, featured circuses, climbing a pole to obtain prizes (*palo esebado*), a raffle, and hot air balloons.²⁴⁷

For devout Catholics, religious activities took place alongside secular celebrations.²⁴⁸ Many of the neighborhood's inhabitants served as members of a wide variety of vigils, penances, and associations that organized activities for the observance of saints' days, fasts, and various religious festivals. The faithful upheld long traditions of pageants like the Christmas *posadas*. They attended La Sagrada Familia and El Espíritu Santo churches for regular services, catechism classes, confirmations, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Some belonged as lay people to the Order of the Josefino Missionaries (*Congregación de Misioneros Josefinos*), whose headquarters were located in Santa María. The day of commemoration for the order's patron saint, Saint Joseph, brought residents into the street, parading statues, holding candles, and singing hymns. Others donated time and money to city-wide religious organizations, including the Catholic Ladies' Association (*Asociación de Damas Católicas*), the Knights of Columbus (*Caballeros de Colón*), the Catholic Young Men's Association, (*Asociación Católica de Juventud Masculina*), and the Catholic Young Women's Association (*Asociación Católica de Juventud Feminina*), which drew from members from the upper and middle classes.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ AHCM, vol. 1060, exp. 90 (April 19, 1918).

²⁴⁸ While this chapter deals specifically with Roman Catholics, residents undoubtedly also belonged to Protestant denominations and Masonic lodges. On Protestantism in Mexico, see Jean Pierre Bastián, *Los disidentes. Sociedades protestantes y revolución en México, 1872-1911* (México, DF: Colegio de México, 1989).

²⁴⁹ Silvia Arrom discusses how the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul drew from not only a restricted elite but also from middle and lower-middle classes, including employees, clerks, and occasionally

Activity in Santa María at the end of the nineteenth came out of a long history of lay religious participation in Mexico. A renewed effort to involve the church laity in social issues came in 1891 when Pope Leo XIII issued the papal encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. The pope called on church members to organize in order to counter the rising tide of socialism and liberalism.²⁵⁰ Social Catholicism marked an explicit engagement with the political, economic, and social issues associated with conflicts between labor and capital. The papal address called on members around the world to involve themselves in social matters.

In 1893, the Roman Catholic newspaper *The Friend of Truth* (*El amigo de la verdad*) urged the creation of Catholic worker circles (*circulos de obreros católicos*).²⁵¹ The groups aimed to teach workers how to save, develop a fraternal spirit, and establish a vigorous work ethic.²⁵² José María Troncoso, a priest in Santa María, played an instrumental role in establishing Mexico City's worker circles. Through his work, the neighborhood became one of the main centers for Catholic labor organization. The circles aimed at helping artisans and factory workers who

artisans. Silvia M. Arrom, "Mexican Laywomen Spearhead a Catholic Revival: The Ladies of Charity, 1863-1910," in *Religious Culture in Modern Mexico*, ed. Martin A. Nesvig (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 50-77.

²⁵⁰ Social Catholicism called for measures similar to those taken by Catholics who had sought to reestablish the centrality of religion in public life after mid nineteenth-century liberals pushed for a secularized society. Manuel Ceballos Ramírez, *Historia de Rerum Novarum en México (1867-1931)* (México, DF: Instituto Mexicano de Doctrina Social Cristiana, 2004).

²⁵¹ At the National Confederation of Catholic Workers' Circles in 1913, the main goals of the Catholic workers' circles included the establishment of schools, mutual aid societies, and savings accounts. Letter from Bishop of Zamora to Father Troncoso. March 22, 1913. Archivo General de los Misioneros Josefinos, Mexico City [AGMJ], SG02-05, exp. Circular Obrero (1913).

²⁵² Villaneda, 344. Catholics also organized professional unions and argued for the need for social reforms directly related to the middle class. Alfredo Mendez Medina, *La Cuestión Social en México* (Mexico, DF: 1913), 11, 34. A document from 1914 lists professional unions under the category of workers' circles. See AGMJ, SG02-05, exp. Circular Obreros (February 10, 1914).

inhabited and worked in the colonia. In 1908, Troncoso established a Catholic Worker Union to coordinate the worker circles.²⁵³ In an assembly held in December 1911, 46 circles were represented with a total of 12,300 members.²⁵⁴ The union's motto "Some for Others and God for All" ("*Unos por Otros y Dios por Todos*") was displayed on cards given out as keepsakes that featured an image of a fair-skinned Saint Joseph holding a white child.²⁵⁵ With its base in an annex of the El Espíritu Santo church, the union was known as the Center for the Apostleship of the Cross (*Centro del Apostolado de la Cruz*). The center's main hall held Sunday School classes for workers. Other activities for workers took place around the neighborhood. For example, on Flores Street, monthly recreation events were held in the evening. A building on Santa María la Ribera Street housed a workers' school that offered classes nightly and a savings bank

Financial support for the Catholic Worker Circles came from benefit concerts attended by Santa María's well-to-do residents. A monthly fundraising event featured the music of Bizet, Verdi, Saint Saëns, and Donizetti for the price of sixty-five centavos a ticket. Supporters dedicated the money to the establishment of a cinema and a salon for the workers.²⁵⁶ The Catholic Ladies' Association raised funds to throw "moralizing and instructive fiestas" for Catholic workers. On one occasion, more than

²⁵³ Manuel Ceballos Ramírez, "Las organizaciones laborales católicas a finales del siglo XIX," in *Estado, Iglesia y Sociedad en México. Siglo XIX*, eds. Álvaro Matute, Evelia Trejo, Brian Connaughton (México, DF: UNAM, 1995).

²⁵⁴ José Miguel Romero de Solís, *El Aguijón del espíritu. Historia contemporánea de la Iglesia en México, 1892-1992* (México, DF: IMDOSOC, 2006), 142. The membership of the Catholic Workers' Circles in Mexico City consisted mainly of artisans. See Romero de Solís, 140.

²⁵⁵ See AGMJ, SG02-05, exp. Circular Obreros (May 8, 1910).

²⁵⁶ AHCM, *Diversiones Públicos*, vol. 1392, exp. 749 (March 1, 1912).

3,000 male workers and 260 female workers of the El Espíritu Santo parish attended a day-long festivity. The female organizers hired a military band to provide music and bequeathed a complete ball court. Local factories donated beer, pastries, confetti, and cookies while the workers brought balloons, fireworks, firecrackers, and flowers. "The betterment of the working class based in Catholic doctrine can save the current conflict between capital and labor," reported a city newspaper the following day.²⁵⁷

The Catholic Church played a significant role in Mexico's processes of modernization. The Church utilized public rituals, festivals, print media, and notions of thrift, recreation and the purifying power of work to cultivate devout workers and foster a culture of capitalism.²⁵⁸ The inclusion of the Catholic Church and religion in our understandings of Mexico's modernity challenges the pervasive dichotomy that has set faith and tradition against reason and modernity.²⁵⁹ Residents' activism also disputes the accepted notion that Latin America has a weak "civic culture." The religious organizations serve as an example of participatory civil society, democratic practices, and a culture of volunteering.²⁶⁰ Moreover, devout Catholics did not bifurcate their religious and liberal identities. They took part in both kinds of organizations and celebrations.

²⁵⁷ AHCM, *Diversiones Públicas*, vol. 1392, exp. 749 (1911-1912).

²⁵⁸ Manuel Ceballos Ramírez, "Las organizaciones laborales católicas a finales del siglo XIX." Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

²⁵⁹ See Pamela Voekel, Bethany Moreton, and Michael Jo, "Vaya con Dios: Religion and the Transnational History of the Americas," *History Compass* 5/5 (July 2007): 1604-1639. See also Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 15.

²⁶⁰ Arrom makes this argument for lay activity in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul's in the second half of nineteenth century. Arrom, "Mexican Laywomen Spearhead a Catholic Revival: The Ladies of Charity, 1863-1910."

Father Troncoso provides a good example of an individual who saw his work of building a Christian social order as a civic and religious duty.²⁶¹ He had arrived in Santa María as a newly ordained priest and member of the Missionaries of Saint Joseph. He served as chaplain to the order's high school (*Colegio Preparatoria de Señor San José*), as well as general secretary of the religious order. In 1897, he became director of the order's magazine *El Propagador de la Devoción a Sr. San José*. In 1910, Rome appointed him general procurer and chaplain to Mexico City's Knights of Columbus.

As a resident of the colonia, he took leadership roles in neighborhood civic organizations. In 1909, he served as treasurer to the material improvement committee and treasurer to Police District Seven, to which Santa María belonged. He was also active in liberal intellectual circles. He belonged to the Geography and Statistics Society and to the Scientific Alliance, whose honorable members included Díaz's finance minister José Ives Limantour, education minister Justo Sierra, and vice-presidential running mate Ramón Corral. The society's headquarters were located at the House of the Mascarones, a former Jesuit building in the southeast corner of the Santa María neighborhood.

²⁶¹ According to Enrique Galindo, Troncoso was born March 14, 1865 in Mexico City to a middle-class family (*familia bien*). He attended the Colegio Católico del Centro determined to study medicine. After the death of his mother, he changed his mind and entered seminary at the age of 18. Shortly after, he joined the relatively new order of the Missionaries of Saint Joseph. See Enrique Galindo, m.j., *El P. José Ma. Troncoso, m.j.* (México, DF: Escuela Tipográfica Josefina, 1979).

After the Destruction: Appealing to the Revolutionary State

By the end of the destructive years of the Revolution many of the wealthier families had moved out of Santa María to the grander houses along the Paseo de la Reforma. Public and private employees, shopkeepers, and artisans continued to make the neighborhood their home. In his recollections of growing up in Mexico City, Luis Ríos Montañez remembers his father's workshop located on Ciprés Street in Santa María. His father constructed wagons, popularly called *de mulitas* because they were pulled by mules.²⁶² The workshop occupied approximately five to six thousand square meters and included a carpentry and painting shop as well as an iron and bronze foundry that constructed the metal pieces for the bearings, brackets, and brakes.²⁶³ Ríos Montañez's father worked alongside other artisans, including dyers, carpenters, and shoemakers housed mainly along Santa María la Ribera Street, which served as the main thoroughfare into the neighborhood.²⁶⁴ The colonia also became home to more factory workers. By the 1920s, small industries in the colonia included Alfa (sweets), La Castellán (pastries), Sidral Mundet (beverage), Phillips Company (furniture), Mendozabal and Imperial (matchsticks), Royalcross Jabón "La Luz" (perfume), La Suiza (chemicals), and La Palma y Cosmopolita (pharmaceuticals).

²⁶² The *mulita* was a type of vehicle sought after by hacienda owners, who counted on small wagons to transport their goods to major railway lines.

²⁶³ Luis Ríos Montañez, "De Tlalayote a México," *Mi pueblo durante la revolución*, vol. 1 ((México, DF: Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares, Dirección General de Culturas Populares, Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1985), 91-92.

²⁶⁴ Tello Peón, 44-45.

New residents rented out rooms or floors in the haciendas and stately homes that had once been retreats for the wealthy.²⁶⁵ Teresa Mará Careaga Soriano remembers that the country houses, constructed in the eighteenth and turn-of-the nineteenth century, still existed in the 1920s along the Puente de Alvarado, one of the main streets bordering the neighborhood of Santa María. One of these homes with large patio garden of a kiosk, fountain, rustic benches, and flowerpots housed her uncle Lio, his wife, and three children. They rented the bottom floor and another family of five rented the top floor. At the back of the home, in an apartment adapted from the old servants' quarters, resided a German family. A house that had once been occupied by one family now housed three.²⁶⁶

In his memories of the home of a classmate from what he describes as a poor middle-class family, Salvador Rivero y Martínez recounts a clean and well-cared for house filled with many rustic family portraits, a color lithograph of the Sacred Heart, and a small plaster bust of the late President Porfirio Díaz.²⁶⁷ Hired help assisted with the cooking, washing, and cleaning. Large number of servants in the capital according to census figures indicates that many middle-class homes employed at least one domestic helper.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ See Vicente Martín Hernández, *Arquitectura doméstica de la Ciudad de México, 1890-1925* (México, DF: UNAM, 1981).

²⁶⁶ Teresa María Careaga Soriano, *Mi México de los veintes* (México, DF: UNAM, 1994), 17-18.

²⁶⁷ Salvador Rivero y Martínez, *Entropía: Calor humano de una ciudad (México, 1920-1930)* vol. 1 (México, DF: Porrúa, 1982), 189.

²⁶⁸ México, Secretaría de Fomento, Oficina Tipográfica, *Censo de Población 1930*; México, Secretaría de Fomento, Oficina Tipográfica, *Censo de Población 1940*.

Santa María residents looked to their neighborhood as a source of pride and an outward manifestation of their civic virtue, religious convictions, and class identity. Yet political instability and continuing economic troubles in the post-revolutionary period disrupted urban services and maintenance. José María Benitez remembers how “the city found itself aging” from neglect.²⁶⁹ Santa María, like many neighborhoods in the city, suffered from the proper provisioning of potable water, lighting, garbage collection, and street cleaning. The Moorish-styled pavilion on the alameda faced disrepair and residents complained about unhealthy sanitary conditions in the neighborhood’s theaters.²⁷⁰ Officials and residents also blamed unsanitary conditions on the Barrio de Atlampa that buttressed Santa María to the northwest where the Carranza administration (1917-1920) had given out for free land to workers and the poor.²⁷¹

A notorious criminal band called the Grey Automobile Gang terrorized the well-to-do residents of Mexico City in the 1920s and represented the world turned upside down that the Revolution had wrought.²⁷² According to newspaper reports, the gang first targeted the wealthy families in Santa María.²⁷³ Gang members disguised themselves as military police with search warrants and entered homes and businesses

²⁶⁹ Benitez, 139-140.

²⁷⁰ AHCM, Gobierno del Distrito, *Diversiones*, vol. 1398, exp. 1236 and vol. 1399, exp. 1254 (1913).

²⁷¹ Berra Stoppa, “La expansión de la Ciudad de México y los conflictos urbanos. 1900-1930” (PhD diss., El Colegio de México, 1982), 114, 207.

²⁷² “Existe en México una banda de ladrones de automoviles,” *Cronos*, June 21, 1922, p. 1. Public speculation that some Carrancista generals were colluding with the gang spread with news that General Pablo González, then governor of the Federal District, had signed the search warrants.

²⁷³ See Agustín Sánchez González, *La banda del automóvil gris* (México, DF: Sansores & Aljure, 1997).

under the pretense of looking for enemy fighters and/or weaponry.²⁷⁴ Other assaults by armed individuals occurred daily.²⁷⁵ In 1925, José Gutiérrez, the owner of a store called "La Colonial" situated in Santa María, filed a police report after assailants the previous evening robbed his establishment of merchandise worth more than a 1000 pesos.²⁷⁶ That same year, a Santa María butcher José Ravale complained that robbers took a copper pan and other objects valuing 200 pesos from his store.²⁷⁷

Many of the neighborhood's residents associated high levels of criminal activity with the lack of lighting and proper policing.²⁷⁸ Concerns about safety appeared in the midst of the Revolution. Residents also blamed the neighborhood's poor conditions on an increase in vagrants and a lack of spaces for respectable enjoyment. In the midst of the Revolution, residents petitioned the city for material improvements. In a handwritten letter dated March 1913, Pedro Marrón complained to the city governor about the neighborhood's abandoned pavilion that had become a magnet for vagrants. Marrón asked for the repavement of the pavilion floor and for the installation of

²⁷⁴ The criminal gang inspired a ballad called the *Corrido de la banda del automóvil gris*. See Antonio Avitia Hernández, *Corridos de la capital* (México, DF: Conaculta, 2000), 102-103. In 1919, the production company Aztec Films, founded by General Pablo González, Mimí Derba, and Enrique Rosas, produced a movie about the Grey Automobile Gang. Sánchez González, *La banda del automóvil gris*, 84 and 87.

²⁷⁵ "La inseguridad en el Distrito Federal," *Cronos*, July 10, 1922, 1a, p. 3.

²⁷⁶ "La noche de ayer fue abundante en as altos y robos," *El Universal Gráfico*, February 10, 1925, 9, AGN, IPS, caja 7, exp. 1, fs: 91.

²⁷⁷ "Robos, as altos y otras actividades de los bandidos," *El Universal*, February 6, 1925, 2a, p. 10, AGN, IPS, caja 7, exp.1, fs: 52.

²⁷⁸ "La falta de policia garantiza la delincuencia," *El Globe de México*, January 28, 1925, 2a, p. 1, AGN, Oficina de Información Política y Social [IPS], caja 7, exp. 1, fs: 12; "Empieza asumir la más graves proporciones la inseguridad en la capital," *El Universal Gráfico de México*, February 3, 1925, 2, AGN, IPS, caja 7, exp. 1, fs: 43; "Una noche macabre: altos y robos en toda la población," *El Universal de México*, February 4, 1925, 9, sec. 1, AGN, IPS, caja 7, exp. 1, fs: 47.

electrical lights. Residents, Marrón argued, wanted to use the pavilion as a cultural center for roller-skating, parties and exhibitions of movies. He assured the municipality that morality would reign again in the square.²⁷⁹

In 1919, the Santa María residents reestablished the Porfirian era Material Improvement Committee to work towards improving their properties and the neighborhood, in many cases contributing their own economic resources. The committee organized neighborhood *kermesses* to collect funds to improve lighting, plant trees, and construct a social and sports center, among other projects.²⁸⁰ Santa María's improvement committee joined others that sprang up throughout Mexico City.²⁸¹ Neighborhood organizations provided one of the main avenues for middle-class participation at both a city and neighborhood level in the debates over urbanization.

Luckily for Santa María residents in the 1920s, two municipal councilors who lived in the neighborhood petitioned for improvements. In 1922, they argued for the construction of a new market to serve an increasing population and to replace the numerous street stalls.²⁸² After three years Santa María received a new modern market befitting its middle-class residents. A year later, most of the major streets of the neighborhood were finally paved.²⁸³ In 1925, Santa María's improvement

²⁷⁹ AHCM, vol. 1398, exp. 1236 (March 19, 1913).

²⁸⁰ "Juntas de mejoras de Santa María la Ribera," *Boletín Municipal*, August 31, 1925, 17, AHCM.

²⁸¹ "Las juntas vecinales," *Boletín Municipal*, September 12, 1919, 585-586, AHCM.

²⁸² *Boletín Municipal*, February 24, 1922, 123-125, AHCM.

²⁸³ Many public works were finally completed when the Partido Laborista Mexicana took power of the municipality between 1925 and 1928. For photos of the market, see *Boletín Municipal*, April 30, 1926, 15-17. For photos of the newly-paved streets in the colonia, see *Boletín Municipal*, July 31, 1926, 21-23, AHCM; *Boletín Municipal*, November 30, 1927, 41-47, AHCM.

committee put forward the idea of having each house install an incandescent light. The committee also arranged for regular music concerts to be held in the alameda. Committee members proposed a social and sport center, a swimming pool, the planting of trees, and the construction of a bridge over the Central and Mexican Railways to facilitate the movement between the neighborhoods of Santa María and Guerrero. In addition, they proposed to establish a private security service, construct a children's park, establish a Red Cross emergency stand, water the unpaved streets of barrio de Atlampa, build a fire station, and drain the Consulado River.²⁸⁴

Defending Christ in the Streets of Santa María la Ribera, 1920s

Community efforts in Santa María could and did arise out of religious convictions. In 1926, in the midst of economic and social instability, the Calles administration launched an assault on the Roman Catholic Church. A vociferous counter-attack by Mexico City's faithful arose in response. Resistance to the state's anticlerical measures in the so-called Calles Law took various forms, usually under the organizing power of the National Defense League of Religious Freedom (*Liga Nacional para la Defensa de la Libertad Religiosa*).²⁸⁵ Residents of Santa María joined the Liga, including members of the neighborhood's prominent Limón y Lascuráin family. The head of the family, a doctor, was a devoutly religious man. Before the Revolution he had been a member of the short-lived pre-revolutionary National Catholic Party. When the authorities shut down a convent in the city and the

²⁸⁴ "Juntas de mejoras de Santa María la Ribera," *Boletín Municipal*, August 31, 1925, 17, AHCM.

²⁸⁵ The LNDR was founded in Mexico City on March 9, 1925. They demanded the right to choice in education, rights for Roman Catholics, the Roman Catholic Church, and Catholic workers.

order of nuns walked into Santa María looking for assistance, he helped them find places to stay and rented cars to drive them to people's homes.²⁸⁶

The father's espousal of political activity meant that all the family members became actively involved in the Liga. They sold lottery tickets to raise money to buy medicine, food, and weapons for the Cristero fighters in the provinces.²⁸⁷ Their activities drew police suspicion and surveillance. The arrest of one brother left the family bereft with no news of his whereabouts for three days. Another brother had himself arrested for public drunkenness in order to enter the prison and find his sibling. Other repercussions included the confiscation of their home, first on Sabino Street and then on Naranjo Street.²⁸⁸ The family joined many other individuals from Santa María, like Father Troncoso. While director of the Colegio Josefino in Santa María, Troncoso was put under investigation by the secret police. The spy could not help but describe Troncoso as a "cultured (*culto*) man of exceptional intelligence."²⁸⁹

In response to the Calles Law, the Mexican Catholic hierarchy suspended public religious worship in July 1926. But many of the faithful continued to attend clandestine masses.²⁹⁰ Reports housed in the Social and Political Investigations archive reveal the tense atmosphere in Mexico City at this time. Some of the

²⁸⁶ Cristina Limón Lascuráin, interview with Armando Hitzelin Égido Villareal, March 9, 2002, recorded on cassette and held in the possession of Armando Hitzelin Égido Villareal.

²⁸⁷ María de los Angeles Limón y Lascuráin, interview with author, April 17, 2007, Cuernavaca, Mexico. Cristeros were Mexican Roman Catholics committed to fighting the anticlerical laws enforced by the Calles administration.

²⁸⁸ María de los Angeles Limón y Lascuráin, interview with author, April 17, 2007, Cuernavaca, Mexico.

²⁸⁹ AGN, IPS, vol. 228, exp. 33, Fs: 40-41 (June 7, 1925).

²⁹⁰ Salvado Rivero y Martínez, *Entropía: Calor humano de una ciudad*, vol. 2 (México, DF: Joaquín Porrúa, 1982), 82.

investigations responded to reports from citizens, sometimes anonymous, about suspicious activities or people in their neighborhood or workplace. In 1926, one government agent investigated the presence of an oratory on Cedro Street on the property of Carolina Troncoso.²⁹¹ Other investigations inquired into a female religious community on Naranjo Street.²⁹² Investigators also spied on suspected religious meetings, such as one on Chopo Street thought to have seditious intentions against the government.²⁹³

For some Santa María residents, the coordination of clandestine services and meetings united the neighborhood. Families hid priests in their homes and held secret religious services to which they would invite over their friends and neighbors. When the police entered the home looking for priests or evidence of religious worship, neighbors warned each other so that propaganda could be flushed down toilets and priests might escape through the back door.²⁹⁴ A united front helped mitigate the high price for clandestine worship, including imprisonment. Cristina Limon Lascuráin remembers how her family invited others over to attend Mass or a holy hour. The police often raided such gatherings and brought the participants on foot to the police

²⁹¹ The report does not indicate if Carolina was a relation to Father Troncoso. AGN, DGG, Violación Ley de Cultos, caja 37, exp. 347 (29) 42 (May 4, 1926).

²⁹² AGN, DGG, Violación Ley de Cultos, caja 5, exp. 2.345 (29) 47. In October 1929, three agents reported that they agreed that the two persons living there looked more or less like nuns but their pedestrian clothing suggested otherwise. AGN, IPS, vol. 49, exp.2, fs: 140 (October 19, 1929).

²⁹³ AGN, IPS. vol. 305, exp. 265 (February, 17, 1932).

²⁹⁴ María de los Angeles Limón y Lascuráin, interview with author, April 17, 2007, Cuernavaca, Mexico.

station.²⁹⁵ As they were walked to the police station, the faithful sang religious hymns and prayed the rosary.²⁹⁶

The successful efforts of lay Catholics to hold clandestine religious services began to worry the church hierarchy. In the newspaper for the parish of El Espíritu Santo in Santa María, *El Mensajero Parroquial*, an August 1929 article acknowledged the “extraordinary” privileges given to lay members. In the years between 1926 and 1929, the Church had authorized the celebration of Masses in houses, the holding of the Reserved Sacrament, baptism and weddings in private homes, and the reception of Communion without canonical fasting, among other things.²⁹⁷ The article stated that these privileges were suspended in the parish, as “things returned to their normal state.” Mass was to be celebrated only in churches or in private oratories sanctioned by the Church. Subsequent efforts to clamp down on private religious spaces and activities suggest that both continued much to the consternation of Church authorities. The following year, a circular to priests in the Federal District reminded clerics that private oratories were permitted only with a proper license. In 1931, the archbishop ordered the capital’s parish rectors to inform him of the number of private oratories that existed.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ The police station was located next to the National Lottery building on Ejido Street. Apparently, this building was dedicated exclusively to Catholic prisoners. María Cristina Limón y Lascuráin, “Una remembranza de tiempos inolvidables” (1998, unpublished manuscript in author’s possession), 6, 11, 12.

²⁹⁶ María Cristina Limón y Lascuráin, “Una remembranza de tiempos inolvidables,” 12. The lyrics of “*Corrido el Boycott*” describe the Catholics who “will sing happily/ in streets and plazas/ in the palace until the prison.” Armando de María y Campos, *La revolución mexicana a través de los corridos populares*, vol. 2 (México, DF: INHERM, 1962), 349-350.

²⁹⁷ “Suspensión de privilegios,” *El Mensajero Parroquial*, August 1929, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 2, AGMJ, IGL-04, leg. Espíritu Santo de Santa María la Ribera.

²⁹⁸ AHAM, Base Pascual Díaz Barreto, caja 57, exp. 83 (March 10, 1930). For the next year, see

The absence of Catholic priests left parishes in the hands of neighborhood residents, who organized daily prayers of the rosary and on Sundays read the Mass and a little of instruction for those who attended. Women initiated and carried out much of the clandestine activity.²⁹⁹ Growing up in the neighborhood of Santa María during the 1920s, Amalia López Reyes remembers her mother's involvement in defying government bans on religious services. López Reyes would accompany her mother to the El Espíritu Santo Church. To avoid police detection, they entered a secret door to the basement and sat in the catacombs reading Scripture. Other times, they met in someone's house. For the first time, women and men met together in secret to read the Bible. López Reyes recalls proudly how her mother read Mass on Sunday mornings as well as "gave lectures and explained the reading as though she were a type of priest."³⁰⁰

For many Catholic women, the 1920s conflict brought into tension their public activities and notions of femininity held by the Roman Catholic Church. These women marched in public protests, handed out propaganda on the street, and broke the law by attending and holding religious services. They opened their homes to the neighborhood, turning their domestic interiors into spaces of religious worship and

Circular 14, AHAM, Base Pascual Díaz Barreto, caja 57, exp. 71 (April 11, 1931). He also reminds the priests that specific permission must be granted in order to hold a private oratorio celebration of Mass in homes.

²⁹⁹ María Cristina Limón y Lascaráin, "Una remembranza de tiempos inolvidables," 11. For a similar argument made elsewhere in Mexico, see Matthew Butler, "Keeping the Faith in Revolutionary Mexico: Clerical and Lay Resistance to Religious Persecution, East Michoacán, 1926-1929," *The Americas* 59/1 (July 2002): 9-32.

³⁰⁰ Amalia López Reyes, "Problema religioso en México y su repercusión en la colonia Santa María la Ribera," (paper presented at the Third Community Colloquium entitled "Una mirada a la Santa María la Ribera," Mexico City, November 26-27, 2003, recorded on cassette tape and held at the Museo Universitario del Chopo, Mexico City).

education. The persecution allowed Catholic women to defy traditional constraints on female behavior and public speech by abrogating responsibility for their own actions and words. Yet this circumvention of gender norms did not directly attack the Catholic status quo, since their outspokenness was in favor of reaffirming the importance of Christian morals and decency to Mexican femininity. Nevertheless, at times they came into conflict with the Church's male hierarchy.³⁰¹ With the priests in hiding, women began to perform religious services without direct supervision from male clerics. The successful efforts of faithful lay Catholics to hold clandestine services began to worry the Church hierarchy. Catholic women experienced articulations of femininity on several different levels – the personal, the state, and the church – simultaneously though not necessarily in a systematic or coherent way and not without conflict.³⁰²

Religious Education Goes Underground

The anticlerical reforms of the Calles administration clamped down on religious schools. In March 1926, the administration suspended 110 Roman Catholic schools, expelled 200 priests, and closed 83 oratories.³⁰³ Cristina Limon Lascuráin recalls how one day she and her two sisters entered their school, the *Colegio de las*

³⁰¹ See Kristina A. Boylan, "Gendering the Faith and Altering the Nation: Mexican Catholic Women's Activism, 1917-1940," in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, eds. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 208.

³⁰² Rebecca J. Lester, *Jesus in Our Wombs: Embodying Modernity in a Mexican Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

³⁰³ Salvador Rivero y Martínez, *Entropía: Calor humano de una ciudad (México 1920-1930)* vol. 2 (México, DF: Porrúa, 1982), 15, 25.

Madres del Sagrado Corazón, to find the nuns without their habits. The students found the sight so distressing that they began to cry inconsolably at the nuns' humiliation.³⁰⁴

Some religious schools changed their names to disguise the institution as either sports or cultural center or a secular private school. The fictitious names often implied that they taught art, painting, foreign languages, cooking, sewing, and pastry making, although in reality they continued to function as a primary or secondary school. Some religious schools were nominally secularized in terms of outward signs of religiosity. Inspectors frequently showed up looking for religious articles like a cross hanging on the wall, which if found they demanded removed.³⁰⁵ When schools feared suspicion or received a warning, the building was often abandoned. Some schools that had been closed down reopened in other places and under new names. For example, a small group of students under the direction of the Lasallista brothers returned to Santa María by opening up a business school.³⁰⁶

Some religious schools went underground to evade education inspectors. Women, in particular, ensured that these educational cells at the primary level continued with religious curriculum. Pro-Catholic female teachers organized to give clandestine religious instruction in houses lent to them by families.³⁰⁷ As a young

³⁰⁴ María Cristina Limón y Lascuráin, "Una remembranza de tiempos inolvidables," 8 and 10.

³⁰⁵ Torres Septién, *La educación privada en México, 1903-1976*, 147, 151-152. See also Valentina Torres Septién, "La educación entre sombras: Los años de persecución" (Paper presented at Los Cristeros: Conferencias del Ciclo de Primavera de 1996, Centro de Estudios de Historia de México, México, DF, 1996).

³⁰⁶ Torres Septién, *La educación privada en México, 1903-1976*, 151-152.

³⁰⁷ Jorge Prieto Laurens, Instituto Mora, Proyecto de la Historia Oral [PHO], PHO 3/2, 26.

child living at this time in Santa María, Rafael Moyo García recalls how he and his classmates hid a small bench and their religious books under their shirts as they walked to classes being held in someone's home. Fearful of spies, they looked around for strangers on the street corners before entering.³⁰⁸ Teachers kept shutters closed to keep out prying eyes of denouncers. Frequently, the location of the classes changed, moving from one house to another every few months, and sometimes every few weeks, in order to escape detection.³⁰⁹

For years, neighbors' complaints continued to object to the existence of secretive religious schools. Two residents living on Pino Street denounced the activities at La Sagrada Familia Church on Santa María la Ribera Street in a letter from December 1937. They complained that they saw enter "three groups of school children of different ages led by five older women who appeared to be nuns."³¹⁰ In an IPS report, Inspector V-12 revealed that he heard a sung Mass and an "antisocialist" sermon. Upon leaving the church, a cat and mouse game ensued between the students and teachers and the inspector. In order to shake the tail of the inspector, the children dispersed in a small garden. Later, they hid in a rented car for an hour before leaving in small groups. Reuniting on Puente de Alvarado Avenue, the children made an infinite number of circles until finally arriving at Sadi Carnot Street.³¹¹ The children and teachers, like many of the middle-class Roman Catholic families in

³⁰⁸ Rafael Moyo García, interview with author, April 25, 2007, Mexico City, Mexico. Born in 1928, Moyo García moved to Santa María la Ribera between 1933 and 1934.

³⁰⁹ Rafael Moyo García, interview with author, April 25, 2007, Mexico City, Mexico. Since the clandestine schools were not officially recognized, Moyo García had to take an exam to certify his grade level during his sixth year of education.

³¹⁰ AGN, DGG, Violación Ley de Cultos. caja 5, bis. 2.345.1 (29) 29397.

³¹¹ AGN, IPS, vol. 73, exp. 1, fs: 263 (December 3, 1937).

Santa María, went to great lengths to practice their faith despite the climate of hostility and suspicion.

Conclusion

The attack on Catholicism by the Calles administration mobilized residents of Santa María la Ribera to protect their religious practices, sacred spaces, and ways of life. The neighborhood's underground schools and secret oratories signaled the unabated Catholicism of the colonia. Unlike earlier organizing, the Cristero years led residents to take part in politically antagonistic and even dangerous community activism. For Santa María residents, the neighborhood served as the frontline of their defense against anti-clerical politics. Through their activities they claimed and reclaimed religious spaces. Santa María neighbors also asserted a vociferous counter-attack on policies that they felt undermined their sense of a middle-class identity, which they tied to Catholic practices and beliefs.

Since the late Porfiriato residents shaped the face of the colonia through their participation in organizations like neighborhood improvement committees. In the process, the colonia itself came to represent middle-class life with its attendant values based on edification, patriotism, respectability, and Catholicism. Sponsorship of workers' circles vocalized middle-class values and helped define the boundaries between the middle and working classes. At home, middle-class residents displayed their sense of propriety and decorum in their interior décor.

After the Revolution, the colonia stood in disrepair. Many of the wealthier residents moved out and remaining inhabitants organized to petition the new post-

revolutionary administrations for neighborhood improvements. Petitions and directives demonstrate residents' desire for public spaces suitable for "respectable" families. But, as we will see in the next chapter, amidst loss, disorder, and anxiety came an explosion of song, dance, and nightlife. In Santa María and throughout the city, young men and women spilled out of co-educational classrooms and administrative offices. To the latest rhythms heard over the radio, they primed themselves for a night at the movies or at the dance hall, swinging in the arms of another.

Chapter 4: Spectacle and Middle-Class Youth in the Capital City, 1920-1940

Introduction

In the 1920s, Mexico City's young adults flocked to the cheap amusements of theaters, movie houses, dance halls, and cabarets. Through an array of cheap consumer goods, these young *capitalinos* (residents of Mexico City) fashioned identities that shook previous notions of gender, class, and sexuality. Along with manifestations of technological change, modernity called forth new forms of gendered self-consciousness, bodily self-expression, and interpersonal relations. The emergence of a modern subjectivity among the young working- and middle-class women and men of Mexico City formed a new relationship to body and psyche. Indeed, as Harvie Ferguson argues, modernity only became meaningful once individuals embodied new ways of experiencing the world.³¹² Mass popular culture shook class-based notions of decency and respectability, as members of the middle class, along with their poorer and richer cousins, consumed new types of products and culture. For conservatives and pious Catholics, modern forms of dress and behavior represented foreign and destructive influences that threatened traditional Mexican customs. On the streets, in the shops, and in the dance halls, Mexico City's middle-class youth embraced and reformulated their nation's post-revolutionary modernity.

³¹² Harvie Ferguson, *Modernity and Subjectivity: Body, Soul, Spirit* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 20.

Cheap Pleasures for the Chica Moderna

Beginning in the 1890s, French and German families opened Mexico City's first department stores, where ornate window displays enticed shoppers into a palace of wonder and desire. In the early decades of the post-revolutionary period, mass marketers found an eager audience in Mexico City, where residents were attempting to rebuild, regain, and reinvent their lives. Moreover, the 1920s brought a shift in attitude toward the female body. During the Porfiriato (1876-1910), only women with questionable moral character like stage actresses and prostitutes wore makeup. Etiquette books raised suspicions about what a woman had to hide behind a "made up" face and condemned makeup for its ability to falsify a woman's inner spirit. Short stories like those written by the Mexican author José Tomás de Cuéllar literally exposed women's dark skin behind whitening makeup and gloves.³¹³ In contrast, the early twentieth-century cosmetics industry encouraged women to accentuate or minimize specific facial features.³¹⁴

In the pages of the magazine *Zig Zag*, popular Mexican satirist Sánchez Filmador poked fun at the generational differences accentuated by modern life. In one piece from 1921, an aged aunt asks her youthful niece why she does not "leave [her eyebrows] the way God gave them to her?" Without interrupting the painting of her

³¹³ For example, see José Tomás de Cuéllar, "Having A Ball" in *The Magic Lantern: Having A Ball and Christmas Eve*, trans. Margaret Carson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³¹⁴ On the debates about makeup elsewhere, see Sabine Hake, "In the Mirror of Fashion," in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. Katharina von Ankum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 185-201; Kathy Peiss, "Making Up, Making Over: Cosmetics, Consumer Culture, and Women's Identity," in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria de Grazia with Ellen Furlough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 311-336.

eyebrows, the niece replies, “Because God gave me very few.”³¹⁵ In another *Zig Zag* illustration by Filmador, a grandmother complains about the crazy girls who wear rouge, knee-length skirts, and transparent-sleeved blouses. Her granddaughter dismisses the objections, replying that all girls dress in such fashions and nobody pays any attention to the girls’ exposed calves.³¹⁶

The consumer market and changes in the life cycle fueled a burgeoning youth culture. Increasingly, middle-class families sent their children to school for a longer period of time. Young women started working outside the home in greater numbers. While some of them worked to support their families, others worked out of a sense of independence and desire for spending power. Marketers and advertisers exploited the new youth culture to sell a wide range of products aimed at students and young working professionals. Consumerism’s emphasis on the individual and on the gratification of personal desires celebrated this liminal stage. In the process, notions about the purpose and meaning of life could shift. In Julio Jiménez Rueda’s play *Cándido Cordero, Public Employee*, which debuted in Mexico City in 1925, the secretary Flora represents the fashionable modern girl (*chica moderna*) who sports bobbed hair and knee-length dresses. At her office desk, she sits sleepily and fixes her eyebrows. She recounts her escapades from the night before and advises her coworker Coti “to get the most out of [life] as possible.”³¹⁷

³¹⁵ The aunt also criticizes her niece for going to the cinema with her boyfriend during the week of Lent. Sánchez Filmador, “Sermón de cuaresma,” *Zig Zag*, March 17, 1921, p. 43.

³¹⁶ Sánchez Filmador, “Cosas de viejos,” *Zig Zag*, January 13, 1921, p. 22.

³¹⁷ Julio Jiménez Rueda, *Cándido Cordero, empleado público; farsa en tres actos* (México, DF: Talleres gráficos de la nación, 1928), 56.

The advent of affordable fashions in dress and accoutrements allowed a larger percentage of residents to participate in consumer culture's promise of instant gratification and self-transformation. For the first time, the ready-to-wear industry made cheap versions of high-style fashions accessible to a broad segment of the female population. The simplification of styles also made dress designs easier to reproduce at home, accompanied by new marketing strategies that included direct mail-order catalogs of knitting patterns, yarns, and fabric.³¹⁸ At vocational schools or at home, women stitched together modish dresses using paper patterns shared between family members and friends. Women could choose from fabrics that came in new vibrant colors, like a matted yellow named "tango" after the popular risqué dance.³¹⁹

Mexico City elites could not claim exclusive possession of the styles identified with modernity, as the diffuse nature of the mass market made fashions available to a wide range of Mexicans. Women's embrace of the modern involved something as simple as cutting their hair into a bob. Contemporary commentator Salvador Novo described how the city's barbershops were not prepared for the "invasion" of young women who wanted their hair cut short. To accommodate the demand from women of all classes and social standing, beauty salons opened in neighborhoods ranging from those of the elite to those of the tenement-house poor.³²⁰

³¹⁸ Helen Harden Chenut, *The Fabric of Gender: Working-Class Culture in Third Republic France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 298.

³¹⁹ See Salvador Rivero y Martínez, *Entropía: Calor humano de una ciudad (México 1920-1930)*, vol.1 (México, DF: Porrúa, 1982), 368 (September 1923).

³²⁰ Salvador Novo, *Nueva grandeza mexicana* (México: DF: Conaculta, 1946), 57.

Commercial advertisements that encouraged women to cultivate a modern look also promoted a new ethic of physical self-improvement and hygiene. Ads for products like soap, toothpaste, and mouthwash heightened fears over proper personal hygiene, making both women and men sensitive to bodily sights and odors that may not have bothered a previous generation. In the rapidly expanding city, these fears were magnified. As individuals became increasingly anonymous, first impressions mattered. Moreover, physical proximity to the opposite sex increased as women entered the public spaces of classrooms, offices, trams, and movie theaters. Advertisers equated good hygiene not only with beauty and sex appeal, but also with the guarantee of future matrimony. For instance, Colgate toothpaste alarmed young readers with the story about Irene whose bad breath threatened to leave her a spinster.³²¹

Through movie star endorsements, cosmetics companies promised customers the features of popular actresses. Max Factor, for instance, guaranteed the lips of famed American movie star Clara Bow.³²² An announcement for the film *Macho y hembra* even advertised the movie for women “to learn how to get rid of wrinkles and watch how the star Bebe Daniels puts on gloves.” In 1923, a fashion show held at the Olimpia Theater linked the latest fashions with the cinema, at least in the minds of the audience.³²³

³²¹ Advertisement, “¿Irene, vas a ser una solterona?” *La Familia*, May 1937.

³²² For example, see *Nuestra Ciudad*, April 1930, p. 32.

³²³ See Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México, 1896-1930: Bajo el cielo de México Vol. 2, 1920-1924* (México, DF: UNAM, 1993), 289. See also “Stabat Mater cantada en el Olimpia esta noche,” *Excelsior*, March 29, 1923, p. 7.

As fashions and social behaviors changed, new products appeared for female consumers. Higher hemlines that uncovered women's legs meant that stockings became an important fashion item. One company advertised its new product, Holeproof stockings, for the discerning female shopper who spent much of her earnings on replacing poor-quality stockings.³²⁴ Cigarette companies aggressively marketed to young women, as smoking became less of a female taboo.³²⁵ The Hollywood cigarette company associated its product with stylish modernity. Smokers of Hollywoods would not only blow smoke but also become part of the fashionable set (“*echan humo, sino que ‘echan tipo.’*”)³²⁶

Consumerism offered a means to experiment with fashioning a modern self and in the process signified an investment in modernity. Participation in consumer culture presumed an enchantment with the modern itself.³²⁷ The transformative powers of commodities and modernity’s liberatory promises incited dreams that transcended class and national boundaries. In *Cándido Cordero*, Manuela, one of Mr. Cordero’s daughters, insists she will become a Hollywood movie star. After all, as she proudly tells her father, she has the face of Mary Astor and Pola Negri, the eyes of Norma Talmadge, and the passionate kisses of Bárbara la Mar.³²⁸ Described as a slender girl with affectations, she accuses her father of cutting off her “brilliant” career

³²⁴ *El Universal*, November 5, 1922, 2a, p. 2.

³²⁵ *Omega*, December 17, 1936, p. 4.

³²⁶ “Ambas son cantantes,” *Omega*, January 21, 1937, p. 4. The cartoon contrasts a “modern” singer with plucked eyebrows and bleached blonde hair to a large hipped and large breasted opera singer.

³²⁷ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 144. Similarly, in early twentieth-century Cairo, a middle-class desire to be modern fueled an embrace of consumerism. Wilson Chacko Jacob, “Working Out Egypt: Masculinity and Subject Formation Between Colonial Modernity and Nationalism, 1870-1940” (PhD Diss., New York University, 2005).

³²⁸ Jiménez Rueda, *Cándido Cordero*, 34.

in Hollywood and forcing her to become yet another “stupid girl” found among the typists of public offices. Perhaps Manuela, like surely the play’s female audience members, had read about the real and exaggerated humble beginnings of Hollywood stars. If a working-class Brooklyn girl like Clara Bow could find fame, maybe Mexico City’s *chicas modernas* also could dream big.

Muscular Manliness Counters Modernity’s Threat to Mexican Men

Modern culture also offered men a variety of styles to model aided by new fashions, consumer products, and the looks of film stars. Salvador Rivero y Martínez remembers how “conservative men” dressed “*a la inglesa*” with striped or plaid shirts, pants with flaps, and Spanish shoes. Other men preferred pleated and belted pants and wore their hair greased “*a lo Valentino*,” after the famed actor Rudolph Valentino. Others wore a “very Americanized” look that consisted of simple, loose and comfortable clothes, scuffed shoes, and unkempt hair.³²⁹

A muscular body became one of the most sought after ideals for many male youths. The daily *El Universal* ran ads for sporting goods that called on the male reader to “Develop Your Strength.”³³⁰ Catholic student publications reflected their readers’ enthusiasm for physical exercise and bodybuilding. In one ad, a well-built young man lifts weights among the bookshelves and portraits of his family’s living

³²⁹ Salvador Rivero y Martínez, *Entropía: Calor humano de una ciudad (México 1920-1930)*, vol.1 (México, DF: Porrúa, 1982), 497 (September 1929).

³³⁰ See *El Universal*, July 10, 1922, 1a, p. 8.

room.³³¹ A new emphasis on personal strength came from various influences. As part of larger eugenics efforts, post-revolutionary educators and reformers encouraged both working- and middle-class young men to funnel their energy into sports and physical exercise. To their customary cleanliness inspections, public schools added for men and women both gymnastics and other sports while the government introduced swimming pools to schools where and when it could.

Young men practiced gymnastics and played soccer and basketball at clubs like the Young Men's Christian Association. Inaugurated in 1909, the Mexico City YMCA building contained a gymnasium, a basketball court, a steam bath, and punching bags for boxing. A piano playing American marching band music accompanied gymnastic classes. Rivero y Martínez recalls how his older brother Fernando brought him to the YMCA after assuring their mother that they were safe from Protestant evangelizing.³³² As a young man in the 1930s, Gregorio Walerstein learned judo at the YMCA, where he and his Jewish friends were accepted. Outside the YMCA, Walerstein played on the student-league basketball team of the School of Commerce.³³³

Young Catholic men's attraction to the YMCA facilities and sports programs led the city's archbishop to mandate against Catholic involvement in the Protestant institution. In a directive to the city's priests, the Archbishop José Mora y del Río called on the clergy to speak from the pulpit about the "gravest danger" that youth

³³¹ Other product advertisements included calculating machines, Oliver typewriters, and Kodak cameras. See *Estatutos o Bases Generales de la Liga Nacional de Estudiantes Católicos*, 1912, Centro de Estudios de Historia de México (CONDUMEX), fondo CLXXXII, caja 1, leg. 05.

³³² Rivero y Martínez, vol. 1, 81-83 (August 1920). Quote taken from p. 81.

³³³ Gregorio Walerstein, Instituto Mora, Proyecto Historia Oral, PHO 2/25.

faced at the YMCA.³³⁴ The archbishop refused to sanction requests by young men who wrote to the archdiocese asking for permission to join the YMCA.³³⁵ As an alternative, young Catholics joined other private organizations. For instance, José de León Toral, a leader of the Young Men's Catholic Association (*Asociación Católica Juventud Masculina*) in Santa María la Ribera, joined the Club de Alvarado, where he competed in running and gymnastics and played on the soccer team.³³⁶ Family photographs record the gym that José Toral built in the back lot of his parents' house, where he trained on parallel bars and boxed with cousins and friends. In front of the camera, Toral posed shirtless while flexing his muscles.³³⁷

For many middle-class men like Toral who worked in the office of the Gerber company, office work presented a dilemma. Advertisers portrayed white-collar work as representative of the ideal modern lifestyle. Emphasizing how personal appearance marked social distinction, the Gillette Company assured the potential buyer that the use of its razor ensured an "air of distinction so appreciated by good society."³³⁸ Touting its razor as the most scientific shaving instrument available, the company promised a "sensation of absolute cleanliness."³³⁹ By the early 1920s, according to one newspaper article, young male students shaved their faces "*a la moderna*" with

³³⁴ The directive refers to previous declarations made by Holy Office on November 5, 1921. See Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de México [AHAM], Base de José Mora y del Río, caja 69, exp. 48 (March 12, 1922).

³³⁵ See AHAM, Base de José Mora y del Río, caja 90, exp. 62 (August 19, 1925).

³³⁶ Esperanza de León interview with author, March 12, 2007, Mexico City, Mexico. Esperanza de León is the daughter of José León de Toral.

³³⁷ Papers of José de León Toral (private archive of Esperanza de León, Mexico City, Mexico).

³³⁸ See *Excelsior*, January 12, 1923, 1a, p. 7.

³³⁹ See *El Universal*, August 3, 1927, 1a, p. 10.

the help of a “*gilette*” [sic].³⁴⁰ The male office employee was far removed from the more physical kinds of work found in an artisan shop or factory floor. Clean-shaved, neatly dressed, and sweet-smelling, the modern world of the office “feminized” men.

Advertisements heightened anxieties about modern society’s debilitating effects on manhood and offered numerous products that promised to revitalize male consumers.³⁴¹ As the happy couple in one advertisement for an electricity belt suggested, the regeneration of men made their wives happy and righted the world to its proper gender hierarchy. Along with the stress of the city and office work, the sexualized woman threatened male potency and vigor. A number advertisements for elixirs depicted sexually provocative half-dressed women hovering over men, who presumably lacked the ability to perform adequately inside, and perhaps outside, the bedroom.³⁴²

Desire, Affect, and the Experience of Modernity

In 1920, the iconic Sal6n M6xico opened its doors to a heterogeneous group of *capitalinos*. Known as the “Cathedral of Danz6n,” the building had three floors

³⁴⁰ “¿Travesuras de ‘muchachos’?” *Omega*, April 17, 1924, 1 and 3. The Gillette Company also urged women to use razors to shave the nape of their necks, which was exposed by the bob hairstyle. See *El Universal*, 7 August 1927, 3a, p. 6.

³⁴¹ For the Ovomaltina ad, see *El Universal*, October 26, 1923, 1a, p. 9; For the electricity belt ad, see *El Universal*, November 23, 1922, 1a, p. 12.

³⁴² For the Mastin’s Vitamon Tablets ad, see *El Universal*, June 11, 1922, 2a, p. 3. For some contemporaries, the city itself became associated with the feminine and therefore dangerous for the modern male. In his short story *The Firefly* (*La luci6rnaga*) published in 1932, Mariano Azuela laments the transformation of Mexico City into “that noisy feminine world that imposes its atmosphere on trains, automobiles, buses, converging and diverging pedestrians in the central square.” See Mariano Azuela, “*La luci6rnaga*” in *3 Novelas de Mariano Azuela* (M6xico, DF: Fondo de Cultura Econ6mica, 1995), 104. Ageeth Sluis similarly argues that architects and artists in the 1920s and 1930s attempted to “feminize” the spaces of Mexico City. See Ageeth Sluis, “City of Spectacles: Gender Performance, Revolutionary Reform, and the Creation of Public Space in Mexico City, 1915-1939,” (PhD Diss., University of Arizona, 2006).

segregated by social class. According to Rivero y Martínez, individuals selected a floor depending on their attire or economic situation.³⁴³ Male patrons paid a peso and women entered for free to dance the foxtrot, the tango, the shimmy, and the Charleston. These dances called for a new type of physicality between the sexes in public space. Subtler dances like the *danzón* required partners to move in tight harmony and helped transform notions of public intimacy.³⁴⁴ Along with a new relationship to the body, the culture of modernity simultaneously ushered in a transformation in personal affect and public intimacy. Mexican middle-class women experienced the body as something enjoyable in itself. In turn, physical feelings of sensuality and desire became more acknowledged, if not encouraged. Mass media pushed sentimentality out of the private sphere and presented a greater, and much more public, sexual candor than ever before. With cheers, laughs, tears, and sighs, patrons of Mexico City's arenas shared emotions and their bodies in unprecedented public but also intimate ways. Modernity provided new systems of representation for understanding sensations, emotions, and desires, as well as bodies. For Mexico City residents, films, music, dance, and fashion mediated a new relationship to desires and emotions that flowed through the body.³⁴⁵

³⁴³ Rivero y Martínez, vol. 1, 393 (January 1924).

³⁴⁴ Marco Velázquez and Mary Kay Vaughan, "Mestizaje and Musical Nationalism in Mexico," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, eds. Mary Kay Vaughan and Steve Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 95-118; Robert Buffington, "'La Dancing' Mexicana: *Danzón* and the Transformation of Intimacy in Post-Revolutionary Mexico City," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 14/1 (March 2005): 87-108; Alberto Dallal, *El "dancing" mexicano* (México, DF: SEP/Lecturas Mexicanas, 1987).

³⁴⁵ Harvie Ferguson, *Modernity and Subjectivity: Body, Soul, Spirit* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 60; Elsa Muñiz, *Cuerpo, representación y poder: México en los albores de la reconstrucción nacional, 1920-1934* (México, DF: UAM, Unidad Azcapotzalco, 2002), 280-281.

By the early 1920s, many theater and cinema owners transformed their spaces into dance salons. People flocked to escape economic hardship and embrace new styles. In 1921, Salón Rojo initiated two nights of dancing a week. Despite little publicity, the change quickly became a success. For twenty centavos, women and men could dance every Thursday and Sunday. Two years later, the Salón Rojo initiated a contest in conjunction with *El Demócrata* newspaper. For five weeks, eighteen couples competed in five dance categories (danzón, fox-trot, one-step, tango, and waltz) under colored lights and surrounded by mirrors. At the Olimpia, the first floor became a spacious middle-class dance hall, where the “beautiful and distinguished *señoritas* of our good society” swayed to the sounds of the city’s best jazz orchestra. The Olimpia in conjunction with *El Universal Gráfico* newspaper held dance marathons starting in 1923.³⁴⁶

Capitalinos danced the fashionable yet controversial Shimmy, the Cake Walk and the Two Step.³⁴⁷ As a young man Rivero y Martínez remembers his fellow Mexicans dancing very well, despite their “much exaggerated and tacky (*cursi*)” style.³⁴⁸ One popular song poked fun at the fashionable men who imitated the new American styles of dancing:

They are the *fifts* of the neighborhood
dandies of the dance halls
that wear, according to fashion,
short-tailed jackets
and imitate the *gringos*
dancing the one step causing people to laugh

³⁴⁶ De los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México, 1896-1930*, 290-291. See also “Concurso de *fox-trot* en el Olimpia,” *Excelsior*, March 15, 1923, 2a, p. 3.

³⁴⁷ Rivero y Martínez, vol. 1, 151 (June 1921) and vol. 1, 184 (October 1921).

³⁴⁸ Rivero y Martínez, vol. 1, 393 (January 1924).

and they don't know why...

At review theaters akin to cabarets, patrons danced “*a la cubana*,” “moving like jelly” and “throwing the hip or neck back.” The theater premiered shows like Castro Padilla’s “Shimmy” and “El colmo de la revista” by the Ortega y Prida Company.³⁴⁹

On the forty-four screens of Mexico City’s cinemas in 1924, *capitalinos* witnessed a similar transformation in gender behavior and interpersonal relations. For forty centavos, residents of Santa María la Ribera watched Mary Pickford come to life on the screen in *Por la puerta del servicio* (*Through the Back Door*, 1921). Meanwhile, Douglas Fairbanks portrayed the modern male in *El fifi* (*The Nut*, 1921) at the neighborhood’s five movie theaters.³⁵⁰ In Mexican cinemas, young people learned the art of romance and the skill of kissing.³⁵¹ Guillermo Zendejas remembers how, as a boy in the 1930s, a girl asked him to “kiss me, embrace me like they do in the movies.”³⁵² The darkened cinemas gave young sweethearts opportunities to experiment with expressions of love and affection beyond the watchful eye of their parents.

Boys and girls exchanged postcards with poetic verses and romantic song lyrics to each other to communicate feelings. While young people had increasing possibilities for personal relations, love letters continued as a mode of middle class

³⁴⁹ Rivero y Martínez, vol. 1, 151 (June 1921).

³⁵⁰ For a history of early cinema in Mexico City, see Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México, 1896-1930: Bajo el cielo de México, 1920-1924*, vol. 2.

³⁵¹ Rivero y Martínez, vol. 1, 317 (March 1923). For similar findings in Italy, see Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women, Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 211.

³⁵² Guillermo Zendejas, personal interview with author, Mexico City, Mexico, March 16, 2007.

communication.³⁵³ In *Revista de Revistas* in 1923, Margarita Santín Fontoura advised women about the best ways to write a letter and reminded them of the importance of good customs in relations of love.³⁵⁴ Theater and film stars depicted on postcards from the 1920s epitomized the fun and spectacle of the sexualized body. Stars like María Conesa, Celia Padilla, Mimi Derba, and Esperanza Iris unashamedly showed off cropped hair, painted nails, and lipstick while flirting with the camera in revealing outfits.³⁵⁵ Other postcards of couples displayed distinctly modern flirtation, physical contact, and open-mouthed smiles. Postcards depicting women looking straight into the camera, inviting the viewer into the intimate scene, certainly shocked an older generation who associated such a bold gaze and coy smile as the behavior of a prostitute.

Movie theaters, dance halls, classrooms, and office spaces allowed for a more direct manner of flirting, outside parental oversight. Students and young office workers passed time in coffee shops like La Flor de México, La Opera, El Globo, Café Tacuba, La Copa de Leche, La Blanca, and El Fénix.³⁵⁶ Popular culture referenced this shift in pre-marital relationships. In *Candido Cordero*, young Manuela unabashedly admits that she has kissed a dashing (*galán*) film producer who she

³⁵³ Isabel Fernández Tejedo, *Recuerdo de México: La tarjeta postal mexicana, 1882-1930* (México, DF: BANOBRAS, 1994), 124-125.

³⁵⁴ Margarita Santín de Fontoura, "Las cartas femeninas," *Revista de Revistas*, July 8, 1923, p. 46 quoted in Muñiz, 281.

³⁵⁵ Fotos de mujeres, 1925, AGN, Fondo Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes, Propiedad Artística y Literatura, caja 451, exp. 3766.

³⁵⁶ Salvador Rivero y Martínez, vol. 2, 101 (February 1927).

hopes will make her into a star.³⁵⁷ The play also has the office employee Pepito inviting the secretary Coti to a night at the theater followed by dancing at a cabaret. When Coti says she must ask her parents for permission, Pepito remarks that parents have become more yielding to their children's requests.³⁵⁸ In 1921, satirist Sánchez Filmador poked fun at the new courting rituals. In the past, a suitor discreetly passed a note in the presence of the mother, sister, aunt, and dog. Nowadays, young men give so many kisses that young women cry out "Ay, don't be so annoying [empalagoso, literally sickly sweet]!"³⁵⁹ A 1929 newspaper article fretted that parents allowed their daughters to attend cinemas and theaters and to stroll "alone and very close to their current male wooer," who did not have matrimony in mind.³⁶⁰

In the home, the gramophone and radio transmitted feelings of romantic love and erotic desire. Beginning in the 1920s, young people became enthusiastic about the energetic rhythms and syncopated beats of jazz. The following decade, the bolero escaped from the cabarets through the radio that extended its sound to the masses.³⁶¹ The crooning Guty Cárdenas and Agustín Lara enticed the imaginations of radio listeners.³⁶² Tuning into radio station XEB, listeners heard Felipe Llera sing "La

³⁵⁷ Jiménez Rueda, *Cándido Cordero*, 36.

³⁵⁸ Jiménez Rueda, *Cándido Cordero*, 70.

³⁵⁹ Sánchez Filmador, "Cosas de viejos," *Zig Zag*, January 13, 1921, p. 22.

³⁶⁰ "La moda agente de prostitución," *El Hombre libre*, October 2, 1929, p. 4.

³⁶¹ Carlos Monsiváis, "Bolero: A History," in *Mexican Postcards*, trans. John Kraniuskas (London: Verso, 1997), 180. On the bolero, see Mark Pedelty, "The Bolero: The Birth, Life, and Decline of Mexican Modernity," *Latin American Music Review* 20/1 (Spring-Summer 1999): 30-58.

³⁶² Marco Velázquez and Mary Kay Vaughan, "Mestizaje and Musical Nationalism in Mexico," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, eds. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 95-118. By 1929, Mexico City

casita” and tandas such as “Lolita” and “Conyugal,” and swayed to the voices of Flora Islas Chacón and María Bonilla.³⁶³ The music spilled over on to the streets of the city as the catchy tunes became part of residents’ daily life. They whistled and sang fashionable hits by Mexican songwriters like Manuel Ponce’s “A la orilla de un palmar” and Alfonso Esparza Oteo’s “Golondrina mensajera.” Esparza Oteo’s fox-trot “Stambul” had a memorable rhythm perfect for dancing “*a la moda*.”³⁶⁴ Fifies whistled the tune of the American hit song “Pretty Baby” and repeated the only lyrics they really understood: “piti beibi.”³⁶⁵

Anxious Critics of Modernity’s Corrupting Influences

Proposed governmental legislation and hysterical accounts in newspapers and Catholic publications attested to the anxiety that modernity generated in Mexico City. Municipal councilors spoke out against dance marathons, which they reported as having caused two women to abort spontaneously.³⁶⁶ Catholic women denounced certain types of dancing that encouraged the close contact of bodies of the opposite sex.³⁶⁷ One critic warned that pulsating jazz rhythms were too much for the already

boasted nineteen radio stations. See Joy Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), 30. See also Pablo Dueñas and Jesús Flores y Escalante, *XEW: 65 Aniversario* (México, DF: Sistema Radiópolis, 1995).

³⁶³ Rivero y Martínez, vol. 1, 392 (January 1924).

³⁶⁴ Rivero y Martínez, vol. 1, 136 (March 1921).

³⁶⁵ Rivero y Martínez, vol. 1, 61 (March 1920). Published in 1926, “Pretty Baby” was written by the popular African-American singer and pianist Tony Jackson (1880-1921).

³⁶⁶ *Actas y Versiones del Consejo Consultivo*, Tomo 21 – 2 – T. 22 1 (February 23, 1933), AHCM.

³⁶⁷ “Moda y bailes,” *Omega*, 1922, sec 1, p 1, 4, Archivo Unión Femenina Católica Mexicana (UFCM), caja 18, exp. 12. See also “Los bailes modernos, las modas imperantes y la trata de blancas,” *El Universal*, 1922, UFCM, caja 18, exp. 13.

sensitive and fiery blood of the Latin race.³⁶⁸ Pious Catholics and other conservative-minded Mexicans attacked Agustín Lara for lyrics that contained public declarations of erotic desires and the worship of women, often prostitutes. Convinced of Lara's transgression of family values and public morality, in 1936 the Secretary of Public Education prohibited Lara's songs in schools over concerns that the lyrics corrupted children.³⁶⁹

The new consumer market provoked criticism of consumerism's pernicious influence on Mexico's gender norms. Critics particularly invested the female body with responsibility for maintaining traditional notions of decency, class respectability, national customs, and lines of racial and gender identification. In the conservative newspaper *Omega*, one writer complained that Mexicans were losing customs around gendered behavior "without protest." The writer described bobbed-hair women (*pelonas*) as the Americanization of the Mexican woman and an "insolent, impudent, nearly savage attack" on Mexican customs.³⁷⁰ For this critic and others, female respectability and decency symbolized the essence of Mexican identity.

Modern fashion's ability to grant social status through the mere display of material attributes unleashed the most furor. For instance, at the height of the *pelona* craze in 1924, a group of young male preparatory students assaulted a working-class female student who sported a bobbed haircut. The next day, another group attacked

³⁶⁸ "Esta el 'jazz' condenado a desaparecer?" *Cronos*, June 18, 1922, 2a, p. 2.

³⁶⁹ Mark Couture, "The Importance of Being Agustín Lara: Cursilería, Machismo, and Modernity," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 20 (2001): 72; Monsiviás, *Bolero: A History*, 179.

³⁷⁰ "Las pelonas y el tejano," *Omega*, July 26, 1924, p. 1, 3.

two other young women and dragged them into the showers of the medical school, where they were washed and shaved.³⁷¹ For months afterwards the aggression towards the *pelonas* continued in newspaper articles and letters from readers, as well as on the city streets. Others, however, condemned the attack on the *pelonas*. Rivero y Martínez considered the act a barbarity.³⁷² Signs appeared in bus windows with assurances like “Come aboard, *peloncitas*,” “Here we protect the *pelonas*,” and “*Pelonas*: we give them safety.” A musician even composed a danzón in their honor entitled “Pro-*pelonas*.”³⁷³

The attacks on the *pelonas* revealed the tension around modern forms of self-presentation. In addition, the attacks reflected the sense of entitlement that well-to-do male youths felt regarding boundaries of class, race, and gender. On the one hand, the middle-class students might have been expressing anger over modern femininity by attacking more vulnerable women. On the other, they could have felt that modern styles were only appropriate for a higher class and lighter complexion. In 1929, a newspaper commentator criticized darker-skinned women appropriating styles supposedly reserved for lighter-skinned women. He complained that “at times the skin is dark [but] the stockings are not black.”³⁷⁴ The consumer market’s non-

³⁷¹ See Anne Rubenstein, “The War on *Las Pelonas*: Modern Women and Their Enemies, Mexico City, 1924,” in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, eds. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 57-80. See also Rivero y Martínez, vol. 1, 436 (July 1924).

³⁷² Rivero y Martínez, vol. 1, 436 (July 1924).

³⁷³ See De los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad, 1896-1930*, 294. See also Jacobo Dalevuelta, “La *pelonas* dispuestas a defenderse con energía,” *El Universal*, July 22, 1924, p. 1; “Las *pelonas* protegidas por guardias estudiantiles,” *El Universal*, July 25, 1924, p. 1.

³⁷⁴ “La moda agente de prostitución,” *El Hombre Libre*, October 2, 1929, p. 4.

discriminating availability offered consumers the opportunity to challenge Mexico City's longstanding class and racial markers.

While cartoonists depicted the *chica moderna* as a mannish woman inverting gender norms, male vanity turned men into effeminate dandies.³⁷⁵ In the 1920s, the male type known by the term *fifi* (dandy) became a standard character in cartoons, as well as the theater. In a satirical column from 1921, entitled "Death of the Boulevard Stroller," Sánchez Filmador described the *fifi* as the contemporary version of the nineteenth-century dandy (*lagartijo*) or *flâneur*. The contemporary *fifi* ogled women, while standing in front of the fashionable El Globo café. Showing off clean nails and thin eyebrows, the *fifi* was an effeminate and foolishly vain character.³⁷⁶ In the play *Cándido Cordero*, the *fifi* represents a young generation of middle-class employees who worried solely about their appearance, impressing women, and consuming the latest fads.

Postrevolutionary Catholic Defense of Mexican Decency

Worries about effeminate and cowardly men concerned the Catholic hierarchy. In 1924, Miguel Palmora y Vizcarra, a leader of the organized Catholic movement, bemoaned the lack of honor among young Catholic men. He accused them of deserting the battlefield! At the First National Eucharist Congress, Palmora y Vizcarra criticized them for not participating in the battle against anticlericalism and popular culture. In his speech, entitled "The Eucharist as an Essentially Virile

³⁷⁵ For example, see *Revista de Revista*, August 26, 1926, p. 28.

³⁷⁶ Sánchez Filmador, "Murió el boulevardeo," *Zig Zag*, February 24, 1921, p. 43.

Sacrament,” Palomar y Vizcarra linked the Catholic faith to manhood: “I have not come to tell you that men should take Communion because they are men, but that because they take Communion they ought to act like men.”³⁷⁷

Palmora y Vizcarra directed a study center in Mexico City belonging to the Mexican Catholic Youth Association (*Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana*, or ACJM).³⁷⁸ The association aimed to produce young males who were both good Catholics and good men. The ACJM offered centers where young men could study and discuss social, political, and religious matters.³⁷⁹ The church’s emphasis on youth and on education mirrored similar discourses of the revolutionary state.³⁸⁰ Like state authorities, Palmora y Vizcarra insisted on educating the youth for the good of the nation. A new generation of Catholic men, who extolled virility, duty, and honor, ensured a strong Christian Mexico.³⁸¹

Anticlericalism in Mexico raised alarm that Catholic men were not taking up the fight against the state in support of the church. According to ACJM scholar Antonio Ruis Facius, worries about the religious convictions of Mexico’s male Catholics surfaced because at the beginning of the twentieth century churches were relatively empty of men. Mexican men shunned attending church because “it was

³⁷⁷ Curley, “Catholic Honor and Shame in Revolutionary Mexico,” 3.

³⁷⁸ On the history of the ACJM, see David Espinosa, “‘Restoring Christian Social Order’: The Mexican Catholic Youth Association (1913-1932),” *The Americas* 59/4 (April 2003): 451-474.

³⁷⁹ According to the ACJM’s founder, the French-born Jesuit priest Bernardo Bergöend, an emphasis on youth was needed because the world needed “well-molded men” and “only the young can be molded.” Espinosa, “‘Restoring Christian Social Order,’” 454.

³⁸⁰ Patience A. Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003).

³⁸¹ Curley, “Catholic Honor and Shame in Revolutionary Mexico,” 1.

considered not manly.”³⁸² Corridos about state-sponsored religious persecution reflected a concern about the lack of men fighting for the church, with lyrics that asked “Where are the valiant Christians? Where are the heroic patriots?”³⁸³. One headline published by the conservative newspaper *Omega* in 1925 read “Catholics Must Proceed Like Men. Enough of Feminine Prayers.” Another, from 1933, blazed “Catholics Get Ready with Virility to Contend in Next Elections.”³⁸⁴ ACJM members were mostly young men under the age of twenty-five drawn from the city’s middle class. The majority were single, salaried office workers.³⁸⁵ José de León Toral was one such active member of the ACJM. After the execution of Padre Miguel Pro in November 1927, Toral became the president of the ACJM branch in Santa María la Ribera. In 1928, he would be arrested for the assassination of ex-president and president-elect Álvaro Obregón. Toral’s writings express typical concerns that distressed members of the ACJM. Like many other Catholics, Toral was disturbed by political and cultural changes in postrevolutionary Mexican society. Mexico’s revolutionary presidents like Obregón and his successor Plutarco Calles sought to secularize Mexico. A modern mass culture threatened to undermine Catholic values. In one of Toral’s many drawings, a soccer player and a nun hold up a broken mantle

³⁸² Antonio Ruis Facius, Instituto Mora, Proyecto de la Palabara, PHO 3/1. Ruis Facius authored several works on the ACJM, including *La juventud católica y la revolución mexicana* (México, DF: Jus, 1963) and *Méjico cristero: Historia de la ACJM 1925-1931* (México, DF: Patria, 1966).

³⁸³ “Corrido persecución religiosa mexicana,” in *La revolución mexicana a través de los corridos populares*, vol.1, comp. Armando de María y Campos (México, DF: INHERM, 1962), 406-408.

³⁸⁴ “Los católicos deben proceder como hombres. Basta de ruegos femeniles,” *Omega*, September 24, 1925, p. 1, 4. “Los católicos se aprestaran virilmente a contender en las próximas elecciones,” *Omega*, May 3, 1933, p. 1.

³⁸⁵ See Antonio Ruis Facius, *Méjico Cristero: Historia de la ACJM 1925-1931* (México, DF: Patria, 1966).

that represents Mexico.³⁸⁶ Toral, an avid soccer player, likely saw himself and the Catholic Church, represented by a nun (likely his mentor Madre Conchita) as attempting to hold the country together.

Toral lashed out against the decline in piety among Mexico's Catholics. Moral weakening, he believed, was the result of cultural changes, especially in regards to fashion. From his prison cell, he wrote letters to family members, his lawyer, and to God in which he complained of the lack of religious convictions in the wake of modern culture.³⁸⁷ He proposed Catholics organize "family vigils" in their private homes. The night would include praying a rosary, having dinner, individuals taking turns sitting with Jesus, and discussing religious and "non-sinful" matters. In the chapel or by a piano, individuals could "sing for Jesus."³⁸⁸ Toral's ideal family vigils would privatize the religious practices of modern-day Catholics.

Of course, most of Mexico City's practicing Catholics did not reject modernity or modernization. Pious Catholic women entered the public world of office work, and even served as employees of the iconoclastic state bureaucracy. The church hierarchy supported programs by lay Catholic organizations that used radio and film to spread religious teachings. However, Catholics premised femininity and masculinity on a distinct set of values and on a specific understanding of the body. An individual existed in reference to the larger structure of the family, the church, and the

³⁸⁶ Photo album of the Toral de León family (Private archive of Esperanza de León, Mexico City, Mexico).

³⁸⁷ "Carta para mis gentes." Papers of José de León Toral (Private archive of Esperanza de León), folder 1, doc. 4.

³⁸⁸ "Velaciones familiares." Papers of José de León Toral (Private archive of Esperanza de León), folder 1, doc. 13.

kingdom of God. The monitoring and disciplining of the gaze and speech, as well as controlled and modest movements, expressed and constituted an internal attitude of a pious self. Catholics eagerly emphasized hygiene because a clean and tidy body mirrored the condition of the soul. At the same time, an emphasis on cleanliness needed to be balanced against the sins of vanity and pride.

The city's new fads signified more than vanity. Fashions rehearsed and reenacted changing social and sexual boundaries, however exaggerated. The stereotypical *chica moderna* and the *fifi* threatened to destabilize primary gender roles in their exchange of work, marriage, and family life for a life of hedonistic pleasures. For ardent Catholics, new styles of clothing and types of behavior turned women's bodies into modern spectacles. An author in the added publication *Acción y Fe* complained of female nudity on the streets and even in church.³⁸⁹ Members of the Catholic Ladies' Association condemned parents for allowing their young girls "to go naked according to current fashion."³⁹⁰ Archbishop José Mora y del Río promulgated a circular indicating how women should dress in church.³⁹¹ According to Rivero y Martínez, at the El Espíritu Santo Church in the neighborhood of Santa María la Ribera, the sacristan impeded the entry of women dressed "*a la moda*."³⁹² In a sketch made in prison while awaiting trial for the murder of president-elect Álvaro Obregón, José Toral depicted his young aunt Lola sporting bobbed hair, dangling earrings, and

³⁸⁹ De los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad, 1896-1930*, 290. See also "Notas morales. La moda," *Acción y Fe*, October 1922, p. 719.

³⁹⁰ "La moda agente de prostitución," *El Hombre Libre*, October 2, 1929, p. 1.

³⁹¹ "Los cines, el desnudo y la sagrada mitra," *El Universal*, August 12, 1922, p. 1 cited in De los Reyes, *Cine y Sociedad, 1896-1930*, 288.

³⁹² Rivero y Martínez, vol.1, 93 (October 1920).

high heels. Standing in front of Jesus, Lola attempts to pull her skirt over her knees. Jesus, indicating a few inches with his finger, tells her, “a little bit longer.”³⁹³

The Middle-Class Search for Mexicanidad

As new forms of popular culture took hold in Mexico City, Mexican artists, intellectuals, and politicians began to define a nationalist version of Mexico’s post-revolutionary modernity. Formulated by a Mexican elite that included anthropologists, artists, intellectuals, and politicians, *indigenismo* argued that the roots of a modern Mexican identity could be found in indigenous culture. In the 1920s, the Indian began appearing in the colorful public murals of Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, who emerged at the forefront in constructing a Mexican identity, or *mexicanidad*.³⁹⁴ Their art circulated among an international audience through exhibits abroad and through the photographs of Manuel Álvarez Bravo, who earned his living documenting their murals for magazines like *Mexican Folkways*.³⁹⁵ In his work for the magazine *The Rural Teacher (El Maestro rural)*, Álvarez Bravo exposed Mexico City’s urban middle class to images of rural life’s peasants and Indians.³⁹⁶ Other magazines, including one Federal District government publication

³⁹³ Papers of José de León Toral (private archive of Esperanza de León).

³⁹⁴ See, for example, Desmond Rochfort, “The Sickle, the Serpent, and the Soil: History, Revolution, Nationhood, and Modernity in the Murals of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros,” in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, eds. Mary Kay Vaughan and Steve Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 43-57.

³⁹⁵ John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 85.

³⁹⁶ Mraz, *Looking for Mexico*, 90-91.

entitled *Nuestra ciudad*, used images of *campesino* and Indians to grace covers and illustrate pages. The monthly periodical *Nuestra México*, described by the editor Armando Vargas de la Maza as “exclusively Mexican,” disseminated nationalist art by Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Manuel Jiménez, Luis Márquez, Roberto Montenegro, José Orozco, and Diego Rivera.³⁹⁷

Middle-class *capitalinos* participated in this process by attending concerts, buying folk art, and wearing appropriated pieces of indigenous clothing. They consumed, and in the process legitimated, the new envisioning of Mexican culture. In 1924, publishers of *El Universal* newspaper invited the middle-class readership to follow the search for Mexico’s most beautiful and “authentic” Indian female (*india bonita*). As Rick López acknowledges, the contest allowed the urban middle class to choose their image of a “pretty Indian” and in the process set the parameters for the appropriated inclusion of aspects of indigenous culture into Mexico’s modern identity.³⁹⁸ Urban middle-class women eagerly adopted aspects of indigenous culture in their dress. Most famously, the painter Frida Kahlo dressed and painted herself in the garb worn by women from Tehuantepec. Safely distanced in time and space from indigenous cultures, urban middle-class women confidently appropriated Indian markers. Idealization of Indian female beauty as rural and pure could be comfortably consumed, while racist attacks on “backward” indigenous ways continued.

³⁹⁷ The magazine debuted in March 1932. Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining la chica moderna: Woman and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 141

³⁹⁸ Rick A. López, “The India Bonita Contest of 1921 and the Ethnicization of Mexican National Culture,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 82/2 (May 2002): 293.

Other members of the middle class turned to a more conservative nationalism that exalted Mexico's Hispanic culture, or *hispanism*. Women dressed in the bright frills of Spanish colonial garb known as the *china poblana*. Their male counterparts looked to the refined cowboy, or *charro*. For many white-collar employees, the *charro* outfit and the horse linked them to the rough-and-tumble maleness of rural Mexico. They paraded down the streets of the capital during various *charro* festivals.³⁹⁹ In 1933, *El Universal* newspaper featured a half-page spread of photographs and hailed the *charro* as Mexico's "national symbol."⁴⁰⁰ Another feature introduced Antonlin Jiménez, the Secretary of the National Association of Charros, who worked as a government bureaucrat.⁴⁰¹

The National Association of Charros was an extremely conservative and elite organization, but the symbol had a broader appeal. Many middle-class men found themselves in a world increasingly changed and unfamiliar. They feared the increasing militancy of working class as well as economic and political displacement. The *charro*'s manly arts of horsemanship represented a return to some mythical real manhood undisturbed by modern influences. Moreover, the *charro* represented a symbol that could withstand modernization that threatened to wipe clear all that was unique and authentic about Mexico. In 1938, the year of the nationalization of Mexico's oil industry under President Cárdenas, a hat company called on men to

³⁹⁹ "Asociación Nacional de Charros," *Revista de Revistas*, March 16, 1924, p. 5; "Fiesta charra," *El Universal*, February 11, 1927, 2a, p.1; "Festival de charro," August 22, 1927, 2a, p.1; "Fiesta del charro," *El Universal*, September 2, 1932, 2a, p. 1, 6; "Día del charro," *El Universal*, September 15, 1932, 1a, p. 12.

⁴⁰⁰ "El charro mexicano como simbolo nacional," *El Universal*, September 16, 1933, 4a, p. 3.

⁴⁰¹ "Secretaría de Asociación Nacional de Charros," *El Universal*, September 22, 1936, 2a, p. 2.

show their patriotism by donning a charro hat. Men should not succumb to “exotic fashions” and “*pochismo*.”⁴⁰² A charro hat signified adherence to Mexican customs: “Use a hat – be faithful to tradition,” read one advertisement. Moreover, the use of a charro hat represented respectability and regard for traditional gendered behavior. The advertisements asserted that real men with proper gender etiquette wore hats and tipped them upon meeting a woman.⁴⁰³

A group of writers extolled a Mexican masculinity they associated with the rough-and-tumble rural life. Julio Jiménez Rueda and Francisco Monterde argued for the production of what they called “virile literature” that they associated with Mariano Azuela’s *The Underdogs* (*Los de abajo*). First published in weekly installments in Mexico City’s *El Universal Ilustrado* newspaper, Azuela’s novel celebrated men on horseback, rural landscapes, and revolutionary violence. Their vision attacked a group of writers known as the Contemporáneos for their alternative view of modern Mexico and masculinity. Jorge Cuesta, José Gorostiza, Salvador Novo, Gilbert Owen, Carlos Pellicer, Jaime Torres Bodet, and Xavier Villaurrutia supported the production of a modernist aesthetic that rooted Mexican culture in an urban middle-class context that was internationalist and cosmopolitan.⁴⁰⁴ Their critics denounced modernist literature as effeminate, foreign, and distant from the “reality of

⁴⁰² Pocho is a pejorative term used by native-born Mexicans to describe Mexican-Americans who are perceived to have forgotten or rejected their Mexican heritage. Pochismo, in this context, derogatorily referred to those Mexicans who emulated U.S. fashions. “Pongase a cubierto de suspicacias,” *El Universal*, February 1, 1938, 1a, p. 5.

⁴⁰³ *El Universal*, February 15, 1938, p. 8, 2a; *El Universal*, February 8, 1938, 1a, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁴ Adriana Zavala, “María Izquierdo,” in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, eds. Mary Kay Vaughan and Steve Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 67-79.

the Mexican race” and its tragic history.⁴⁰⁵ Azuela himself lashed out against modernists, accusing them of “degeneracy” and labeling them nothing more than “rotting latrines.”⁴⁰⁶

Conclusion

In the 1920s and 1930s, Mexico City’s youth came of age as a culture of popular entertainment and cheap consumer goods enabled new ways of experiencing and imagining the exterior body and its psychological interior of affect and desire. Consumer products and consumption practices offered people not only a shared “horizon of experience,” but also a powerful physical (embodied) and emotional (psychical) investment with modernity. Modernity required a new consciousness and sensibility that celebrated a subjectivity informed not only by temperance, self-control and constraint, but also by the celebration of pleasure.

Gender formed a crucial part of the construction and perceptions of the modern subject, as well as of modernity itself. Young women perhaps experienced the most dramatic change, as they entered educational institutions and the paid workforce in unprecedented numbers. An emphasis on physical activity, along with liberating changes in dress and hairstyle, altered not only the appearance of the female body, but also how women moved through an enlarged public sphere of work and leisure. The critical discourse of woman-as-consumer, and fears over unleashed

⁴⁰⁵ Ermilio Abreu Gómez, *Clásicos, románticos, modernos* (Mexico City, Ediciones Botas, 1934), 217, quoted in Rubén Gallo, 241, nn. 20.

⁴⁰⁶ See Julio Jiménez Rueda, “El afeminamiento de la literatura mexicana,” *El Universal*, December 21, 1924, cited in Rubén Gallo, *Mexican Modernity: The Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 241, nn. 21.

desires, produced a gendered vision of transgression and deviance in Mexico City. For pious Catholics, government officials and urban intellectuals modernity loomed as a threatening aberration to Mexican femininity.

Educators added their voice to the competing discourses of politicians, church officials, and product advertisers. Teachers instructed students about hygiene, physical exercise, and new forms of labor that mitigated class and gender lines. In the 1930s, public schools became workshops for a new society based on cross-class unity and freer relationships between the sexes. Politically and sexually awakened in the classrooms, young people learned to inhabit and traverse the inherent tensions of post-revolutionary Mexico.

Chapter 5: Men and Women in Vocational, Technical, and Preparatory Education: From the Porfiriato to 1930

Introduction

The beginnings of Mexico's mass consumer market and mass media occurred simultaneously with the post-revolutionary administrations' attempts to democratize access to education while providing opportunities for advancement consistent with goals of national development. Governments opened new public schools to increase accessibility. A shift in policy placed greater emphasis on vocational and technical schools for working- and middle-class students. Administrations widened entry into the National Preparatory School and thus possibilities for university training in professional careers.

Educational changes challenged gender and class boundaries. They opened up new opportunities for women. While vocational training in domestic industries allowed women to practice trades from their homes, many women sought preparation in office work that would take them into a traditionally male realm. Although the government wanted to train men in industrial and technical careers, middle-class men preferred options in office work and commerce. Those who saw manual labor as a marker of low status and of the rapidly organizing working class likely differentiated themselves from artisan proprietors, who traditionally self-identified as members of the middle class. Similarly, the widening of the doors to the National Preparatory School, which in turn allowed greater opportunities to enter Mexico's National University, suggest a deepening of stratification and distinction within the middle

class. The inclusion of popular sectors in public education likely intensified a trend among the wealthiest sectors to send their children to private schools.

Educating Women of the Middle Class: Training in Domestic Industries

The respectable place for middle-class women was in the home. In the Porfiriato, the ideal woman was the “angel of the house” (*angel del hogar*), who personified virtue, moral superiority, and maternal sentiment in this private space.⁴⁰⁷ Work outside the home threatened women with contamination, loss of virtue and family honor. Yet by 1900, newspaper writers were recommending that women of the middle class work in order to mitigate the effects of the nation’s economic instability.⁴⁰⁸ Reformers also urged middle-class families to educate their daughters to reduce their precarious financial state when orphaned or widowed.

Teaching provided one of the few respectable and sought-after forms of employment in the late nineteenth century. Middle-class women flocked to teachers colleges in order to find work in the expanding primary education system. Mexico City’s Normal School for Female Teachers (*Escuela Normal para Profesoras*) was inaugurated in February 1890 and within five years a huge demand forced directors to close registration early due to the lack of space.⁴⁰⁹ Other women studied music as a

⁴⁰⁷ William E. French, “Prostitutes and Guardian Angels: Women, Work, and the Family in Porfirian Mexico,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72/4 (November 1992): 529-553.

⁴⁰⁸ A series of national economic crises led many middle-class families to face dire financial difficulties. “Las mujeres de la clase media deben trabajar,” *El Imparcial*, February 1900, p.1, cited in Eugenio Sancho Riba, “Las condiciones económicas en los últimos años del porfiriato y la clase media,” *Revista de Historia* 5/9-10 (1980): 12.

⁴⁰⁹ Luz Elena Galván, *La educación superior de la mujer en México: 1876-1940* (México, DF: CIESAS, 1985), 54.

means to make a living. Money earned as a piano teacher could help a woman leave a bad economic situation or supplement her family's income, and even allow her a form of social mobility.⁴¹⁰ The supply of teachers was matched by a demand from parents eager for their daughters to attend school. Petitioning President Díaz, parents sought work in Mexico City in order for their daughters to continue their music lessons. Parents already residing in the capital sought a "second" job to pay for their daughters' higher education.⁴¹¹

Fearing that their daughters might end up in disreputable factory work, families sought to place girls in vocational schools. Opened in 1872, the School of Arts and Trades for Women (*Escuela de Artes y Oficios para Mujeres*) offered courses in artificial flowermaking, cooking, domestic economy, embroidery, sewing, and, increasingly at the turn of century, commercial and clerical work. According to Mary Kay Vaughan, in the later half of the nineteenth century, the increase in vocational school enrollments overall in Mexico was due to the influx of women.⁴¹² Although vocational schools were originally intended for poor women, the institutions quickly came to serve primarily the middle strata. In 1902, the director of the School of Arts and Trades for Women noted that offerings attracted families of the middle class. She noted that the working class had not wanted to enjoy the benefits the school offered. On the other hand, numerous families of the middle class

⁴¹⁰ Galván, *La educación superior de la mujer en México*, 16-17.

⁴¹¹ Galván, *La educación superior de la mujer en México*, 124-127.

⁴¹² Vaughan, *State, Education, and Social Class*, 69.

hastened to take the opportunity to learn practical skills of some manual industry.⁴¹³ Many middle-class young women likely learned trades that they could practice from home like sewing and related crafts. The school later changed its name to the Arts and Trades School for Young Ladies (*Escuela de Artes y Oficios para Señoritas*) and included classes on cooking, flower arranging, clothing design, and hairdressing.⁴¹⁴ The Corregidora de Querétaro School of Industrial Art (*Escuela de Arte Industrial Corregidora de Querétaro*), inaugurated for the 1910 centennial celebrations, offered sewing and batik classes to prepare single young women or housewives to become economically independent, again working from their homes.⁴¹⁵

In 1914, in the midst of the Revolution, a Department of Public Education report on vocational schools listed courses in domestic economy, embroidery, fashion, hatmaking, lacemaking, ornamentation, and sewing undergarments.⁴¹⁶ The report defined the objective of female vocational schools as working toward the betterment of the middle and working classes. Along with young girls, women who had been widowed or abandoned, or caught in the economic crisis of the Revolution, sought out these courses to learn income-earning skills.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹³ “Informe relativo á la Escuela Nacional de Artes y Oficios Para Mujeres, durante el año de 1902,” *Boletín de Instrucción Pública*, January 20, 1903, p. 481-483.

⁴¹⁴ Patience A. Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003), 52-53.

⁴¹⁵ Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 53, 126-127. See also Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico*; Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003), 165-166.

⁴¹⁶ *Las Escuelas que Preparan Hombres Útiles para la Patria y la Familia. Guía para los Alumnos y para sus padres y tutores* (México, DF: Dept de Educación Pública y Bellas Artes, 1914), 80.

⁴¹⁷ *Las Escuelas*, 85.

The Gabriela Mistral School of Domestic Arts (*Escuela Hogar Gabriela Mistral*), founded in 1922 on Sadi Carnot Street served women of the neighborhoods of Guerrero, Santa María la Ribera, and San Rafael, *colonias* that after the Revolution mixed middle-class families with those of more popular origin and identification.⁴¹⁸ The school's objective was to prepare the woman for care of the home, as well as to give them a means to earn a living.⁴¹⁹ In 1922, a Department of Public Education (SEP) bulletin recorded an enrollment of 1,464 students, with a 68 percent graduation rate. The popularity of the school led officials to consider opening up another locale in Santa María la Ribera.⁴²⁰ Over the next few years, businessmen came to give talks on how women could open their own small businesses.⁴²¹ The school also became more supportive of women as professionals.

The Industrial School for Young Women Malinalxochitl (*Escuela Industrial para Señoritas Malinalxochitl*) opened in 1926. The institution aimed to teach small domestic industries in order to instill thrift and economic security. According to the school's pamphlet, the students' need for vocational skills depended upon their socio-economic class. On the one hand, the school served children who could not continue their studies past primary school as their help was needed in the home. On the other hand, potential students included the female employee who wanted to "prepare

⁴¹⁸ "La Escuela Hogar "Gabriela Mistral," *Boletín de Secretaría de la Educación Pública*, May 1, 1922, 244, AHCM.

⁴¹⁹ "Escuela de Hogar "Gabriela Mistral," *El Demócrata*, January 17, 1922, in *Boletín de Secretaría de la Educación Pública*, May 1, 1922, 240, AHCM. See also Patience A. Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003), 54.

⁴²⁰ Escuela Industrial "Gabriela Mistral," Tomo VIII, No. 15 (México, DF: SEP, 1926), CONDUMEX, Misc. Educación Pública 15, 379.08.72 V.A.

⁴²¹ Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 54.

herself against unemployment, readjustments, and decrease in pay.” In addition, the courses also taught administration of the home to new brides. According to school officials, these women attended not out of necessity but rather as a way for them to occupy their time or earn a little extra money to buy small luxury items.⁴²²

By 1926, two other schools focused on housekeeping. The Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz School of Domestic Arts (*Escuela Hogar Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*) trained housewives to operate a home in an orderly, hygienic, and rational manner.⁴²³ The National School of Domestic Instruction (*Escuela Nacional de Enseñanza Doméstica*) explicitly stated its objectives as preparing young women for the “high mission” of taking care of the home. The school hoped to “develop cultured women, perfect mothers and wives” who would contribute to Mexico’s moral and material progress. Courses dealt with efficiency in the home through lessons on the proper distribution of money, time, and work. A class called the Ideal House (*Casa ideal*) dealt with disinfection, heating, natural and artificial lighting, sewage, and water. Students also learned about interior decoration and the proper use and care of carpets and objects. These courses catered to women who could devote their time exclusively to the running of the home. However, school officials acknowledged the need among some women to learn small craft skills that they could perform from the home in order to supplement the family income. Thus, the school offered lessons in fashion, hatmaking, linendraping, and machine embroidery. Extra curricular activities

⁴²² Folleto de la Escuela Industrial para Señoritas “Malinalxochitl,” Tomo VII, No. 15 (México, DF: SEP, 1926), CONDUMEX, Misc. Educación Pública 15, 379.08.72 V.A.

⁴²³ Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City*, 55.

included visits to commercial establishments, public markets, and small industries to learn how to sell their wares to the public.⁴²⁴

In the 1920s, advice on homemaking and motherhood moved to the airwaves, as Mexican governments discovered the potential of the radio. Ageeth Sluis describes the new aural medium as the perfect symbol of post-revolutionary modernity. For the first time, the government was able to simultaneously reach thousands of citizens in the private domain of their homes. Moreover, the “‘disembodied voice’ of the radio could assume a multiplicity of personae which were equally authoritative and seductive, yet always personal.”⁴²⁵ In late 1924, the Department of Education (*Secretaría de la Educación Pública*, or SEP) founded the radio station CZE with the purpose of transmitting cultural information.⁴²⁶ Renamed XFX in 1928, the station’s key demographic were women. By 1929, 26 programs were aimed exclusively at women. The programs totaled 52 hours and represented half of the yearly airtime. The focus on women may have been based on who had the most access to the radio. According to studies by the SEP, urban housewives represented the largest group of radio listeners.⁴²⁷

The XFX's radio programming identified the revolutionary woman as first and

⁴²⁴ In 1922, the school registered 438 day students and 358 night students. The courses cost five pesos each. At night, the school offered quick intensive courses for women in the service industry. Unfortunately, the school’s statistics do not reveal how many of the students sought training small industries. *Folleto de la Escuela Nacional de Enseñanza Doméstica*, Tomo VII, No. 1 (México, DF: SEP, 1925), CONDUMEX, Misc. Educación Pública 15, 379.08.72 V.A. See also Mary Kay Vaughan, “Education and Class in the Mexican Revolution,” *Latin American Perspectives* 5/2 (Summer 1975): 17-33; Vaughan, *State, Education, and Social Class*.

⁴²⁵ Ageeth Sluis, “Revolution and the Rhetoric of Representation: Gender Construction in Mexican Radio and Cinema, 1920-1949” (MA thesis, University of Wyoming, 1997), 80.

⁴²⁶ Sluis, “Revolution and the Rhetoric of Representation,” 33.

⁴²⁷ Sluis, “Revolution and the Rhetoric of Representation,” 38-39.

foremost a mother and homemaker whose traditional roles needed modernizing. A program called *La Hora del Hogar*, which aired weekdays for two hours at midday, featured lessons on home economics and advice on better housekeeping and hygiene. In 1930, roughly 3,000 housewives actively listened to XFX. By 1932, *La Hora del Hogar* filled 86 percent of the station's annual airtime hours. Enriqueta P. de Vega from the School of Arts and Trades lectured on beauty tips, maintaining a hygienic home, meal preparation, and small craft industries.⁴²⁸ Other female instructors warned mothers of the consequences of lax childrearing that would cause their children to “fall prey to all the pernicious influences of the street, day-dreaming, and conversations with maids.”⁴²⁹

La Hora del Hogar's references to maids, as well as entire segments devoted to the management of servants, indicate an intended middle- and upper-class audience. While discourses of family and housekeeping were intended for all mothers, women belonging to the middle and upper classes had both money and time to achieve the radio program's ideal image of motherhood. Moreover, in the 1920s, radio sets were still limited to well-off homes. Ageeth Sleuth points out that SEP programs sharpened distinctions between women on the basis of class, rather than unifying them under a revolutionary or feminist banner.⁴³⁰ Thus, women of the middle class differentiated themselves from working-class women through their formal education in the latest scientific childrearing techniques, their (or their

⁴²⁸ *Boletín de Secretaría de la Educación de SEP* [BSEP], Vol. 6, No. 2, November 1927, p. 366, Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Educación Pública [AHSEP].

⁴²⁹ Sluis, “Revolution and the Rhetoric of Representation,” 42.

⁴³⁰ Sluis, “Revolution and the Rhetoric of Representation,” 43.

servants') implementation of hygienic standards, and their consumption of products intended to fortify their children. Consumer advertising and women's magazines may have strengthened not only the class but also racial dimensions of ideal modern motherhood. A 1930 cover of *El Hogar* magazine features a light-skinned mother holding a baby as she sports a bobbed haircut and a fashionable dress is one example among many.⁴³¹

Industrial and Technical Schools for Men

Emphasizing the need for skilled manual labor for national development, Mexico's education policymakers promoted training in the skilled trades, industrial work, and technical careers throughout the 1920s. During the administration of President Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924), Education Minister José Vasconcelos expressed the need to improve the skills, and consequently the remuneration, of small and medium producers, as well as artisans. Vasconcelos' educational and cultural programs aimed "to construct a large civilized and nationalistic class." This class would defend the nation against external threats and reconcile the country's antagonisms following a decade of revolutionary violence."⁴³² Vasconcelos hoped that teachers would aid the nation-building effort by inspiring in youth a work ethic, a

⁴³¹ *El Hogar*, March 5, 1930.

⁴³² Victor Díaz Arciniega, *Querrela por la cultura "revolucionaria" (1925)*, (México, DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989), 33-34.

sense of honor, and willingness to take action. They would instill in young boys the necessary courage, strength, and vigour for nation's future grandeur.⁴³³

The SEP's message heartened master craftsmen like J. Sánchez Aguilar, president of the Mutual Aid Society of Watchmakers, Jewelers, and Engravers. In a telegram to President Obregón in February 1922, Sánchez Aguilar, sought professional training in these crafts that he claimed were in a lamentable state of backwardness and abandonment. Imported better-made and cheaper goods exacerbated the situation.⁴³⁴ In 1924, Sánchez Aguilar formally petitioned the government for a vocational school to serve the three trades represented by his mutual aid society.⁴³⁵ He argued that skilled training would ensure that artisans did not get left behind in the march toward progress. Formal education would give artisan trades a more professional character, raising the social, and possibly economic, status of the craft. There is no indication that the SEP acted on his request.

In 1921, Vasconcelos created the Department of Technical Instruction. The department administered old and new vocational and technical schools.⁴³⁶ These included the older Escuela Primaria Industrial José María Chavez, which provided a worker's diploma (*obrero*), the Escuela Nacional Primaria Vasco de Quiroga for

⁴³³ José Vasconcelos, *El maestro*, vol.1, 1921, 5-9. See also Patience Schell, "Nationalizing Children Through Schools and Hygiene: Porfirian and Revolutionary Mexico City," *The Americas* 60/4 (April 2004): 559-587.

⁴³⁴ AGN, O-C, vol. 207, exp. 711-R-20, fs: 2, February 20, 1922. Sánchez Aguilar sent a follow-up telegram five days later. AGN, O-C, vol. 207, exp. 711-R-18, fs: 4, February 25, 1925.

⁴³⁵ AGN, O-C, vol. 207, exp. 711-R-18, fs: 3, September 20, 1924. They were still awaiting a response in March according to a telegram sent by Sánchez Aguilar. See AGN, O-C, vol. 207, exp. 711-R-18, fs: 4, March 5, 1925. Another formal letter requesting a school was sent later that month. See AGN, O-C, vol. 207, exp. 711-R-18, fs: 1, March 20, 1925.

⁴³⁶ Claude Fell, *José Vasconcelos: los años del águila, 1920-1925* (México, DF: UNAM, 1989), 195.

children of artisans, and the Escuela de Artes y Oficios. The SEP renamed the latter the Escuela de Ingenieros Mecanicos y Electricistas to train auto mechanics, electricians, electrical and mechanical engineers, and machinists.⁴³⁷ It also created the Instituto Técnico Industrial and the Escuela Técnica Nacional de Maestros Constructores where boys and young men trained as carpenters, blacksmiths, electricians, and mechanics through practical education and hands-on experience. The SEP promoted technical and industrial careers as respectable options for middle-class men. It is possible that it had some success among youth from artisan families that had claimed middle-class status, but most students came from more humble backgrounds.⁴³⁸ Youth of the white-collar middle class or with middle-class aspirations were not well represented.

The transition in occupational structure and the rapid political organization of the working class likely heightened a middle-class disdain for manual labor. Many skilled artisans, who were both craftsmen and entrepreneurs, had claimed middle-class identity, but many in this group were sidelined or proletarianized by industrialization. At the same time, white-collar training and employment opportunities widened for the sons of artisans.⁴³⁹ Manual labor came to be associated with factory labor. Other artisans emerged as leaders of the workers' movement fostering and celebrating a new militant working-class consciousness.⁴⁴⁰ Men in the

⁴³⁷ Charles Nash Myers, *Education and National Development in Mexico* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1965), 97.

⁴³⁸ *Las Escuelas*, 62.

⁴³⁹ *Las Escuelas*, 91.

⁴⁴⁰ See John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

skilled trades often identified themselves through their political affiliations as working class. Streetcar drivers and mechanics, for example, were active members of working-class anarchist organizations. Technical schools like the School of Mechanical Engineers and Electricians possibly came to serve newly formed trade unions.

As a result, manual labor became largely identified with the working class. Men with middle-class pretensions scorned such labor. David Parker finds that in early twentieth-century Lima, white-collar workers (*empleados*) clearly distinguished themselves from manual workers (*obreros*). For office employees, nonmanual labor was a defining quality of the *gente decente*, the self-proclaimed respectable people of the middle class.⁴⁴¹ Similarly, in Mexico City, many members of the middle class rushed to become office employees, particularly in the growing government bureaucracy. Already in 1914, the Primary Industrial School José María Chavez reported a low turn out of students, which administrators attributed to the majority of young people aspiring to professional careers. These observations support the complaints published in the *La Clase media* newspaper about young people not entering into workshops. Instead, they were turning to office work.

Thus, it is not surprising that a writer in the conservative newspaper *Omega* responded negatively in 1923 to presidential candidate Calles' promotion of vocation and technical training. The writer did not believe a man with intelligence could dedicate himself to "making shoes, metalwork, or grabbing the pickaxe or hand of the

⁴⁴¹ David S. Parker, "White-Collar Lima, 1910-1929: Commercial Employees and the Rise of the Peruvian Middle Class," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72/1 (February 1992): 47-72.

plough.” Poetically, he insisted that even in the humblest of souls burned the ambition to rise past their parents in the social scale. He continued, “The people reason like this: I was carpenter, and I have lived in misery, and have nothing. You, that are my son, will have a career. You will be a lawyer, for example.” How, he wondered, could Calles, who had once been a schoolteacher, turn away eager young students from the classroom and turn them into “an American proletariat.”⁴⁴² Indeed, if the government’s strategy prevailed, these men would feel oppressed by society, defrauded in their salaries, and offended by injustices, and convert into agitating “agrarianists and Bolsheviks.”⁴⁴³

The Education of the Middle-Class Employee: Men and Women

Thus, the 1920s witnessed the proliferation of a trend begun in the Porfiriato, in which middle-class status became increasingly associated with white-collar employment. Business and clerical schools fed the demand for literate and competent office workers in private companies and in the increasingly complex governmental bureaucracy. A 1904 article in the *Diario del Hogar* newspaper remarked that the Secretaria de Instrucción Pública had to close enrollment in the Escuela Nacional de Comercio early that year due to the large number of students.⁴⁴⁴

Census material from the late Porfirian period traces the growth of white-collar employment. New professions appeared in the census, including administrative

⁴⁴² “El General Calles pertenece al proletariado intelectual,” *Omega*, April 7, 1923, p. 1.

⁴⁴³ “El General Calles pertenece al proletariado intelectual,” *Omega*, April 7, 1923, p. 1.

⁴⁴⁴ “Una injusta disposición en la Escuela Nacional de Comercio,” *Diario del Hogar*, cited in *Boletín de Instrucción Pública*, January 30, 1904, 100-101.

employees in 1900, and bookkeepers, clerks (*empleados particulares*), contractors (*contratistas*), and typists in 1910.⁴⁴⁵ The number of shorthand writers also increased considerably between 1890 and 1910, from 26 to 419. The largest number worked under the category of public employees (*empleados públicos*). Although exaggerating, Porfirian writer Francisco Bulnes claimed that before Díaz's downfall, seventy percent of the middle class depended on the state for employment.⁴⁴⁶

Critics like Bulnes lamented the middle-class reliance on public employment that caused *empleomania*. Pointing to what he called the Mexican "bourgeoisie," Bulnes blamed them for them being "the daughter of the state payroll and not of an industrial revolution."⁴⁴⁷ Graduates entered willingly into an inert and dependent relationship with their state employer. They shunned being entrepreneurs and nurturing the progressive and innovative spirit natural to the middle class. Educational reformers singled out secondary school curriculum as too theoretical: it neither taught practical skills nor bolstered the entrepreneurial spirit.⁴⁴⁸ In a 1907 report on Secondary Instruction, Francisco Vázquez Gómez argued that the National Preparatory School (*Escuela Nacional Preparatoria*) reduced students to merely

⁴⁴⁵ In 1890 and 1900, the occupation labeled private employees (*empleados particulares*) appears in the general category of "diverse occupations," which included domestic servants and laundresses. In 1910, the occupation appears under "General designations without indication of a determined profession." This grouping included accountants, contractors, mechanics, and servants. Donald Keesing argues that in 1895 the title probably referred mainly to high-ranking service personnel within a landed proprietor's household. However, by 1910 the title had become a euphemism for a general type of clerk. Donald B. Keesing, "Structural Change Early in Development: Mexico's Changing Industrial and Occupational Structure from 1895-1950," *The Journal of Economic History* 29/4 (December 1969): 716-738.

⁴⁴⁶ Moises González Navarro, "El Porfiriato: La vida social," vol. 4, ed. 1, in *Historia Moderna de México*, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (México, DF: Editorial Hermes, 1957), 388-389.

⁴⁴⁷ González Navarro, "El Porfiriato: La vida social," 388.

⁴⁴⁸ *Las Escuelas*, 91.

preparing for exams. They graduated with scientific knowledge, but without the development of other kinds of mental faculties and without a good work ethic. He quoted another critic who complained that “very ill prepared” graduates took places in public offices “incapable of doing anything on their own.”⁴⁴⁹ On the same grounds, a report on the Industrial School José María Chavez argued for the superiority of entrepreneurial jobs over government or private office employment. Accordingly, small entrepreneurs like bosses of workshops or small business owners fared better than government employees who suffered from “shaky” salaries and job-threatening political fluctuations.⁴⁵⁰ These were the same observations and complaints presidential candidate Plutarco Elías Calles made in 1923.

Yet, in the 1920s, both the state and private sector responded to a growing demand for training in office work and commerce. The SEP opened several business schools. Created in 1922, the Doctor Mora Business School had 187 day students and 631 night students taking classes in accounting and shorthand typing. The school’s building quickly became too small to serve student demand.⁴⁵¹ A year later, the government established a Technical School of Shorthand Typing (*Escuela Técnica de Taquimecaógrafos*).⁴⁵² The School of Commerce and Administration (*Escuela Superior de Comercio y Administración*) had 1,013 students in 1922. In response to growing numbers of private academies and the call for more practical training, the

⁴⁴⁹ Galván, *La educación superior de la mujer en México*, 45-46. In a similar effort to stimulate personal initiative, educators argued for instituting ball sports like *pelota* and baseball in the place of monotonous movements of Swedish gymnastics that supposedly stifled a child’s imagination and individuality.

⁴⁵⁰ Escuela Industrial José María Chavez, *Boletín de SEP*, May 1, 1922, ASEP.

⁴⁵¹ Escuela Comercial Doctor Mora, *Boletín de SEP*, May 1, 1922, 94, ASEP.

⁴⁵² Escuela Técnica de Taquimecanógrafos, *Boletín de SEP*, January 1, 1923, 244, ASEP.

School of Commerce and Administration revised its curriculum to provide modern methods of teaching and more hands-on experience. For example, the school established an accounting class, which served to simulate a true business office.⁴⁵³ In a 1926 report, the SEP described the school's objective as animating businessmen with a "practical spirit."⁴⁵⁴

Private academies opened to meet growing demand. In the colonia of Santa María la Ribera, the Central School of Mexico (*Escuela Central de México*) offered shorthand and other business skills. Many of the school's courses offered quick acquisition of requisite skills and afternoon and evening class for those already working.⁴⁵⁵ Short-term courses offered a means to enter the job market in a haste, if a family's financial circumstances suddenly deteriorated. For example, Santa María resident José Toral, who wished to pursue a career in art, took a short course in business when the family's financial difficulties required him to earn an income quickly. Upon graduation, he found employment in the office of the German-owned Geber Company.⁴⁵⁶

Men who found office work had to confront the rapid and forceful entry of women into this formerly masculine domain. Their entry began before the revolution and responded to changes in office technology and technique: particularly the introduction of the typewriter and shorthand. In order to avoid the factory work that

⁴⁵³ Escuela Superior de Comercio y Administración, *Boletín de SEP*, May 1, 1922, 93, ASEP.

⁴⁵⁴ Folleto de la Escuela Superior de Comercio y Administración, Tomo VIII, No.1 (México, DF: SEP, 1926), CONDUMEX, Misc. Educación Pública 15, 379.08.72 V.A.

⁴⁵⁵ Galván, *La educación superior de la mujer en México*, 124-127.

⁴⁵⁶ Jesús de León Toral, *Recuerdos y comentarios sueltos de mi familia* (México, DF: Centro de Estudios Históricos José de León Toral, A.C, n.d.), 77.

was considered disreputable for honorable daughters, young women from artisan, lower middle-class, and working-class families flocked to schools to learn secretarial skills. In 1902, the Miguel Lerdo de Tejada School for women opened to offer training for careers in commerce, domestic economy, and graphic arts. In a 1904 speech, the school's director, Raquel Santoyo, boasted that the school's female students had within several months gained the necessary knowledge to accept a position in a variety of companies, offices, and shops. Santoyo defended female education against critics who linked female entry into the labor force to an undignified feminism that masculinized women. Santoyo was certain that a woman could work "without falling into the ridiculous exaggerations of feminism that converts her into a hybrid."⁴⁵⁷ Santoyo was not alone in her defense of female students. In 1908, *La Clase media* newspaper lauded young middle-class women who had dedicated themselves to learning accounting, English, shorthand, typing, and business correspondence. He noted that these women's studies came out of an eagerness to be useful to their families as well as find something that would give them relative independence. Perhaps as a consequence of the lack of respect for women workers, the author added that male employees should show the requisite "proverbial gallantry of the Latin race" to their female colleagues.⁴⁵⁸

With material hardship and loss of life wrought by the Revolution and economic instability in the 1920s, many middle-class families encouraged their

⁴⁵⁷ Informe relativo a la escuela Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, *Boletín de Instrucción Pública*, January 30, 1904, 860-868.

⁴⁵⁸ "Pobres empleados," *La Clase media*, June 1, 1908, p.3.

daughters to seek training for a workspace they considered reputable.⁴⁵⁹ In 1922, an *El Universal* newspaper article entitled “Women Who Work” referred to a radical revolution in female education. Referencing the changing educational norms for women, the writer praised girls who had taken the opportunity to obtain “honest and lucrative means of work.” As a result, the so-called “pretty sex” held a considerable number of positions in commercial establishments and offices.⁴⁶⁰

The father of Andrés Iduarte, a lawyer who refused to secure the family's fortune by accepting bribes, acknowledged that some day his daughters might have to earn a living. With this in mind, the daughters stopped studying the piano and took courses in typewriting and bookkeeping.⁴⁶¹ As a young woman in 1925, the famed painter Frida Kahlo studied shorthand and typing at Oliver Academy to better her chances of finding a part-time job while studying at the National Preparatory School. Kahlo's family needed extra income and her possible employment at the Ministry of Education library promised four pesos a day. In a letter to her boyfriend at the time, Kahlo noted that she had to learn something about “typing and charm.”⁴⁶²

Despite government hopes to privilege entrepreneurial, practical, and industrial skills, both men and women favored public employment. Such work was respectable and available, despite the fragility of job security and wages particularly

⁴⁵⁹ See Patience A. Schell, *Church and State Education in Revolutionary Mexico City* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003). See also Porter, “Espacios burocráticos.”

⁴⁶⁰ “Las mujeres que trabajan,” *El Universal*, February 3, 1922 in *Boletín de Secretaría de la Educación Pública*, May 1, 1922, 246, AHCM.

⁴⁶¹ Andrés Iduarte, *Niño: Child of the Mexican Revolution*, trans. James F. Shearer (New York: Praeger, 1971), 124 -125.

⁴⁶² Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 42-43.

in the early 1920s. Overall, the number of public employees in the Federal District increased rapidly, from 15,000 in 1921 to 47,000 in 1930, an increase of over 200 percent.⁴⁶³ The 1930 census reported that public employees represented almost four percent of the economically active population in the Federal District.⁴⁶⁴ Thirteen percent or 6,000 of these employees were women.⁴⁶⁵ Both men and women filled not only clerical jobs but also worked as professionals and technicians. Women in particular worked in the fields of education, social work, and health.

Revolution in the Classroom: The National Preparatory School

Students who wanted to enter various graduate and professional schools at the National University first passed through the National Preparatory School (*Escuela Nacional Preparatoria*, or ENP). Founded by Gabino Barreda in 1867, the school reflected the ideological orientation of the time with its heavily positivist curriculum. From the capital and surrounding provinces, sons of upper-class professionals and the elite entered the hallowed halls of the ENP. In his autobiography, Andrés Osuna characterized the ENP as an elitist institution, different from the normal schools that were the “destinations for the humble children of the middle class.” Osuna believed that class differences became evident in revolutionary participation. He claimed that

⁴⁶³ My findings of the 1930 census indicate 15,031 in 1921 and 46,977 in 1930. See México, Secretaría de Fomento, Oficina Tipográfica, *Censo de Población 1930*.

⁴⁶⁴ Susie S. Porter, “Espacios burocráticos, normas de feminidad e identidad de la clase media en México durante la década de 1930,” in *Orden social e identidad de género México, siglos XIX y XX*, eds. María Teresa Fernández Aceves, et al. (México, DF: CIESAS, 2006), 193.

⁴⁶⁵ México, Secretaría de Fomento, Oficina Tipográfica, *Censo de Población 1921*; México, Secretaría de Fomento, Oficina Tipográfica, *Censo de Población 1930*. Susie Porter finds that between 1921 and 1930 the number of *empleadas* increased 2,000 percent while male employees increased 300 percent. Susie S. Porter, “Espacios burocráticos,” 189-213.

the contingent of participants from the normal schools was much greater than at the ENP. For him, the numbers proved that the institution was the destination of privileged classes who did not care about the betterment of society.⁴⁶⁶ To a degree, his assessment reflected post-revolutionary biases that identified the Porfiriato with a privileged elite. Among others, José Vasconcelos had graduated from the ENP in the Porfiriato. He was the son of a provincial customs official. He entered the revolution and became the first minister of the Secretary of Public Education (*Secretaría de la Educación Pública*, or SEP).

In the early 1920s, ENP admissions became more democratic under the leadership of Vicente Lombardo Toledano, son of a middling Italian immigrant merchant family from the Sierra Norte de Puebla who became a Marxist and would emerge as Mexico's top labor leader in the 1930s. This initiative had the support of José Vasconcelos who altered the ENP curriculum and that of the feeder secondary schools.⁴⁶⁷ Enrollments in secondary schools grew rapidly. In 1923, 27 percent of students who finished primary school in the Federal District passed on to secondary schools and then to the ENP. The figure rose to 35 percent in 1925 and to 46 percent in 1928.⁴⁶⁸

Andrés Iduarte who entered the ENP in 1922 came into contact for the first time with boys of the lower classes. His new classmates no longer resembled his upper-class colleagues at his secondary school, the Colegio Mexicano. Instead, they

⁴⁶⁶ Andrés Osuna, quoted in Engracia Loyo, *Gobiernos revolucionarios y educación popular en México, 1911-1928* (México, DF: Colegio de México, 1999), 52 and p. 52, fn. 86.

⁴⁶⁷ Loyo, *Gobiernos revolucionarios y educación popular en México*, 154.

⁴⁶⁸ Loyo, *Gobiernos revolucionarios y educación popular en México*, 234.

were “a motley, heterogeneous crew, of all extractions and odors.” Iduarte winced at the odor of his fellow students, many of who were poor boys who rarely bathed. Yet, even city boys who had a house with a bathroom took few baths, according to Iduarte.⁴⁶⁹ Through his new companions, Iduarte began to know a side of Mexico City he had not seen, the tenements of Loreto, Pervalvillo, and La Bolsa.⁴⁷⁰

The ENP had admitted women slowly. The first woman enrolled in the ENP in 1882, fifteen years after the institution’s opening. A second female student entered eight years later. As young women in higher learning, both had to fight prejudices.⁴⁷¹ Clementina Batalla de Bassols remembers entering the ENP with forty other women in 1909. By the 1920s, there were three girls in every class. In the 1930s, 16 percent of the class population was female.⁴⁷² The female students represented a range of social classes, with some very “modest girls of the lower bourgeoisie,” along with daughters of intellectuals.⁴⁷³ According to Sara Cantu, some teachers opposed their admission. They argued that “this is not a place for a girl and they should go wash dishes and darn socks.”⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁶⁹ Iduarte, *Niño: Child of the Mexican Revolution*, 127.

⁴⁷⁰ Iduarte, *Niño: Child of the Mexican Revolution*, 132.

⁴⁷¹ In 1882, the first female student Matilde Montoya entered the ENP to study medicine. Rosario Martínez followed eight years. See Mariana Romo Patiño, *Las modernas: Preparatorias de la generación de los veinte*, VHS (México, DF: UNAM, 1996).

⁴⁷² In the 1920s, 809 women entered the ENP. The number increased dramatically in the 1940s with 9,123 women. Many of the women attended the ENP’s night courses. In 1929, 96 women were enrolled in day school and 108 were enrolled in night school. In order to attend night school the student had to prove that she worked during the day.

⁴⁷³ Clementina Batalla de Bassols, Instituto Mora, Proyecto de Historiá Oral, PHO 4/13.

⁴⁷⁴ Mariana Romo Patiño, *Las modernas: Preparatorias de la generación de los veinte*, VHS (México, DF: UNAM, 1996).

Regarded as mentally strong but physically weak, women students could find relief in the consumer market. In 1922, an advertisement for Lydia E. Pinkham vegetable compound depicted a young woman studying at home accompanied by the warning that girls between the ages of twelve and twenty-three must take care of their “delicate feminine organism.”⁴⁷⁵ In 1924, the same vegetable mixture promised strength for young women confronting school demands and menstrual pain.⁴⁷⁶ An ad for Dr. Richard’s vegetable oil pills presented a young girl whose studies caused her to weaken and lose weight. The pills were guaranteed to restore her energy, return color to her face, and help her gain weight.⁴⁷⁷

Education provided exercise for girls’ brains and bodies, as schools offered many female students their first opportunity to become involved in sports. As a student at the ENP in the 1920s, Guillermina Mostalac played on Mexico’s first women’s basketball team. Other students wore bathing suits and bloomers for the first time.⁴⁷⁸ Women’s new relationship to their bodies in such educational settings intersected with the new bodily expressions promoted in the mass media, consumer culture, and world of entertainment. Physical strength gave women the confidence and stamina to dance the shimmy or Charleston on the city’s dance hall floors.

Schools also provided young women a space to express their individuality and seek non-traditional lives. In a school photograph from 1923, Frida Kahlo, dressed in

⁴⁷⁵ *El Universal*, May 13, 1922, 2a, p.4.

⁴⁷⁶ *Excelsior*, March 18, 1925, 2a, p.7.

⁴⁷⁷ *El Universal*, August 5, 1927, 2a, p. 3.

⁴⁷⁸ Mariana Romo Patiño, *Las modernas: Preparatorias de la generación de los veinte*, VHS (México, DF: UNAM, 1996).

the school uniform, showed off cropped hair in the popular *pelona* style. Kahlo, who entered the ENP in 1922, was one of 35 female students in a student body of 2,000.⁴⁷⁹ Her father was a professional photographer and her family lived in Coyoacán, then at the outskirts of city. She took the tram into town. At school, she belonged to a rebellious clique of seven boys and two girls known as the *cachuchas*, named for caps they wore. Kahlo's female classmates considered girls like her rebellious, troublesome, and bohemian-types who discussed the philosophy of Schopenhauer with boys in the school's hallways. Kahlo found most of the girls at school to be pretentious, or *cursi* (pitifully sentimental). Irritated by endless gossiping and pettiness, she labeled these girls *esquinkles* after the hairless Mexican dogs of the same name.⁴⁸⁰

The National Preparatory School took great measures to appease families' fears concerning the morality of their daughters, most of whom entered the ENP at the age of twelve. Families warned daughters to safeguard their honor. Upon being dropped off at the ENP, Sara Cantu's father admonished his daughter to "take care of [her] name, or, in other words, be respectful [and] not screw up."⁴⁸¹ Fearful of these types of warnings, Clementina Batalla Bassols remembered how the girls went to class with great intrepidation of the boys.⁴⁸² Teachers had girls sit up front to keep a close eye on them. In the hallways, female prefects watched carefully to see that the

⁴⁷⁹ Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 25.

⁴⁸⁰ Mariana Romo Patiño, *Las modernas: Preparatorias de la generación de los veinte*.

⁴⁸¹ Mariana Romo Patiño, *Las modernas: Preparatorias de la generación de los veinte*, VHS (México, DF: UNAM, 1996).

⁴⁸² Clementina Batalla de Bassols, Instituto Mora, Proyecto de Historiá Oral [PHO] 4/13, 17.

male students stayed away from their female charges. According to Alfonso Mostalac, boys hardly spoke to the very discreet girls. When they finished class, they went up to the designated female area, where waited between classes or during rest hours. At lunchtime, the doorman would bring a vendor around to the female area to sell sandwiches.

Still, some of the boys went to great lengths to find ways to make contact with the girls. Alfonso Mostalac recalled being “tortured” by the presence of the girls in class, whose fashionable knee-length skirts exposed their legs. The short skirts made it easier for the boys to peek up the girls’ legs when they stood on the second floor.⁴⁸³ Despite limits placed on girls, Andrés Iduarte remembered how they talked with the older boys at the door of the school or in the garden of the nearby church. They socialized together at Café Alfonso in the student neighborhood (*barrio estudiantil*). Located only a few blocks from the Zócalo, the ENP lay at the heart of a district that was filled with cinemas, bars, bookstores, cafes, stores, restaurants, and public gardens. The ENP boys also gathered in the afternoon at the nearby Miguel Lerdo de Tejada vocational school to wait for girlfriends or prospective sweethearts. Showing their manners, boys carried girls’ books, walked on the outside of the sidewalk, and bought a treat from the street vendors selling meats (*carnitas*), ice cream, and doughnuts (*churros*).⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸³ Mariana Romo Patiño, *Las modernas*.

⁴⁸⁴ Iduarte, *Niño: Child of the Mexican Revolution*, 134. Also see Jaime Pensado, “Student Resistance, Political Violence and Youth Culture in Mexico City, c.1867-c.1965: A History of the Antecedents of *Porrismo*,” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008).

Iduarte's experiences with girls in the ENP's corridors allowed him to develop a new kind of relationship to the opposite sex. Rather than embarrass him or inspire sensual thoughts in him as had occurred in his earlier school years, the spirit of "camaraderie" at the ENP taught him to treat girls without fear or desire. He found that "contact with those girls, physically and scholastically more mature than I, taught me, to a certain point, to regard women in a spirit of naturalness and companionship."⁴⁸⁵ However, changed attitudes towards women did not translate into gender equality. For some who married their classmates, marriage meant relinquishing dreams of a career. For instance, Clementina Batalla de Bassols married a fellow student who convinced her not to work outside the home.⁴⁸⁶ This husband, Narciso Bassols, became the brilliant but controversial and authoritarian Marxist Minister of Education from 1931-1934. Revolutionary men might support women's education but did not necessarily support women's careers, especially if the women in question were their wives.

Yet the breached doors of the National Preparatory School made it a microcosm of the social and political changes wrought by the Revolution. Standing at the front of the classrooms were some of the brightest minds of Mexico, like Narciso Bassols, Ramón Beteta, Antonio Caso, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Jaime Torres Bodet, and Samuel Ramos. Students debated with their teachers and fellow students in an atmosphere of cultural and political ferment. The intellectual energy of the classrooms spilled into the corridors where students talked about history, discussed

⁴⁸⁵ Iduarte, *Niño: Child of the Mexican Revolution*, 134.

⁴⁸⁶ Clementina Batalla de Bassols, Instituto Mora, PHO 4/13, 43.

the texts of thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer, and read aloud classical works edited by José Vasconcelos.⁴⁸⁷ Students discussed philosophy, wrote political and intellectual tracts, played sports, and went on excursions. Many debated the popular educational reforms put forward by Vasconcelos. Some criticized Vasconcelos for Mexico's "democratization" of culture, which they considered a debasement. While some read Karl Marx and rejected religion, faithful Catholics defended the Church. Future members of the *Contemporáneos* group like Salvador Novo and Xavier Villaurrutia, walked the halls with Frida Kahlo, some of whose members of the *cachuchas* went on to become well-respected professionals.⁴⁸⁸

In and outside the classroom, ENP students came in contact with new political ideologies and philosophical ideas. At school, Juan Olivera López met revolutionary teachers and students who countered his father's strong admiration for Porfirio Díaz.⁴⁸⁹ Andrés Iduarte similarly came into contact with stalwart revolutionaries, who forced him to reconsider his esteem for Díaz. He had found in Díaz a hero who fought against the French and made Mexico admired in Europe. Following his father's political leanings, Iduarte felt an aversion for the Revolution because of its bloodshed and political corruption. He espoused equality for all, but admitted that he attributed the defects of the nation to the Indian.⁴⁹⁰ As a student at the ENP, instructors like Vicente Lombardo Toledano and Ramón Beteta introduced Iduarte to socialist ideas

⁴⁸⁷ Teachers who were practicing Catholics generally avoided the topic of the Church's opposition to the Revolution. Their silence was out of economic necessity since any such indiscretion would have cost them their jobs. Iduarte, *Niño: Child of the Mexican Revolution*, 143.

⁴⁸⁸ Herrera, *Frida*, 27.

⁴⁸⁹ Juan Olivera Lopez, Instituto Mora, PHO 1/28, 13.

⁴⁹⁰ Iduarte, *Niño: Child of the Mexican Revolution*, 126-127.

and revolutionary ideology.⁴⁹¹ In his memoirs, Iduarte describes how one day after several years at the ENP he removed the portrait of his childhood hero Díaz from his bedroom wall.⁴⁹²

In the microcosm of the EPN, the partisan struggles of the late 1920s and the 1930s took shape. Students, such as Frida Kahlo's friend, Germán de Campo, would take a leadership role in the dissident campaign of José Vasconcelos for the presidency in 1929.⁴⁹³ With strong middle-class backing, Vasconcelos protested the state's anti-religious campaign, its praetorianism, and corruption to champion electorally-driven political democracy and classical liberal freedoms. Bassols, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, and Ramón Beteta, on the other hand, supported the state. Indeed, they led state endeavors to extend social democracy, engineer economic development, and alter middle-class mentalities. Electoral democracy was less important to them. In the 1930s, students and faculty split over government's efforts to "socialize" university education, i.e., to oblige it to respond to state demands for particular forms of training for national development. Another of Frida Kahlo's friends, Alejandro Gómez Arias, championed the National University's autonomy as president of the National Student Federation. In the 1930s, ENP instructor, university professor, and distinguished philosopher Antonio Caso would stand eloquently against his one-time colleague Vicente Lombardo Toledano's insistence that the university bow to government demands. He would demand the autonomy of the

⁴⁹¹ Iduarte, *Niño: Child of the Mexican Revolution*, 141.

⁴⁹² Iduarte, *Niño: Child of the Mexican Revolution*, 149.

⁴⁹³ Herrera, *Frida*, 79.

university as a center of freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression.⁴⁹⁴

Conclusion

The emergence of business and vocational schools in the 1920s resulted in a significant shift in the occupational structure of Mexico City. Disdaining traditional artisan work, many young people sought modern practical training. Post-revolutionary efforts to expand educational opportunities meant that working and middle-class individuals learned together. Many middle-class sons showed a clear preference for skills related to office employment. Rejecting manual labor, they associated their class status with the white-collar world of the office.

Office work offered middle-class daughters a respectable way to support their families. However, most of these women quit working outside the home upon marriage. Some re-entered upon widowhood, or if their husbands became ill or disabled. Thus, a woman's lifecycle often predicted her entry and exit from the workforce. The modern mother was the domesticated *chica moderna* trained in the latest domestic science. The angel of the home was just as vital and skilled a participant in the creation of a modern Mexico as her working counterpart.

Under the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), educational reform became the subject of more heated debate. Through the school system, the Cárdenas administration hoped to further goals considered key to the Revolution. Curriculum changes introduced sex education and socialist objectives into the classroom. Teachers were to develop a proletarian consciousness among future workers, whose

⁴⁹⁴ Herrera, *Frida*, 79.

objective would be to enhance the good of the collective. Members of the middle class, employed as managers, bosses, and professionals, subsequently had their class status and authority challenged. The new reforms incited reaction from several corners. Roman Catholics responded with strident protests and organized boycotts, while various new middle-class organizations vociferously condemned Cárdenista policies.

Chapter 6: Education and Middle-Class Discontent in the 1930s

Introduction

In 1931, Secretary of Education Narciso Bassols (1931-1934) aimed to bring the socialist vision to the rest of Mexico through the school system. During the Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930-1932) and Abelardo L. Rodríguez (1932-1934) administrations, Bassols banned religious teachings and installed curriculum that stressed a collectivist ethic. Socialist education became part of the ruling National Revolutionary Party's (PNR) mandate. Bassols' attempts to implement socialist education, and later sex education, met with fierce resistance from many middle-class parents, as well as all Catholic Church organizations. Parents asserted the right to control their children's upbringing and instill in them values of religiosity and sexual propriety. They opposed a paternal state that viewed itself as the head of one big Mexican family.

Under President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), the government continued to focus on education's importance in engendering a revolutionary collective. In order to promote education that would serve both the working and middle class and national development, he reformed and upgraded vocational, technical and professional training through the formation of the National Polytechnic Institute (*Instituto Politecnico Nacional*). He asked the middle class to abandon its individualist goals to join a productive alliance of the "working classes." The Cárdenas administration's vision for the middle class had no supporters among Mexico City's right-wing groups that claimed to speak for that class. Organizations like the Confederation of the Middle Class (*Confederación de la Clase Media*, or CCM) attacked the Cárdenas

administration for highjacking the Mexican Revolution to promote a communist agenda. While the CMM and its allied organizations were small in numbers, they brought attention to growing dissent within Mexico City's middle class.

Socialist Education and Battles Over Classroom Curriculum

Accords signed between the church and the Emilio Portes Gil administration ended the Cristero War in 1929. The Cristeros had fought a four-year armed conflict against Calles' efforts to ban all religious activity. But, in 1930, hostilities flared again when Pope Pius XI published an encyclical that proclaimed the superiority of Christian education. That same year, a radical young lawyer, Narciso Bassols, became Secretary of Education. His proposals for reform enflamed a still tense situation. Previously with the Department of Agriculture, Bassols had become known for his fervent anticlerical ideas and determination to bring about the social promises of the Revolution. Bassols' ideology stressed the state's role in wealth redistribution, the promotion of technology for modernization, and the building of a secular and patriotic culture.⁴⁹⁵

Building on Calles' policies, Bassols banned religious teaching in schools and ordered the removal of religious iconography. Schools that failed to comply were fined and/or closed. In December 1931, Congress passed a law that extended state control over private schools affiliated with the federal system. The law allowed Bassols to institute further changes, including banning the clergy from teaching in such schools. He also invalidated diplomas from non-affiliated schools thus making

⁴⁹⁵ Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 31.

them invalid for entry into state universities.⁴⁹⁶ Further, he proposed a socialist curriculum that would impart a rational view of the world and instill a collectivist ethic.⁴⁹⁷

Catholic organizations and conservative middle-class parents fiercely resisted. Many complied with Archbishop Pascual Díaz Barreto's order to not send their children to secular schools. Other parents with industrial, business, and professional interests worried that socialist education threatened the capitalist system.⁴⁹⁸ "Down with Socialist Education" became the rallying cry of both Catholic and right-wing parents. The opposition found voice through the National Union of Parents (*Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia*, or UNPF), a lay organization subordinate to ecclesiastical authorities. The majority of its members were lawyers who defended the family as the indispensable base of society. They supported the right of parents to decide their children's education, as well as the freedom to teach religion.⁴⁹⁹

In one of its many publications, the UNPF warned parents that the government was not interested in their children's welfare. Socialism, the "antireligious religion," would see their children "irremissibly lost without faith, without morals, without honor, without worth, and guilty of blasphemy like the

⁴⁹⁶ Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *Triumphs and Tragedy: A History of the Mexican People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 393. See also John W. Sherman, *The Mexican Right: The End of Revolutionary Reform, 1929-1940* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997).

⁴⁹⁷ Thomas Benjamin, "Rebuilding the Nation," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, eds. William H. Beezley and Michael C. Meyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 485-486.

⁴⁹⁸ Valentina Torres Septién, *La educación privada en México, 1903-1976* (México, DF: Colegio de México, 2004), 119.

⁴⁹⁹ Torres Septién, *La educación privada en México, 1903-1976*, 94.

unhappy ‘young revolutionaries.’⁵⁰⁰ Parents should not trust politicians who had no respect for citizens and who were only interested in making money. The pamphlet pointed to the government’s treatment of public employees as evidence of mistreatment. State employees had no right to strike and indemnification and served as “slaves subject to the whims of the politicians.”⁵⁰¹

The UNPF turned the protest and subsequent boycott of secular schools into a patriotic mission. To fight against socialist education was to defend national values. “Mexican: the socialist school paves the way for the Yankee invasion. Defend Your Country,” warned one UNPF pamphlet. “What we do for your children,” it continued, “We do for our Country.”⁵⁰² The National Association for Freedom of Education (*Asociación Nacional Pro Libertad de Enseñanza*) echoed the nationalist fervor. A leaflet announcing a meeting at the Cine Capitolio in the Colonia Guerrero exhorted parents to secure their children’s future. “Saving the Country is Saving the Child” became the association’s motto.⁵⁰³

In an effort to counteract the UNPF, the Rodríguez administration created its own organization and passed legislation in favor of socialist education. The Secretary of Education (SEP) formed the Association of Parents of the Mexican Republic (*Asociación de Padres de Familia de República Mexicana*) primarily to represent

⁵⁰⁰ Abajo educación socialista 1930. Padres de familia. Centro de Estudios de Historia de México (CONDUMEX), [CEHM], fondo CLXXXII, Los impresos, C17 L1781.

⁵⁰¹ Abajo educación socialista 1930. Padres de familia. CEHM, fondo CLXXXII, Los impresos, C17 L1781. See also Padres de Familia, CEHM, fondo CLXXXII, Los impresos, C17 L1802.

⁵⁰² "Lo que hagamos por los niños, lo haremos por la Patria," Asociación Nacional de los Padres de la Familia, CEHM, fondo CLXXXII, Los Impresos, C1 L77.

⁵⁰³ Asuntos de Palpitante Interes 1933. Asociación Nacional Pro Libertad de Enseñanza, CEHM, fondo CLXXXII, Los impresos, C17 L1684.

private schools. Launched in May 1933, the association hoped to limit UNPF activity in Mexico City. In 1933, the Law of Parent Organizations (*Reglamento de las Agrupaciones de Padres de Familia*) allowed only associations associated with the SEP to present demands and suggestions relative to education questions. All other parent associations were prohibited from intervening in the administration or direction of schools.

Despite these efforts, UNPF claimed the support of public opinion.⁵⁰⁴ The organization gathered further support when Bassols rubbed salt into the wounds of wary parents by introducing sex education to the schools. The initiative came in response to a 1932 report from the Mexican Eugenics Society that cited a high frequency of unwanted pregnancies and abortions in adolescents. Bassols hoped that sex education would decrease the number of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, while improving the health of the Mexican nation.⁵⁰⁵

Conservative parents were already anxious about the introduction of coeducation. In November 1929, an *Omega* newspaper headline declared that “The Institutions of Mixed Sexes are True Centers of Scandal.” The article’s author described public schools as places of “scandalous disorder” and “frightening immoralities.” These “mansions of Love” perverted and corrupted adolescent girls and boys through the “premature awakening of the impulses of puberty.”⁵⁰⁶ To the

⁵⁰⁴ Torres Septién, *La educación privada en México, 1903-1976*, 119.

⁵⁰⁵ Emmanuel Moreno Rivera, “Narciso Bassols: intelectual y revolucionario mexicano,” in *El pensamiento latinoamericano del siglo XX ante la condición humana*, ed. Alberto Saladino García, 2003.

⁵⁰⁶ “Los planteles de ambos sexos son verdaderos centros de escándalo,” *Omega*, November 8, 1929, p. 1, 4.

UNPF, sex education represented yet another government attack on virtue and parental rights. Classes on sexuality would surely pervert their children's minds.⁵⁰⁷ Right-wing conservatives, various Catholic groups, and a number of newspapers and magazines joined the UNPF's opposition.⁵⁰⁸ It even received support from the SEP-backed Association of Parents, which had been created by the government to counteract the UNPF.⁵⁰⁹

In February 1934, UNPF President Ignacio Bravo Betancourt called on parents and students to support a boycott against teachers who taught the offensive material. In the Federal District, 49 of 485 schools supported the call. The number of schools affected was small. However, protestors were vocal and had the support of the newspaper *Excelsior*, which served as a conduit of information. Defiant parents and students transformed the city's movie theaters into meeting halls.⁵¹⁰ In one gathering at the Cine Díaz de León, two thousand parents reportedly agreed to not send their children to school if the Secretary of Education included sex education in the curriculum. The meeting concluded with participants shouting the movement's slogans "Long live Christ the King!" and "Down with the Constitution!"⁵¹¹

The UNPF printed and distributed stamps to drum up support for the

⁵⁰⁷ "La educación sexual," *El Universal*, September 5, 1933, 1a, p. 3, 6.

⁵⁰⁸ Quejas contra educación socialista y sexual. Padres de Familia, AGN, ALR, Caja 220, 580/varios. See also "La nauseabunda educación sexual no debe macular el pudor de la niñez," *Omega*, January 12, 1934, p. 1 and "Las madres de familia se pronuncian abiertamente contra la implantación de la nauseabunda educación sexual," *Omega*, January 26, 1934, p. 1.

⁵⁰⁹ Soledad Loaeza, *Clases medias y política en México* (México, DF: El Colegio de México, 1999), 103.

⁵¹⁰ Torres Septién, *La educación privada en México, 1903-1976*, 123.

⁵¹¹ Torres Septién, *La educación privada en México, 1903-1976*, 123.

boycott.⁵¹² These played on parental fears. “There are not enough prisons in Mexico to hold all worthy parents,” claimed one. Another warned parents against complying with the state: “Your children will be your inexorable judge and your executioner.”⁵¹³ Socialist and sex education would destroy family life as the state seized and exploited Mexican children. “The socialist school attempts to prostitute the Mexican child and youth “ and “MEXICAN MOTHER: Do not permit your children to be dragged into prostitution,” cautioned the stamps. Writings in the UNPF’s official bulletins repeated these threats.⁵¹⁴ These questioned the motherhood of those sent their children to school. “If you cowardly abandon the fight,” the UNPF argued, “you do not deserve the sacred name of mother.”⁵¹⁵

Archbishop Pascual Díaz Barreto condemned sex education. In a publication entitled “Parents’ Guide to Parents For the Moral Sex Education of Children,” he denounced the discussion of venereal disease as offensive to children and parents. He also criticized the government’s emphasis on sports. They might admirably pull youth out of dance halls and cinemas, but they kept children from attending Sunday mass.⁵¹⁶ The UNPF had a similar problem with school sports, but for a different reason. In a

⁵¹² CEHM, fondo CLXXXII, Los impresos, C17 L1792.

⁵¹³ CEHM, fondo CLXXXII, Los impresos, C17 L1790.

⁵¹⁴ “La prostitución de la niñez y la destrucción del hogar como altos ideales del programa de educación socialista.” *Boletín Oficial of the Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia*, December 6, 1933, p. 1 and 4, CEHM, fondo CLXXXII, Los impresos, C17 L1730. See also “La prostitución de la niñez,” *Boletín Oficial of the Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia*, May 10, 1933, CEHM, fondo CLXXXII, Los impresos, C17 L1730.

⁵¹⁵ Madres defendiendo a sus hijos. No date. CEHM, fondo CLXXXII, Los impresos, C17 L1788.

⁵¹⁶ *Guía de los padres para la educación moral sexual de los hijos*. Educación sexual. Base Pascual Díaz Barreto, caja 58, exp. 3 (1934). For response to the parents’ guide, see Educación sexual. Base Pascual Díaz Barreto, caja 67, exp. 26 (1934).

leaflet written to the female students of the Federal District, the UNPF warned that, under the pretext of a “uniform,” the government wanted young honorable Mexican women to appear “seminude.” Regarding one particular athletic event, the UNPF exhorted students to stay at home for the sake of “modesty, decorum, and dignity” as well as “solidarity against the official tyranny.”⁵¹⁷

To support the boycott, some parents sent their children to underground religious schools that had been established during the Calles administration. In the neighborhood of Santa María la Ribera, spies continued reporting suspicious religious activities. Government agents recorded the police detainment of nuns at a school on Amado Nervo Street, and the closure of a school on Camelia Street for the use of prohibited religious educational material.⁵¹⁸ Another spy discovered that the Verbo Encarnado School, which officials had closed, had re-opened under the name Academia Inglesia.⁵¹⁹ Yet, the same nuns continued teaching and imparting religious instruction. The spy heard the muffled singing of religious hymns coming from behind closed shutters.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁷ Uniformes para las chicas. Padres de familia, 1934/35, CEHM, fondo CLXXXII, Los impresos, C17 L1801.

⁵¹⁸ On the nuns, see Rivero y Martínez, vol. 2, 192 (January 1928). On school closure, see AGN, DGG, Violación Ley de Cultos, caja 4, exp. 2.345.1 (29) 32. From 1932-1934, government spies reported on El Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, a secondary school for girls. See AGN, DGG, Violación Ley de Cultos, caja 5, exp. 2.345 (29) 25 bis; AGN, Oficina de Información Política y Social [IPS], vol. 305, exp. 264, fs: n/a (dates 1932-1934).

⁵¹⁹ AGN, DGG, Violación Ley de Cultos, caja 4, exp. 2.345.1 (29) 31 (1933).

⁵²⁰ The Ladies of the Sacred Heart (*Damas del sagrado corazón*) in the neighborhood of Santa María la Ribera also appeared in a spy report from 1932. The Chief of Police ordered the nuns to stop teaching secondary education to upper-class women. AGN, DGG, Violación Ley de Cultos, caja 3, 2.345.1 (29) 9.

Vociferous protests finally forced Bassols to cancel the proposal for sex education. In May 1934, he resigned.⁵²¹ His departure was a big victory for the opposition which continued its struggle against socialist education. According to one 1935 calculation, 25,000 children in the Federal District attended underground schools that operated under a variety of names, including “home-schools,” “home-centers,” “school operations,” and “clandestine school groups.”⁵²² In October 1934, the University Student Federation (*Federación Estudiantil Universitaria*) mobilized to support the opposition.⁵²³ The federation invited students attending technical schools to join their strike against socialist education.⁵²⁴ On October 19, the third day of the strike, “scandals provoked by students” erupted in the area surrounding the neighborhood of Santa María la Ribera. Students took over the Pensador Mexicano School and blockaded its doors. At nearby schools, students shouted and hurled firecrackers. Near the Tacuba neighborhood, police detained students for smashing windows and breaking doors.⁵²⁵ The following day, the *Excelsior* newspaper reported

⁵²¹ Sherman, *The Mexican Right*, 37. See also Julia Tuñón Pablos, *Women in Mexico: A Past Unveiled*, trans. Alan Hynds (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 101.

⁵²² In Spanish, “escuelas-hogar,” “centros-hogar,” “operación escuela,” or “grupos escolares clandestinos.” See Torres Septién, *La educación privada en México, 1903-1976*, 146. See also Valentina Torres Septién, “La educación entre sombras: Los años de persecución,” *Los Cristeros: Conferencias del ciclo de primavera de 1996* (México, DF: CONDUMEX, 1996).

⁵²³ “Se forma el frente unico para luchar en contra de la “educación socialista,”” *Excelsior*, October 14, 1934, 1a, p. 1, 5. See also “Raza de esclavos como producto de la nueva escuela,” *Excelsior*, October 9, 1934, 1a, p. 4, 8.

⁵²⁴ “Se inicio una huelga de escuelas tecnicas ayer en esta capital,” *Excelsior*, October 17, 1934, 1a, p. 1, 2.

⁵²⁵ Other schools in Santa María included one on Cedro Street and Secondary Schools #2 and #4 on Ribera de San Cosme Street. “Nuevos escandalos en la capital por causa de la huelga escolar,” *Excelsior*, October 19, 1934, 1a, p. 1, 3.

that much of the conflict had subsided. Student protestors abandoned the buildings and children returned to class.⁵²⁶

The engagement of university students, professors and authorities against socialist education had been building for some time, particularly in response to Ignacio Garcia Tellez support for the reform during his tenure as rector from 1929 to 1932. Subsequent rectors, Roberto Medellín Ostos (1932-3), Manuel Gomez Morín (1933-4) and Fernando Ocaranza (1934-5) opposed it and had the support of key faculty members and new conservative student organizations such as the Nationalist Youth of Mexico (*Juventudes Nacionalistas de México*), the Anti-Communist University Students (*Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas*) and the National Union of Catholic Students (*Unión Nacional de Estudiantes Catolicos*). The struggle between a radicalizing federal government and the national university would come to a head under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas.⁵²⁷

Lázaro Cárdenas and the Middle Class: The Battle over Vocational, Technical and Professional Training

Lázaro Cárdenas became president of Mexico in December 1934 with a platform that included socialist education. National protests against its anti-religious content forced his government to abandon this front in 1936 and by 1938, Cárdenas acknowledged the role of private schools in meeting the nation's educational needs.

⁵²⁶ "Disminuye la agitación en los centros estudiantils," *Excelsior*, October 20, 1934, 1a, p. 1, 4.

⁵²⁷ Michael E. Burke, "University of Mexico and the Revolution, 1910-1940," *The Americas* 34/2 (October 1977): 268. See also Gabriela Contreras Pérez, *Los grupos católicos en la Universidad Autónoma de México* (1933-1944) (México, DF: UAM, 2002); David Espinosa, "Student Politics, National Politics: Mexico's National Student Union, 1926-1934," *The Americas* 62/4 (April 2006): 533-562.

But in the area of technical, vocational, and professional training, he launched a vigorous challenge to the middle class. Cárdenas claimed the Revolution was committed to resolving the problems of workers, which included the middle class. The middle class belonged to the working sector and its interests were linked to those of the proletariat.⁵²⁸ Socialist education, he asserted, would ensure that members of Mexico's present and future middle class shared in the collective struggle for national development and social harmony.

Cárdenas had a more technical, industrial vision of Mexico's future than his predecessors and a deeper commitment to the welfare of urban and rural workers. SEP reports told him that existing technical and vocational schools underserved working class families who could not afford to sacrifice income by dedicating a son to fulltime study. Rather, the schools had come to serve sons of liberal professionals, property owners, small industrialists, and bureaucrats. Individualist and bourgeois in their backgrounds, claimed the report, these students worked solely to surpass the economic success of their fathers and to "liberate" their families. They passed from workshop to office and from countryside to city, concerned with procuring a good job rather than partaking in the Revolution. Worst of all, graduates with the "pink psychological color of the middle class" showed a hostile attitude toward the organized working class.⁵²⁹ A report on women's schools reached similar conclusions. They were not attracting the working class who had a vital interest in

⁵²⁸ "Cual es la causa para implantar la nueva escuela," *Excelsior*, October 29, 1934, 1a, p. 1, 3.

⁵²⁹ Escuelas técnicas para varones, *Memoria ramo de educación pública*, August 31, 1934, 183-184, Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Educación Pública [AHSEP], Mexico City.

possessing a money-making skill. Rather, the schools attracted girls and women of the middle class who attended at the cost of the state for “personal goals.”⁵³⁰

But the technical and industrial schools suffered from a general lack of interest. Purportedly linked to this was a Mexican disdain for manual occupations. The PNR’s newspaper *El Nacional* argued that Mexicans harbored a deeply ingrained distaste for physical work. “All over Mexico [there] weighed a prejudice against manual work, brought by the Spanish conqueror. Not only the middle class, but also the worker and *campesino* aspire that their children enter universities and study some liberal profession.”⁵³¹ Cárdenas’ new National Council on Higher Education and Scientific Research (*Consejo Nacional de la Educación Superior y la Investigación Científica*) argued that the “antiquated” system of post-primary education condensed “the vices and anachronism of Mexico’s social organization since colonial times.” President Cárdenas went further. Liberalism itself, he stated, had been damagingly antisocial with its anarchical ideas about work and freedom of education and its egoism. Moreover, the upper class had obtained a monopoly over higher education and caused Mexico to suffer from the “cancer of an exaggerated professionalism.”⁵³² Another critic described graduates in the traditional professions of the law, medicine, and engineering as removed from social reality: they “close their eyes to Mexico’s problems” and facilitate the “intervention of foreign technicians.” Lacking a

⁵³⁰ Las escuelas industriales para mujeres, *Memoria ramo de educación pública*, August 31, 1934, 173, AHSEP.

⁵³¹ “Notas sobre la enseñanza técnica en México,” *El Nacional*, January 23, 1937, AE, ET, M12272.

⁵³² Presidential Speech, 1935, Archivo General de la Nación [AGN], Lázaro Cárdeanas del Río [LCR], vol. 688, exp. 534/100.

collective ethic, they pursued personal gain. With such egotistical aspirations, they monopolized bureaucratic positions.⁵³³

To address these problems, Cárdenas in January 1937 inaugurated the coeducational National Polytechnic Institute (*Instituto Politécnico Nacional*) on the grounds of the ex-hacienda of Santo Tomas, bordering on the colonia of Santa Maria la Ribera.⁵³⁴ The IPN consolidated the SEP's existing technological and vocational schools, including six pre-vocational schools, four vocational schools, and seven professional schools. The latter included the Escuela Superior de Comercio y Ciencias Sociales y Económicas, the Escuela de Ingeniería Mecánica y Eléctrica (ESIME), Escuela Superior de Construcción (which later changed its name to Escuela Superior de Ingeniería y Arquitectura, or ESIA), the Escuela Federal de Industrias Textiles (which later changed its name to Escuela Superior de Industrias Textiles, or ESIT), Escuela de Medicina Homeopática, Escuela de Bacteriología, and the Escuela de Bacteriología Parasitología y Fermentación.⁵³⁵ The purpose was to instill among the students throughout the IPN system a collective responsibility for national development and a commitment to class harmony. Students trained for management and professional positions would develop a consciousness “bound to the interests of the proletariat” and form part of the broadly defined “working classes” (*clases trabajadoras*).

⁵³³ “El ejercicio profesional,” *El Universal*, September 10, 1936, 1a, p.1, 10.

⁵³⁴ *Excelsior*, January 1, 1936, Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, Mexico City [BMLT], Archivos Económicos [AE], Enseñanza Técnica [ET], M12272.

⁵³⁵ María de los Angeles Rodríguez Alvarez, et al., *IPN: 50 años de la educación tecnológica* (México, DF: IPN, 1988), 133.

The government equipped the schools with the latest technology and students received practical training that would help meet the needs of the Mexican people. With its developmentalist goals, the IPN immediately added new careers in aeronautical, petrochemical, and metallurgical engineering. The Escuela de Bacteriología became the Escuela Nacional de Ciencias Biológicas and offered careers in rural medicine, parasitology, botany, zoology and physical and social anthropology. In 1940, the IPN introduced training in nursing and obstetrics. The School of Commerce made organizing cooperatives in poor neighborhoods a central priority. Engineering and electricity programs addressed the needs of nationalized industries.⁵³⁶

The IPN would serve the expanding middle class and newly empowered working class as well as aspirants to both. In its hierarchical structure it offered full six-year career training while ensuring short-term acquisition of skills and multiple options between these extremes. The government provided scholarships, subsidized dining rooms and cafeterias, and built dormitories to expand access. Later in 1952, the IPN would open a new boarding facility (*internado*) to serve the numerous students who came from other states, many of whom would join the ranks of Mexico City's expanded middle class.⁵³⁷

The IPN in the late 1930s drew students from diverse class backgrounds. Studies characterize the IPN as a working-class institution from its opening until the

⁵³⁶ Jaime Pensado, "Student Resistance, Political Violence and Youth Culture in Mexico City, c.1867-c.1965: A History of the Antecedents of *Porrrismo*" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008), 52.

⁵³⁷ María de los Angeles Rodríguez Álvarez, et al., *IPN: 50 años de la educación tecnológica* (México, DF: IPN, 1988); "Cronología del IPN, Escuelas," accessed October 10, 2011, <http://www.mexicomaxico.org/IPN/CronoIPN.htm#crono>

early 1950s. However, in 1936 the majority of students, 36.6 percent, came from parents working as public and private employees. Certainly some of these families claimed middle-class status. Another 26.7 percent came from families of artisans, workers, and *campesinos* while 14.4 percent came from families working in business and agriculture. Again, it is unclear how these families self-identified in terms of class membership.⁵³⁸

Cárdenas considered the IPN a genuine project of the Mexican Revolution. The institute enjoyed an official relationship with the state that precluded institutional autonomy. The Cárdenas administration encouraged all student federations once associated with the individual technical schools to unite into a single umbrella organization. In 1937, the National Federation of Technical Students (*Federación Nacional de Estudiantes Técnicos*, or FNET) came to represent all the students of the IPN. Two years later, the organization became the Confederation of Mexican Youth (*Confederación de Jóvenes Mexicanos*, or CJM). The CJM served as the youth wing of the official state party, the Mexican Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Mexicano*, or PRM), and later the unofficial student wing of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, or PRI).⁵³⁹

Upon its opening, the IPN organized an American-style football team that played to large crowds in the new Salvador Camino Stadium, named for a young IPN athlete who had won prizes in track at the first Central American Games (*Juegos Centroamericanos*). The highlight of the season was the game played against the

⁵³⁸ Pensado, "Student Resistance, Political Violence and Youth Culture in Mexico City," 31.

⁵³⁹ Pensado, "Student Resistance, Political Violence and Youth Culture in Mexico City," 55.

football team of the National Autonomous University (*Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, or UNAM).⁵⁴⁰ Indeed, the creation of the IPN was a response and a challenge to the national university.

Cárdenas called upon the more conservative UNAM to orient itself technically and socially to the ideals of the Revolution. He pushed for a revision of curriculum that would stress preparation appropriate to national development while instilling values of hard work and collective solidarity. His ally, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, head of the newly formed and powerful Confederation of Mexican Workers (*Confederación de Trabajadores de México*, or CTM) vociferously and publicly called upon the university to “socialize” its curriculum in the interests of the nation and its masses. Antonio Caso of the university’s Faculty of Philosophy and Letters (*Facultad de Filosofía y Letras*) and a relative of Vicente Lombardo Toledano by marriage, answered him eloquently, firmly, and publicly. The university would not socialize itself at the behest of the government. Autonomous from the government, the university operated on the principle of freedom of inquiry and expression. Caso won the debate.

Still More Middle-Class Discontent

Throughout the 1930s, groups claiming to represent the middle class organized around issues not solely targeted at socialist education. They ranged from apparently non-partisan associations of the unemployed to anti-communist organizations such as the Confederation of the Middle Class (*Confederación de la*

⁵⁴⁰ Cronología del IPN, Escuelas. <http://www.mexicomaxico.org/IPN/CronoIPN.htm#crono>

Clase Media, or CCM) to out-right fascist groups like the Mexican Revolutionary Action (*Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista*, or ARM), also known as the Gold Shirts (*Camisas Doradas*). The groups shared in common a resentment against being “left out”—whether they were unemployed by the virtue of the Depression, impoverished by cheap foreign imports, or ignored by a government that favored organized manual workers and rural land reform recipients. Some had been early supporters of the revolution who now felt marginalized and betrayed. Yet as much as these groups wanted attention and redress from the government, many were loathe to associate themselves with the militantly organizing working class and its tactics. They also repudiated Cárdenas’ grand notion of a collective composed of “the working classes” (*las clases trabajadoras*), or the political alternative Cárdenas offered to the middle classes when he reformed the PNR to create the PRM in 1938.⁵⁴¹

The National Workers’ Confederation Pro-Employment (*Confederación Nacional Obrera pro-Trabajo*, or CNOT) formed in 1930 in response to the dismal unemployment that grew with the New York stock market crash. The “desperate situation of the middle class” was clear, wrote *Excelsior*, when two hundred individuals showed up at the offices of a single business at 8 a.m. in the morning in hopes of getting a job.⁵⁴² The CNOPT, Mexico City’s most important organization for the unemployed, claimed 3,500 members, including artisans, employees of public and private offices, doctors, lawyers, and manual workers. In January 1930, it convened

⁵⁴¹ Historians have pointed to frustration and sense of marginalization among unorganized sectors of the middle class, namely professionals and small merchants. Garciadiego, “La oposición conservadora y de las clases medias al cardenismo,” 32; Loaeza, *Clases medias y política en México*, 78-98.

⁵⁴² “Urgen fuentes de trabajo para la clase media,” *Excelsior*, August 30, 1930, p. 1.

to discuss “the huge problem of our subsistence.” In March, nearly 4,000 joined a “silent protest” to draw attention to their plight and seek help from President Ortiz Rubio.⁵⁴³ In August 1930, a thousand concerned citizens met in the Mina movie theater. The organization discussed make-shift solutions such as the creation of cooperative workshops and more permanent ones such as the colonization of virgin territory.⁵⁴⁴ When their leader, Febronio Méndez, told *Excelsior* that the group sought only jobs and had no intention of making politics, he expressed a middle-class aversion to the radical tactics of blue-collar workers. On the other hand, he blamed the situation partially on the middle class’s failure to organize. No salvation would arrive, he asserted, “if the middle class continues to live by its usual apathy.”⁵⁴⁵

The *Confederación de la Clase Media*, or CCM was more overtly political. Its defense of the middle class was explicitly anti-communist and a response to proliferating working-class strikes. Brigida von Mentz estimates that the CMM probably had no more than 30 to 40 active members, most of whom, according to government security reports, lived in Santa Maria la Ribera and the more upscale colonias of Roma and Condesa.⁵⁴⁶ Soledad Loaeza writes that its members included

⁵⁴³ Esther Martina Vázquez Ramírez, *Oganización y resistencia popular en la ciudad de México durante el crisis de 1929-1932* (México, DF: INEHR, 1998), 132-133, 136. The global economic crash of October 1929 exasperated a difficult situation. The unemployment figures were already high a few months before the crash. AGN, Emilio Portes Gil [EPG], vol. 65, exp. 5/487, fs: 2 (August 3, 1929).

⁵⁴⁴ A newspaper article exhorted the unemployed middle class “to convince their friends ... that they should go to the countryside to earn their sustenance and that of their families.” “Desea colonizar Cozumel un grupo de desocupados,” *Excelsior*, September, 1930 cited in Vázquez Ramírez, 137.

⁵⁴⁵ See “Mil hombres sin trabajo celebrarán una asamblea,” *Excelsior*, August 30, 1930 cited in Vázquez Ramírez, 136.

⁵⁴⁶ Brigida von Mentz, *Los empresarios alemanes, el Tercer Reich, y la oposición de la derecha a Cárdenas* (Mexico: CIESAS, 1988), 302-303. AGN, IPS, Vol. 205, Exp. 1, fs: 1-6. February 22, 1938. For other reports on the CCM, see AGN, IPS, vol. 205, exp. 3, Fs: 12, 14, 16, 20.

those who had supported Obregón and Calles as well as those who had supported José Vasconcelos' Anti-reelectionist party.⁵⁴⁷

The brothers Enrique and Gustavo Sáenz de Sicilia founded the CMM. Enrique was a lawyer who had directed Obregón's presidential campaign in 1920. He then worked for the consular service and the Bank of Mexico before opening a financial firm that failed in the stock market crash. His brother Gustavo was an engineer who had participated in the formation of the short-lived Fascist Party in 1922. A pioneer in Mexican silent cinema, he was producer, director, and scriptwriter for many early films. With Enrique, he formed the Compañía Nacional Productora de Películas that produced some of Mexico's first sound movies. These included classics such as *Santa* and Fernando de Fuentes' *Prisionero Trece*. *Santa* expressed a middle-class aversion to the vice and prostitution that threatened to disgrace young women migrating to Mexico City. *El Prisionero Trece* was the first of Fernando de Fuentes' trilogy denouncing leaders of the revolution as an opportunistic and corrupt class driven by the pursuit of power and wealth, rather than principles of social welfare and democracy. In a way, it was a response to the government's condemnation of middle-class egotism. Gustavo Saenz de Sicilia, a prominent member of the conservative National Association of Charros, is also said to have introduced to Mexican cinema the figure of the *charro*, the fancy horseman and gentleman (*galán*), associated with a film genre that celebrated the hacienda as a harmonious hierarchy of kind owners and happy peons.⁵⁴⁸ In their Declaration of

⁵⁴⁷ Loeza, *Clases medias y política en México*, 96-97.

⁵⁴⁸ Tania Carreño King, *El charro: la construcción de un estereotipo nacional, 1920-1940*, (México, DF: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 2000); Ricardo Pérez

Principles, Saenz de Sicilia brothers stated the CCM's objective as the "economic and moral betterment of middle class workers." They affirmed that the middle class represented "the productive and consumer strength of the country, the bureaucratic mass (*masa burocratica*) and intellectual sector (*factor pensante*)." The Cárdenas administration had given (manual) workers victories that made them "privileged," while the middle class struggled at the margins of the nation's progress.⁵⁴⁹ They complained of the increasingly corporate structure of the political system under Cárdenas, which institutionally excluded middle-class groups not represented by state-backed unions. Professionals, renters' groups, small shopkeepers, and artisans were without organizational power or formal representation within the ruling party.⁵⁵⁰ Only one middle class sector was represented at the political table: the public employees. But these public sector workers were weighed down by the heavy hand of the PNR party.

Like the National Workers' Confederation Pro Employment (CNOPT), the CMM abjured syndicalist forms. The organization operated through profuse propaganda and coordinated action with similar groups. Like the CNOPT, CCM members took up the cause of the unemployed. The group called for the creation of producer and consumer cooperatives, credit unions, and mutual aid societies to

Monfort, *Estampas de nacionalismo popular mexicano: ensayos sobre cultura popular y nacionalismo* (México, DF: CIESAS, 1994); Emilio García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano*, Vol. 5 (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1992).

⁵⁴⁹ Declaración de principios, programa de acción y estatutos de la "Confederación de la Clase Media," México, DF: n.p, 1936, p. 6, 20; AGN, LCR, vol. 120, exp. 136.3/432 (1936); AGN, LCR, vol. 490, exp. 437.1/512 (June 3, 1936); AGN, LCR, vol. 490, exp.437.1/512 (August 18, 1936).

⁵⁵⁰ Diane E. Davis, *Urban Leviathan, Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), 88-89.

provide social security.⁵⁵¹ It recommended new agricultural colonies. Leading members appealed to the government for funds to set up cooperative workshops in domestic industries such as sewing and requested land to build affordable housing, small workshops, and factories.⁵⁵² Like the presidents of the 1920s, Gustavo Sáenz de Sicilia argued for the importance of accessible home ownership for the middle class and appealed to the government to make it possible.⁵⁵³ In the desperate years of revolutionary violence and the early 1920s, middle class sectors had organized for such assistance from the state. In the depression of the 1930s, they were once again needy and undoubtedly spurred in their ideas and their petitions by the actions of the peasantry and workers whose tactics they despised. They wanted a place at the table but on their own terms.

The CCM worked with right-wing organizations that claimed to represent specific groups within the middle class. The Pro-Race Union (*Unión Pro-Raza*) created in 1930 focused on protecting artisans and small businesses from foreign competition. In its declaration of principles, the union claimed to defend cabinetmakers, musicians, photographers, potters, shoemakers, silversmiths, and tailors, and all those who “belonged to the middle class with an artisan skill (*oficio*).” The CMM seems to have integrated this organization by 1937. Another group, the Civic Action Party of the Middle Class (*Accion Partido Civico de la Clase Media*)

⁵⁵¹ Declaración de principios, programa de acción y estatutos de la “Confederación de la Clase Media,” México, DF: n.p, 1936, p. 6, 20. On the relationship between military veterans and the CCM, see newspaper articles in *El Hombre libre*, October 25, 1937, p. 1 and November 1, 1937, p. 1.

⁵⁵² AGN, LCR, vol. 1050, exp. 565.4/1391 (1937).

⁵⁵³ AGN, LCR, vol. 490, exp. 437.1/512, fs: 4 (August 18, 1936).

claimed a membership united “under the banner of nationality.”⁵⁵⁴ Middle-class military officers who felt excluded from the Revolution’s benefits formed the National Union of Veterans of the Revolution (*Unión Nacional de Veteranos de la Revolución*) in 1936. They demanded better pay and living conditions for military personnel and defended military benefits (*prebendas*).⁵⁵⁵ The Revolutionary Mexican Action (ARM) had 3,500-4,000 members across the country with the majority representing middle-class military personnel.⁵⁵⁶

These organizations reacted to workers’ strikes, land redistribution, and government populism by varyingly espousing anti-communism, anti-semitism, fascism, and xenophobic nationalism. In 1937, the CMM tried unsuccessfully to organize an Ibero-American anti-communist conference in Havana that drew interest and support from representatives of the fascist governments of Germany, Italy and Spain.⁵⁵⁷ The Civic Action Party exalted the nation’s Spanish cultural heritage (*hispanismo*) and supported Spain’s Francisco Franco.⁵⁵⁸ The Union of Veterans condemned the Cárdenas administration’s policies as communist. ARM leader Nicolás Rodríguez described his group as national socialist and demanded the

⁵⁵⁴ Alicia Gojman Goldberg, “La Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista. Los camisas doradas, 1934-1940,” (Tesis de doctorado, UNAM, 1998), 41. On the CCM’s nationalism, see AGN, LCR, vol. 120, exp. 136.3/432, leg. 3.

⁵⁵⁵ Garcíadiego, “La oposición conservadora y de las clases medias al cardenismo,” 42. See also Ricardo Pérez Montfort, “Los camisas doradas,” *Secuencia* (ene-abr 1986): 66-77.

⁵⁵⁶ Pérez Montfort, “Los camisas doradas,” 72. See also Hugh G. Campbell, *La derecha radical en México 1929-1949* (México, DF: SEP SETENTAS, 1976), 276.

⁵⁵⁷ “En el primer congreso Ibero-Americano anticomunista desarrollará interesante programa la Confederación de la Clase Media,” *Omega*, October 23, 1936, p. 1.

⁵⁵⁸ Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Hispanismo y falange. Los sueños imperiales de la derecha española y México* (México, DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992).

expulsion of Jews.⁵⁵⁹ ARM members also attacked communism as a threat to the family, morality, and private property. Police reports suggest that these organizations worked together. In August 1936, detainees held by the Mexico City police for putting up ARM propaganda included CCM leader Gustavo Sáenz de Sicilia and eight members of the Veterans' Union.⁵⁶⁰

Articles in right-wing newspapers fanned the fears of communism and civil war. One critic blamed President Cárdenas' "perfidious theory of a society without classes." Rather, he was fomenting hatred between the diverse sectors of the country to the point of provoking a "civil war." At the same time, the writer condemned the passive acceptance of the middle class. The "suicidal apathy" of the middle and intellectual classes had allowed the government to spread an "impudent propaganda of communism, which they disguise with the names of socialism, radical socialism and leftism."⁵⁶¹ Groups like the CCM and ARM repeated their frustration that the middle class — professionals, public and private employees, small farmers, industrialists and merchants — had been left out of the Revolution's benefits. Their exclusion had occurred despite their significance to society and the economy and the fact that from the dawn of independence, the middle class had supplied the nation's leaders.⁵⁶²

Concern for the absence of representation grew as Cárdenas in 1937 proposed a restructuring of the PNR to include corporate organizations representing social

⁵⁵⁹ AGN, IPS, vol. 204, exp. 17, fs: 52-54 (August 1934).

⁵⁶⁰ AGN, LCR, vol. 490, exp. 437.1/512, fs: 20.

⁵⁶¹ "Vigorouso llamamiento a las clases media e intelectual," *Omega*, February 17, 1938, p. 1, 4.

⁵⁶² Declaración de principios, programa de acción y estatutos de la "Confederación de la Clase Media,"

groups. The CTM would represent Mexican workers and the National Campesino Confederation (*Confederación Nacional Campesina*, or CNC) would represent campesinos, specifically those who had received land from the government. In an article in *El Universal* entitled “The Wounded Middle Class,” Rúben Salazar Mallén noted the plan’s hostility to the middle class that had since the PNR’s foundation “acted as its pedestal.” He claimed that the middle class sustained the official revolutionary party. Proposed changes to the PNR structure would “displace the middle class” and consign its members to the margins of national issues. The middle class was “the most vital part of all organized society:” its artists, technicians and thinkers contributed to the improvement of Mexican culture. All of Mexico would suffer from this “death blow” to the middle class.⁵⁶³

Cárdenas Responds to the Middle Class

The Cárdenas administration was uneasy about the proliferation of right-wing opposition groups, concerned about middle-class loyalty, and aware of material difficulties facing many in this sector.⁵⁶⁴ In 1939, the ruling party’s newspaper, *El Nacional*, described the long lines at pawnshops made up of the “honorable professional who has neither clients nor influence,” “the politician fallen from grace who had a car and now has to pawn the last stickpin to buy oil,” “the student,” and “the widow with her sewing machine.”⁵⁶⁵ In 1938, the state publicity department

⁵⁶³ Rúben Salazar Mallén, “La clase media herida,” *El Universal*, December 30, 1937.

⁵⁶⁴ Javier Garciadiego, “La oposición conservadora y de las clases medias al cardenismo,” 45.

⁵⁶⁵ “Las hienas de los empeños,” August 25, 1939, 2a, p. 1. See “El destino de la clase media,” *El Universal*, February 2, 1938, 1a, p. 3.

(*Departamento Autonomo de Prensa y Publicidad*, or DAPP) issued a pamphlet entitled *Strength and Weakness of the Middle Class (Fuerza y flaqueza de la clase media)* acknowledging middle-class concerns with combating monopolies, organizing fairer systems for the distribution of goods, and guaranteeing small property owners. In the midst of the oil expropriation, it called for the “solidarity of the most cultured (*más cultos*).” Together the members of the middle class could contribute to national cohesion by emphasizing “the triumph of Mexican sovereignty” in lecture halls and professional unions. It called on the farmer and small businessmen to help stop the spread of “crazy” and “malevolent” rumors about Mexico’s future. Acknowledging the differences “between the intellectual and the modest bookkeeper, and between the doctor and farm owner,” the pamphlet pointed out that many shared the condition of being self-employed and all were distinct from the empresarial class. The writer expressed sympathy for those who in their “diversity and indeterminate position lay crushed between the two millstones of capitalism and the proletariat with its head in the upper bourgeoisie and its feet in the proletariat.”⁵⁶⁶

Praising the middle class as sister of the working class, the pamphlet assured readers that Cárdenas had not forgotten them. His recent transformation of the PNR into the Mexican Revolutionary Party (PRM) would aid middle-class political organizing and the middle class’s merger with the proletariat in common struggle. Indeed, Cárdenas had reorganized the party creating four sectors: the labor sector represented by the CTM, the campesino sector, represented by the CNC, the military,

⁵⁶⁶ “Fuerza y flaqueza de la clase media,” (México, DF: Departamento Autónoma de Prensa y Publicidad, 1938).

and a popular sector that would supposedly include many middle-class organizations. Although a bid for middle-class support and inclusion, this sector did not satisfy groups like the CMM. It favored only groups closely associated with the state, most notably public employees organized into the Federation of State Workers' Union (*Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado*), or FSTSE.⁵⁶⁷

However, the strength of the coterie of right-wing middle class groups fizzled in 1938. According to Brigida von Mentz, evidence and publicity associated them with the attempted coup of General Saturnino Cedillo, with the conservative association of Mexican businessmen (*Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana*), and with European fascism. This occurred at a moment when the government decided to crack down on fascist propaganda as the administration made common cause with the United States in the approaching war.⁵⁶⁸ The government's oil expropriation generated an enormous patriotic response that knocked the wind out of the sails of right-wing nationalism.⁵⁶⁹ In 1940, the CMM and affiliated organizations joined the presidential campaign of opposition candidate General Juan Andreu Almazán against PRM candidate Manuel Avila Camacho.⁵⁷⁰ The tremendous

⁵⁶⁷ The FSTSE included those previously organized under the National Federation of Workers (*Federación Nacional de Trabajadores del Estado*), or FNTE. The latter united Mexico City-based workers providing urban services as well as telegraph industry employees, street maintenance workers, postal workers, government employees in several key ministries, and office employees in the Mexico City government. Davis, *Urban Leviathan*, 88.

⁵⁶⁸ Mentz, "Los empresarios alemanes," 303.

⁵⁶⁹ Mentz, "Los empresarios alemanes," 303.

⁵⁷⁰ Garcíadiego, "La oposición conservadora y de las clases medias al cardenismo," 45, 77. Almazán headed the Revolutionary Party of National Unification (*Partido Revolucionario de Unificación Nacional*). On the relationship between students, public employees, and Almazán, see "La vigorosa juventud universitaria toma sitio en las filas almanzanistas," *Omega*, July 1, 1939, p. 1; "Almazán ofrece que los empleados públicos disfruten de garantías y consideraciones," *Omega*, September 9, 1939, p. 1. On the support of the CCM for Almazán, see "La CCM a favor de Almazán," *El Hombre*

showing of support for Almazán at the polls would convince the government and the party to take more concrete steps to incorporate and neutralize the middle class. But under Cárdenas, the middle-class beneficiary of state largesse was the public employee. In itself, the increase in public employment from 45,000 in 1930 to 70,000 in 1940 was a boon to a distressed class eager for respectable white-collar employment. But it came at a price. Chapter Seven focuses on the public employee.

libre, June 19, 1939, p. 1. See also “La clase media debe de estar con Almazán,” *El Hombre libre*, August 4, 1939, p. 3.

Chapter 7: Public Employees: Beleaguered, Gender-Challenged and Corporativized (1920-1940)

Introduction

In the Porfiriato, expanding bureaucracies began to shift the notion of middle class from one comprised of liberal professionals and artisan proprietors to one dominated by public and private office workers. After the Revolution, office work became synonymous with the middle class although disputes raged over whether or not new entrants to this expanded sector qualified for middle-class status.

Controversy particularly focused on the middle-class status of working women, whose growing presence in the office represented a challenge to male prerogatives and notions of propriety, honor, and merit. In the early years of the 1920s, both male and female office workers faced frequent layoffs, firings, and unpaid wages.

Beginning in 1925, the government began a long process of corporativizing the public sector worker: it introduced pensions, insurance, access to home mortgages, cooperatives, and state-controlled unionization in return for loyalty secured through these privileges and increased surveillance in a period of socio-political conflict.⁵⁷¹

Between 1920 and 1940, the number of public employees in the Federal District increased from 15,000 to 69,300. The percentage of female employees rose much more dramatically than that of men. The number of *empleadas* jumped from 171 to

⁵⁷¹ I use the word “corporativize” to refer to a political process whereby a particular group (in this case, public employees) becomes a corporate unit attached to the state. The Mexican state made public employees into a privileged group in return for loyalty.

16, 400.⁵⁷² These public employees would become a major backbone of the official state party.

The Public Employee in the Early 1920s

The municipal and federal governments would have liked to focus on their white-collar employees as a means of ensuring their loyalty, improving their alleged spendthrift behavior, and responding to their demands. Attempts were made to introduce savings banks, stores for basic consumer goods at controlled prices, and homeownership through access to easy loans and property.⁵⁷³ But the state was hardpressed to pay their salaries let alone resolve the problems of soaring prices and rents.⁵⁷⁴ Although the government received revenue from oil exports, other forms of taxation were difficult and Mexico suffered as a pariah nation denied recognition and credit by major countries, particularly the United States. Although the signing of the de la Huerta-Lamont treaty in 1922 was a step toward U.S. recognition in its scheduling of debt repayment to foreign bondholders, the treaty meant the siphoning

⁵⁷² México, Secretaría de Fomento, Oficina Tipográfica, *Censo de Población 1921*; México, Secretaría de Fomento, Oficina Tipográfica, *Censo de Población 1930*, México, Secretaría de Fomento, Oficina Tipográfica, *Censo de Población 1940*. Female employees represented 24% of all public employees. Susie Porter finds that the percentage of female employees in government administration grew from 28% in 1932 to 31% in 1938. Susie S. Porter, "Espacios burocráticos, normas de feminidad e identidad de la clase media en México durante la década de 1930," in *Historia de mujeres y hombres en perspectiva de género, México siglos XIX y XX*, eds. María Teresa Fernández Aceves, Susie Porter, and Carmen Ramos Escandón (México, DF: CIESAS, 2006), 194.

⁵⁷³ In 1919, the municipality announced the creation of a savings bank for its employees. "Hay que realiza la gran idea," *Boletín Municipal*, August 1, 1919, 485-486, ACHM; "El ahorro es dignificación y es libertad," *Boletín Municipal*, October 12, 1923, 413-414, ACHM. In 1922, Obregón ordered the division of the property around the old horsetrack of Peralvillo (*ex-hipodromo del Peralvillo*) at the north end of the city in order to establish a neighborhood for employees and workers. With a low price of 1.50 pesos per square meter to be paid off in five yearly installments, the lots quickly sold. By the middle of 1923, no properties were left. Berra Stoppa, "La expansión de la Ciudad de México," 212.

⁵⁷⁴ "Triste situación del empleado público," *Omega*, September 13, 1921, p. 1, 4; "Costa de Vida 1923," AGN, RT, vol. 539, exp.3; "Costa de Vida 1926," AGN, RT, vol. 1106, exp. 29.

off of a substantial portion of revenue away from Mexico. An editorial in the newspaper *El Imparcial* coined the phrase “Put living before paying” (“*Primero es vivir que pagar*”),” arguing that the government had to pay the six or seven back payments it owed its employees before it paid American bankers (“*los banqueros americanos*”).⁵⁷⁵ Beleaguered state employees in public demonstrations and private petitions repeated the slogan, “*Primero es vivir que pagar.*”

While financial crisis affected all levels of society, contemporary commentators often remarked that the economic situation hit the middle class the hardest. In his study of early twentieth-century Peru, David Parker similarly shows how middle-class employees claimed to suffer more from inflation than manual workers (*obreros*). Self identified members of the middle class believed they had an intrinsic right to a certain standard of living, to remaining within particular boundaries of decency, and to educate their children to preserve those standards and boundaries.⁵⁷⁶ Mexicans repeated the same arguments. In 1921, the right-wing newspaper *Omega* decried the ten percent salary reduction suffered by public employees, the “servants of the Nation.” No other triumphant revolution or constituted government had so debased the situation of the public employee. The rich could survive and resist “the foolish aims of the pseudo-socialists and revolutionaries,” while workers recovered their rights and obtained new ones.⁵⁷⁷ But

⁵⁷⁵ “Primero es vivir que pagar,” *Excelsior*, May 7, 1924, AGN, O-C, vol. 313, exp. 813-E-51, fs. 9.

⁵⁷⁶ David Parker, “White Collar Lima, 1910-1929: Commercial Employees and the Rise of the Peruvian Middle Class,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72/1 (February 1992): 47-72.

⁵⁷⁷ “Triste situación del empleado público,” *Omega*, September 13, 1921, p. 1, 4. See also “En defensa de los empleados públicos,” *Omega*, November 11, 1922, p. 1, 4; “Reina gran disgusto entre los empleados municipales,” *Cronos*, September 5, 1922, 1a, p. 1, 5. In his defense, Municipal President Dr. Miguel Alonzo Romero explained that the failure to pay employee salaries was due to the vast

the middle class, the gears of the administration of public services, felt the brunt of the crisis. They lacked the right to strike, but did they want to? To strike went against their principles of order and public interest.

Public and private protest in 1924 mounted among public sector workers when military rebellion plunged the country into civil war. A key sector of generals backed ex-finance minister Adolfo de la Huerta in his opposition to Álvaro Obregón's imposition of Plutarco Elías Calles as president. So grave was the situation that Obregón himself took to the battlefield to save his government. Of course, the government went broke. It suspended debt-repayment to foreign bondholders and only managed to pay soldiers' salaries with a loan from William Doheny of Standard Oil.⁵⁷⁸ While US government recognition, recently awarded upon the signing of the Bucareli Agreements, helped to assure a government victory over the rebels by providing arms, white-collar employees suffered, spoke up, and organized. "Primero es vivir que pagar" became their oft-repeated slogan.

In 1924, the Department of Finance admitted that federal employees had sacrificed up to 50 percent of the value of their salaries in delayed paychecks.⁵⁷⁹ Newspapers warned that "hunger has made its sinister appearance in the homes of

sums of money being directed toward public services. Public services, however, were also in disorder as a result of the city's huge deficit of over three million pesos. *Memorias del Ayuntamiento* 1922, 42, AHCM;

⁵⁷⁸ On the de la Huerta rebellion and its fiscal consequences, see Linda B. Hall, *Oils, Banks and Politics: The United States and Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1917-1924* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 158-179. Also Carmen Collado Herrera, *Empresarios y políticos, entre la restauración y la revolución, 1920-1924* (México, DF: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1996), 66-69.

⁵⁷⁹ Fondo Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca, Mexico City [FAPEC], Archivo Fernando Torreblanca, Fondo Alvaro Obregón [FAO], f. 11, s. 040100, g. 30, exp. 214, inv. 4749, leg. 1, f. 4-5.

this important sector of our middle classes.”⁵⁸⁰ The Association of Federal and Commercial Employees (*Asociación General de Empleados Federales y de Comercio*) lamented that “more than five thousands families” were without food, medications, and tramfare to get to work. They had lost the “most elementary rudiments of delicacy and shame.” They took to mass rallies in the El Toreo plaza and at the Nacional Frontón building.⁵⁸¹ In 1925, the National Resistance League of Public Employees Against Exploitation (*Liga de Resistencia de Empleados Públicos Contra la Explotación*) rallied to the defense of the middle class ignored by recent government efforts to “dignify” the campesino.⁵⁸² The league warned the new Calles administration that the government had to meet its demands if it wanted to ensure the loyalty of public employees.⁵⁸³

Yet these workers were divided over tactics and loathe to imitate the militant unionization of the working class. When violence erupted in a rally at El Toreo Plaza, a group of employees wrote to President Obregón: “We energetically protest all forms of violence, public pressure, and scandal. As “honorable servants of the nation,” they were obliged to conserve an attitude of serenity, prudence and civility in order to keep the authorities’ respect and confidence. A letter from the Department of Communications and Public Works supported them. “The idea to protest,” it claimed,

⁵⁸⁰ “Las decenas de los empleados,” *Revista de Revistas*, April 13, 1924, p. 3.

⁵⁸¹ AGN, IPS, vol. 30, exp. 53, fs. 1-7 (May 10, 1924). Photographs of the protests show men in suits and ties assembled at El Toreo Plaza. See *Revista de Revistas*, May 18, 1924, p. 7-8. On the Nacional Frontón rally, see “Con un escandalo termino ayer la session de la Asociación de Empleados Federales y de Comercio.” *El Democrata*. June 13, 1924, AGN, IPS, vol. 30, exp. 53, fs. 1-7.

⁵⁸² AGN, Información Políticas y Sociales [IPS], vol. 296, exp. 72, fs. n/a (May 19, 1925).

⁵⁸³ “Los sin trabajo tuverion ayer un mitin y una manifestación,” *El Día Español*, April 17, 1925. See also AGN, IPS, vol. 6, exp. 14, fs. 39.

“germinated among some bad servants of the government.”⁵⁸⁴ The letters reveal a particular conception of the public white-collar employee. Unlike the working-class protestors, they were not uncouth and aggressive, but respectful citizens in search of peaceful solutions. At least in the private sector, employers played upon these distinctions: the Compañía Teléfonos Ericsson supported a management-friendly Catholic association among phone operators who could claim “*señorita*” status in contrast to the unruly, immoral *obreras* associated with the anarchist-led General Confederation of Workers (*Confederación General de Trabajadores*, or CGT).⁵⁸⁵

One option was to appeal directly to the president as a private citizen in need. Hundreds besieged the president with telegrams. Emilio Nava needed 324 pesos in back pay to support his wife and two children. Manuel and María Luis Irigoyen, both employees of the Secretaría de Educación and residents of Santa María La Ribera, needed the same to attend to “urgent family matters.” Sofía Garciduenas, typist in the Secretaría de Industria y Comercio, wanted the \$244 owed her for April and May to take care of her sick mother. Carmen Iriarte, a shorthand secretary in the Departamento de la Contraloría needed her pay to intern her mother in a sanitarium.⁵⁸⁶ President Obregón had a single response to all petitioners: he “could

⁵⁸⁴ AGN, Álvaro Obregón y Elías Plutarco Calles [OC], vol. 313, exp. 813-E-51, fs. 7 (May 12, 1924 and May 13, 1924).

⁵⁸⁵ Susie Porter, “*De Obreras, señoritas y empleadas; culturas de trabajo en la Ciudad de México, 1920-1940*,” (Paper presented to the Seminario de la Historia Social, Colegio de México, México, DF, September 29, 2011).

⁵⁸⁶ AGN, O-C, vol. 313, exp. 813-E-51, fs. 4 (July 30, 1924 and August 2, 1924). For more telegrams, see AGN, O-C, vol. 313, exp. 813-E-51, fs. 9.

not make exceptions in delayed pay because he received millions of the same requests daily and could not attend to them all as he desired.”⁵⁸⁷

Candido Cordero, Beleaguered Public Employee

In December 1925, the play *Candido Cordero* opened at the Teatro Virginia Fabregas. I have alluded to its characters in Chapter Four. Written by the prominent avant garde playwright, 29 year old Julio Jimenez Rueda, it was a farce built around popular stereotypes.⁵⁸⁸ A critique of the government’s inability to care for its own workers, the play was also a nightmare expressing the anxieties of middle-class men as they perceived women’s invasion of their work space, an alleged deterioration of standards of merit in favor of patronage and personalism, and the inability of the traditional breadwinner to sustain his family.

“The government owes us two paychecks,” Candido Cordero tells the rent collector at the opening of the play. Cordero has no “Henessy” to offer the rent collector and makes up a lie that his friends drank it up yesterday. Cordero must serve him tequila, the drink of the poor. The rent collector gets the last of Cordero’s cigarettes. They both agree that the lottery is the only option for the struggling middle class.

Candido Cordero has been unemployed for six months. His broken watch symbolizes his broken manhood. Cordero’s family survives on their small savings and the salary of his daughter Consuelo, also a government worker. They have

⁵⁸⁷ AGN, O-C, vol. 313, exp. 813-E-51, fs. 3 (July 14, 1924).

⁵⁸⁸ Julio Jiménez Rueda, *Candido Cordero, empleado público; farsa en tres actos* (México, DF: Tallers gráficos de la nación, 1928).

pawned precious accoutrements of middle-class status like their piano. Cordero assures his wife that the Minister has told him that at the first vacancy the office will call him back to work. His wife scorns him for being so naive. Cordero commiserates with his friend Rodríguez who has also just been fired. “Twenty years of labor, incessant work, absolute punctuality. The Government is a pig,” Cordero cries out in anger. Rodríguez agrees. Discussing the state of affairs, they lament that the “government has no money and doesn’t fulfill its promises.” The two friends talk of alternatives that will make them independent entrepreneurs. Cordero fancies using his remaining savings to open a tobacco shop. Rodríguez is forever dreaming up moneymaking schemes involving the invention of new gadgets.

It is not the “Ministro,” but Cordero’s daughter Consuelo who gets him a post in a lower rank in another government office. The office is full of the chatter and machinations of young women, more interested in gossip, painting their nails, discussing the movies, the fashions and their boyfriends than in work. The typist Coti reads a novel she has received from her boyfriend. Arriving late and sleepy to work, her coworker Flora plucks her eyebrows and recounts the wonderful time she had last evening dancing till three in the morning at a club. Flora does not have to worry about arriving late, she claims, because she was dancing with a friend of the boss. Coti and Flora admit that through the favor of their bosses, they can rise in the office hierarchy. These were figures of popular culture and the mostly male imagination: women worked not out of need but to spend frivolously and, in fact, they hardly worked at all. Readers of the *Excelsior* newspaper followed the antics of “The

Secretary that Does Not Work”.⁵⁸⁹ Young and slim, she was more interested in fashion and dancing than work.⁵⁹⁰ The conservative *Omega* newspaper mercilessly criticized the female employee. She did little or nothing in the office. She was a dangerous beauty, “delicate and svelte with her mouth a small purple nest in the shape of a heart.” The female employee ensnared helpless, decent men at work and rendered the poor empleado “without energy or virility” a “toy” in her capricious banalities. The miserable male employee with an empty stomach and worn out suit, seeking an office job, had to pay homage to these empleadas. For the love his family, he had to “bow down to that prostitute.” To behold a modern office was to look upon “a delicate selection of pretty faces and idle hands” that covered “rot and filth.”⁵⁹¹

The middle class family had viewed office work as a safe and reputable haven for their daughters who were obliged to work prior to marriage. This transnational phenomenon was necessarily negotiated in local space.⁵⁹² But employers in Mexico City, as elsewhere, did not take their female employees seriously. They viewed women’s work as a transitory stage before marriage, or a temporary reality to help support their families, or a means to earn a little extra cash to buy frivolous things.⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁹ “La Taquígrafia que no Trabaja,” *Excelsior*, September 19, 1937 2a, p. 7.

⁵⁹⁰ See, for example, *Excelsior*, January 24, 1923.

⁵⁹¹ “El lastre burocrático,” *Omega*, Dec. 13, 1924, pp. 1, 3; “Esmaltes color de fúeto. La señorita secretaria,” Feb. 4, 1922, pp. 1, 4.

⁵⁹² Katharina von Ankum, “Introduction,” *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 4.

⁵⁹³ For Chile, see Elisabeth Hutchison who argues that bosses expected female workers to quit upon marriage and justified their lower wages and lack of work protections because they were “daughters of good families,” and therefore simply contributing to larger family incomes. Elisabeth Quay Hutchinson, *Laborers Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900-1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 184.

In fact, employment files record how women were often sole caretakers of older or sick family members.⁵⁹⁴

The new *empleada* as stereotyped in the media presented a conundrum: was she the daughter of the middle class or was she a sleazy interloper from the lower classes? Who were these new girls with cropped hair who had shed their ankle-length skirts, long-sleeved blouses and high collars for high-heels, stockings, short-sleeved blouses, and skirts that exposed their legs?⁵⁹⁵ Cordero's daughter Consuelo was a proper hard-working *señorita* but his other daughter Manuela was a *chica moderna*, hot on the heels of the latest fashion in hopes of becoming a movie star.

Candido Cordero represented a new type in popular culture: the male employee emasculated by routine work in an office hierarchy infused with new cultural behaviors. He believes his superiors will one day recognize his honorable and faithful service. A secretary points out that he may be a "model employee," but he still earns 300 pesos a month after thirty years of service.⁵⁹⁶ He likely knows that patronage has historically provided access to public service, but he comes to perceive that its modes and clientele have changed. The newspaper *Omega* complained that

For Canada, see Kate Boyer who argues that male employers saw female clerical worker as earning extra spending money and searching for husbands. Kate Boyer, "Neither Forget nor Remember Your Sex: Sexual Politics in the Early Twentieth-Century Canadian Office," *Journal of Historical Geography* 92/2 (2003): 222. For Mexico, see Susie Porter who discusses the socio-political belittling of female office workers as morally lacking and working for money to spend on frivolities. Susie Porter, "Espacios burocráticos," 199-200.

⁵⁹⁴ For example, AHCM, caja 980, exp. 248 (1919).

⁵⁹⁵ "Lo que va de ayer a hoy in cuestión de faldas: La taquígrafa antigua y la moderna," *El Universal*, February 5, 1928. For photos of women's fashion at the time, see Fototeca Nacional del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia [FN-INAH], Fondo Casasola [FC], c. 38A03, no. 96940 (1936); FN-INAH, FC, c. 38A04, no. 76505 (1930-35); FN-INAH, FC, c. 38A04, no. 79859 (1934).

⁵⁹⁶ Jiménez Rueda, *Candido Cordero*, 75.

only those favored by “influential people” and “friends of the cause” got government positions. Moreover, those who got them barely knew how to read and write.⁵⁹⁷

Cordero notes that his boss drinks heavily and falls in love with the secretaries. Pepito, a coworker, dresses stylishly, flirts with Coti and Flora, and spends his nights teaching girls how to dance.⁵⁹⁸ He is representative of the “*fifi*,” the young *empleado* who shows off a new suit each month, manages to drive a car, and delights in the company of his female co-workers.⁵⁹⁹ *Omega* called the “*fifis*” “elegant men” who had spawned a “social plague of immorality and injustice.”⁶⁰⁰ For his part, Cordero worries that his age will pose an obstacle to his finding a new job. He comes to realize that his “honor” and merit no longer serve him.⁶⁰¹

The market offered bureaucrats like Cordero relief. Numerous products — many from the United States — promised to boost the energy of the middle class man suffering from “mental depletion” and “neurasthenia” allegedly caused by nervous

⁵⁹⁷ “El lastre burocrático,” *Omega*, December 13, 1924, p. 1, 3. Research on Brazil has concluded that even government efforts to undermine patronage as part of a modernization strategy, such as the introduction of a competitive examination (*concurso*) to decide who obtained federal government jobs, did not minimize the continued reliance on connections (*pedido*). Brian Owensby, *Intimate Ironies: Modernity and the Making of Middle-Class Lives in Brazil* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 80-88. Similarly, the professional requirement of a diploma represented a new “modern” bridge between merit and patronage rather than completely transforming old patronage and clientelist models. Cristina Peixoto Mehrrens, “Urban Space and Politics: Constructing Social Identity and the Middle Class in São Paulo, Brazil, 1930s-1940s,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Miami, 2000), 143. Despite *Omega*’s disqualification of new public employees as ignorant, new educational requirements in Mexico undoubtedly had a similar effect in Mexico.

⁵⁹⁸ Jiménez Rueda, *Candido Cordero*, 63.

⁵⁹⁹ Jiménez Rueda, *Candido Cordero*, 14.

⁶⁰⁰ “Mujeres de lujo y hombres elegantes,” *Omega*, June 17, 1932, p. 1, 3.

⁶⁰¹ Jimenez Rueda, *Candido Cordero*, 87.

strain and excessive mental effort.⁶⁰² The newspapers entertained with new cartoon characters who escape the routine of office work by indulging in fantasy. In *El Señor Pestaña*, created by Andres Audiffred and Hipólito Zendejas, characters invent a time machine to travel to inhospitable deserts and cannibal-infested islands; they joust as knights in the Middle Ages and witness the French Revolution. In fact, they are public employees who speak a colloquial, provincial Spanish indicative of their immigrant status.⁶⁰³ They are part of the social opening of office work that represented such a challenge to long-time employees like Candido Cordero who had suffered the debacle of Porfirian stability and propriety — a stability and propriety now inflated with nostalgia.

Then disaster strikes in the office of Candido Cordero. Coti and Flora accuse his daughter Consuelo of sleeping with the boss. In Cordero's eyes, Coti and Flora lack middle-class decency in their personal behavior, but in this instance, they transform themselves into proper "señoritas" to accuse Consuelo of an unacceptable breach of morality. Consuelo admits that she is friendly with her boss, but denies an amorous relationship. Nonetheless, Candido Cordero feels he must resign. He cannot defend his honor, nor that of his daughter and his family for which he is responsible. He forces Consuelo to resign as well.

⁶⁰² The company Ovomaltina promised that its powder drink would boost the energy of tired individuals and "fill up [their] mental depletion." *Excelsior*, Jan. 24, 1923; A manufacturer of automatic-playing pianos advertised its product for the "the brain of the intellectual worker," who in times of rest supposedly needed the stimulation of "perfectly executed piano playing." *El Universal*, Aug. 31, 1924, 1a, p. 12. For the incidence and meaning of neurasthenia in the U.S., see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 14.

⁶⁰³ Juan Manuel Aurrecochea and Armando Bartra, *Puros cuentos: La historia de la historieta en Mexico, 1874-1934* (Mexico, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1988), 248.

A case recently uncovered by Susie Porter reveals the greater complexity of such a situation that could develop when more actors became involved. She recounts the story of two telephone operators fired in 1927 by the Ericsson Telephone Company (Empresa de Teléfonos de Ericsson) for allegedly being pregnant. Through the anarchist worker confederation, the CGT, they challenged the company and filed a case with the government arbitration board (*Junta de Conciliación y Arbitraje*). The telephone company insisted that the women be dismissed because it was their custom to hire only single women without children and because the presence of pregnant women in the office caused a “scandal” offensive to the other “señoritas.” These señoritas belonged to the white-collar Catholic association approved by the company management. The pregnant women identified themselves as “obreras.” The state ruled in their favor: not only women but also mothers had rights as workers and the Family Law of 1917 had abolished all distinctions between illegitimate and legitimate children. Hence whether these workers were married or not was moot.⁶⁰⁴

Candido Cordero does not imagine a collective defense of any kind. He defends his individual honor and that of his family, and in this defense, he orders his daughter out of the work place. Frustrated by his impotence in the workplace, Cordero tries to assert his dominance in the home. “I am tired of obeying. Now I want to give orders. I am the boss of the house!” he yells.⁶⁰⁵ No one pays attention to him. His wife and his daughter Manuela have always criticized him mercilessly and spent his money. At one point, his wife called him a “good for nothing” and beat him

⁶⁰⁴ Susie Porter, “*De Obreras, señoritas y empleadas; culturas de trabajo en la Ciudad de México, 1920-1940.*”

⁶⁰⁵ Jimenez Rueda, *Candido Cordero*, 28.

up.⁶⁰⁶ The husband hen-pecked by his consumer-crazed wife had also become a literary type. In a short story published in *Omega* in 1922, Don Ramón's wife searches his pockets to make sure he has hidden no money from her. When his wife discovers 60 centavos unaccounted for, she accuses him of having a sweetheart. Calling him a criminal for robbing bread from his children, she begins to suffocate him. Their servant intervenes and don Ramón assures his wife of his fidelity. He promises to buy her fabric for a new dress. Later, she again accuses him of having a lover when she smells lotion that has spilled on him in a barbershop. Depressed, he returns to the office with thoughts of suicide, but the sweet voice of the typist interrupts his morbid plan. Her stockings, bare arms, and low neckline distract him from his worries.⁶⁰⁷

Candido Cordero never returned to the office. His daughter Consuelo returned and she became the family breadwinner. According to statistics, by 1938, 74 percent of female workers in public administration were the principal providers for their families.⁶⁰⁸ The image of the frivolous temptress did not lose its punch, but feminist voices spoke up loudly for the rights and dignity of these workers. Meanwhile, in 1925, Candido Cordero's job was taken by a consumer- and girl-crazed fifi.

⁶⁰⁶ Jimenez Rueda, *Candido Cordero*, 21.

⁶⁰⁷ "Bocetos estafalarios. Las mujeres celosas," *Omega*, July 29, 1922, p.1.

⁶⁰⁸ A federal census of employees in 1938 revealed that 88 percent of men and 74 percent of women supported dependents. Porter, "Espacios burocráticos," 195.

The Corporativization of the Public Employee (1925-1940)

Beginning in 1925, President Plutarco Elías Calles took steps to rationalize public administration. The government sought greater control over public employees by providing greater job security, job benefits, increased surveillance and obligatory political organization. Responding to employees' grievances and the specter of disloyalty provoked by his attack on Catholics, Calles initiated the corporativization of the public employee who in return for "privileges" would be obliged to submit to official politics. The process intensified in the Maximato (1929-34) and the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940).

Calles' Civil Service Law (*Ley de Servicio Civil*) protected "the public employee against the frequent possibilities of unjustifiable destitution." Employees got the right to indemnification as well as to medical and pharmaceutical assistance. The law placed restraints on the political voice of employees by refusing them the right to strike. State workers had "a juridical obligation to fidelity to the state." The law did, however, permit associations that represented professional interests and acted in defense of its members.⁶⁰⁹

Further legislation under the Calles and Portes Gil governments (1928-1930) initiated social security benefits. The Social Security Law (*Ley de Seguro Social*) offered compensation for work-related accidents, funds for old-age pensions, life insurance, and benefits for workers' dependents. The legislation was a means of inculcating habits of savings, thrift and prevision — albeit forcibly — and responding

⁶⁰⁹ AGN, Lázaro Cárdeans del Río [LCR], vol. 881, exp. 545.2/1, fs. n/a (No date).

to the oft-repeated charge that lack of savings was a serious flaw in the Mexican middle class.⁶¹⁰ Deductions forced employees to economize further and to practice, at least on the surface, an esteemed value befitting middle-class Mexicans as envisioned by their national leaders. At the same time, insurance and pension funds gave the government power over a part of the employee's salary. As in Britain, deductions acted as a form of discipline. Daniel Defert explains how insurance there in the nineteenth century became a new channel for concentrating capital and controlling workers. Taking part of a worker's pay ensured more regular and punctual attendance while disciplining consumption and encouraging individual responsibility.⁶¹¹ However, in Mexico insurance had deep historical roots in more egalitarian artisan guilds and mutual aid societies.

Public employees had long sought home ownership as a badge of middle-class status and relief from rent gouging. As early as 1922, President Obregón initiated government subsidization of home ownership by selling lots at low prices on easy terms on the grounds of the old racetrack in the Colonia de Peralvillo. These included insurance of the loan and property upon the death of the borrower.⁶¹² After 1926, the newly created Civil Pensions and Retirement Fund (*Dirección de Pensiones Civiles de Retiro*, or DGPCR) assumed responsibility for housing issues. The state directly participated in housing construction and awarded credit to public employees for the

⁶¹⁰ "Las pensiones civiles y militares," *Omega*, Sept 17, 1925, p. 1, 4.

⁶¹¹ Daniel Defert, "'Popular Life' and Insurance Technology," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 211-212.

⁶¹² See footnote 2. Berra Stoppa, "La expansión de la Ciudad de México," 212.

construction and acquisition of a house.⁶¹³ The DGPCR authorized loans of a maximum of 10,000 pesos for the purchase of a house and loaned other small amounts to employees to save them from voracious moneylenders.⁶¹⁴ In its first three years, the DGPCR claimed to have created more than 4,000 homeowners. By 1930, officials declared that these “small property holders have the advantage by their modesty of not creating a capitalist caste, but people free from the demand of property owners (rentiers).”⁶¹⁵

The government also promoted cooperative societies as a means of solving the economic difficulties confronting the middle and lower classes. Cooperatives also built on a long tradition of mutual aid societies whereby members saved and shared in order to “improve themselves.”⁶¹⁶ As early as 1923, officials established a consumer cooperative for Mexico City municipal employees (*Cooperative de Consumos de Empleados Municipales*).⁶¹⁷ According to officials, the cooperative was the first definitive step on “the road to [...] spiritual and economic liberation of the employee

⁶¹³ María Soledad Cruz Rodríguez, *Crecimiento urbano y procesos sociales in el Distrito Federal (1920-1928)* (México, DF: UAM Azcapotzalco, 1994), 144-145.

⁶¹⁴ Berra Stoppa, “La expansión de la Ciudad de México,” 213.

⁶¹⁵ *Estadística Nacional 1930*, 231 cited in Berra Stoppa, “La expansión de la Ciudad de México,” 213.

⁶¹⁶ See, for example, Carlos Illades, “Organizaciones laborales y discurso asociativo en el siglo XIX,” in *Ciudad de México: Instituciones, actores sociales y conflicto político, 1774-1931*, eds. Carlos Illades and Ariel Rodríguez (Zamora, Mich.: Colegio de Michoacán, 1996); Felipe Arturo Ávila Espinosa, “La sociedad mutualista y moralizador de obreros del distrito federal (1909-1911),” *Historia mexicana* 43/1 (1993): 117-154; José Woldenberg K., “Asociaciones artesanas del siglo XIX. Sociedad socorros mutuos de impresores, 1874-1875,” *Revista mexicana de ciencias políticas y sociales* 21/83 (1973): 71-112.

⁶¹⁷ “Hay que realiza la gran idea,” *Boletín Municipal*, August 1, 1919, 485-486, AHCM.

that we have for a long time been preaching and trying to correct.”⁶¹⁸ Cooperatives were seen as an answer to a much older problem of inequality. The administration declared that the cooperative associations’ greatest benefits involved improving the situation of the middle class and the proletariat that had “justly complained of misery and oppression under the plutocracy to which they had been subjected since the time of the Conquest.”⁶¹⁹

While drawing on old mutualist traditions, the cooperative was also promoted by a contemporary transnational movement.⁶²⁰ Prior to his presidency, Calles traveled to Europe to study cooperatives. A subsequent pamphlet published by the SEP (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*) explained how European cooperatives taught the value of unity and working together that were critical to solving the problems of labor struggles and class conflict.⁶²¹ Promoters of cooperatives also shared European economists’ convictions that cooperatives were vital to the middle class. To build a strong nation, the middle class needed to learn to unify and work toward a common cause. One official writing as a member of the middle class claimed that cooperatives would affirm “our solidarity and strong action.” Declaring that “it is our class [...] where the strength of the people lies,” he urged fellow citizens to fight and sacrifice themselves to break “once and for all the long-time indifference toward civic matters

⁶¹⁸ “El primer beneficio de la cooperativa de consumos de empleados municipales,” *Boletín Municipal*, October 19, 1923, 414, AHCM. See also “Otro fase del cooperativismo,” *Boletín Municipal*, November 9, 1923, 481, AHCM.

⁶¹⁹ Informe de sociedades cooperativas, AGN, Ramo Trabajo [RT], vol. 320, exp. 15.

⁶²⁰ On the transnational discussion of cooperatives and the middle class, see L. Müffelmann, *Orientación de la clase media* (Barcelona-Buenos Aires: Editorial Labor, 1926).

⁶²¹ *¿Estamos capacitados para la cooperación?* Propaganda Cooperativa V (México, DF: Publicaciones de la Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1925), 9-11.

on the part of our cultured (*culta*) middle class, of which public employees form a small part.”⁶²²

The fledgling cooperative movement under Calles was a forerunner of the cooperative stores, hospitals, credit banks and housing opportunities that would later become available to public employees as a corporation, a beneficiary of privileges awarded by the state to this group. In this case, the state-sponsored cooperative movement would not so much encourage middle-class autonomy and self-sufficiency as government dependence.

The state’s need to secure public employee loyalty through creating dependence intensified when in 1926 the National League of Religious Defense organized an economic boycott against Calles’ assault on the Catholic church. The state’s response was not so much the granting of privileges as the institution of surveillance and obligatory compliance.

Calles’s supporters responded to the boycott calling on colleagues to condemn the Catholic clergy that supposedly interfered with Mexico’s progress. A group of public employees called on co-workers to form a united front against the church.⁶²³ They formed a pro-Constitution organization of public employees (*Unión de Empleados Públicos Pro-Constitución*). Denouncing the association, the church hierarchy claimed it required employees to face an “inquisitorial interrogation.” Employees had to answer questions about their religious beliefs and practices. The union forced men associated with the Knights of Columbus to renounce their

⁶²² La fuerza de los pueblos está en la clase media,” *Boletín Municipal*, October 26, 1923, p. 469-470.

⁶²³ A los empleados del gobierno, AGN, IPS, vol. 7, exp. 3, fs. 154 (July 28, 1926).

membership. Individuals who did not comply would lose their jobs. The church worried that those condemned would waiver in their convictions and submit to the Union.⁶²⁴

Devout public employees sought advice from prominent priests. They wanted to know how to respond to a questionnaire issued by the Calles administration. Employees had to answer five questions: 1) Are you a member of the National League of Religious Defense? 2) Are you a member of the Knights of Columbus? 3) Are you loyal to the government? 4) Do you approve of the politics of the government? 5) Do you criticize acts of the government? In response, the priests emphasized two principles: “first, that no Catholic must approve the religious persecution or feel obliged to renounce his convictions; and second, that without denying his/her faith, nobody is obliged to accuse himself/herself.” Catholic employees were to answer “no” to questions 1, 2, and 5. They did not have to answer question 4, but the priests advised their most prudent answer would be “yes.”⁶²⁵

Spy reports indicate that prudence did not stop harassment within the administration between 1926 and 1929. In a letter to Calles, employees denounced their Catholic colleagues.⁶²⁶ One employee outed high-ranking officials as practicing

⁶²⁴ Fondo Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca, Mexico City [FAPEC], Archivo Fernando Torreblanca, Fondo Plutarco Elías Calles [FPEC], exp. 61, inv. 5121, leg. 1, fs. 25 (1926); AHAM, Base José María y del Río, caja 43, exp. 28 (December 12, 1926).

⁶²⁵ AHAM, Base Pascual Díaz Barreto, caja 41, exp. 2. (August 20, 1926).

⁶²⁶ For Catholics working in the Banco de Mexico, see AGN, IPS, vol. 296, exp. 72, fs. n/a (August 17, 1926). For members of the Knights of Columbus working in department of Public Welfare (*Benefencia Pública*), see AGN, IPS, vol. 296, exp. 72, fs. n/a (August 28, 1926). The newspaper “*El chinaco*” published a list of names of public employees suspected of belonging to the Knights of Columbus. See AGN, IPS, vol. 296, exp. 72, fs. n/a (December 23, 1926). The same archival file includes another list of employees who were “spies of the clergy, members of the Religious Defense League and who insult[ed] the President.” September 10, 1926.

Catholics, including the head of the Department of Technical Education, engineer Simon Sierra, described as “a complete devotee of the Virgin of Guadalupe,” and member of the Knights of Columbus.⁶²⁷ A government customs auditor was accused of having a “double personality” as a public employee and a principal member of the Catholic faith.⁶²⁸ Employees of the Department of Communications and Public Works denounced workers at the city’s Central Telegraph Office as “addicts of Catholic fanaticism.”⁶²⁹ They reported that the assistant head of the office openly declared that he “would prefer to die than recant [his] religion.” Others were denounced for distributing religious propaganda and belonging to groups like the Vela Perpetua and the Knights of Columbus.⁶³⁰ An employee of the Department of Statistics denounced a man he met on his daily commute to work as one who “shows no embarrassment in publicly manifesting his sympathies for the rebel movement [Cristeros].”⁶³¹

Some Catholic employees renounced their religious activities in order to save their jobs. A few even denounced fellow Catholic co-workers. Agent Number 17 found Catalina Maya, a forty-five year old employee of the Secretary of Finance, exhausted and sick in bed. Maya confessed that she and various young female co-workers had taken part in church activities, including religious gatherings in the

⁶²⁷ AGN, IPS, vol. 107, exp. 24; fs. 1-2 (April 17, 1929).

⁶²⁸ AGN, IPS, vol. 235, exp. 27, fs. 2-5 (March 14, 1929). See also AGN, IPS, vol. 235, exp. 27 fs. 9-10 and fs. 16-17.

⁶²⁹ AGN, IPS, vol. 229, exp. 25, fs. 9-10 (June 1, 1927).

⁶³⁰ AGN, IPS, vol. 299, exp. 25, fs. 13-14, n.d.

⁶³¹ AGN, IPS, vol. 235, exp. 26, fs. 2-6, n.d. Agents of IPS investigated the man and did not find him expressing pro-religious sentiments.

house of a Mrs. Lascuráin.⁶³² However, for the past year she had ceased her involvement because she feared losing her job. She needed her salary of four pesos a month to attend to her illness and the needs of her son.⁶³³ Esther Batalla collaborated with Agent Number 17 after she discontinued distributing Catholic propaganda to co-workers. Batalla ceased her activities, noting that she and her co-workers were being watched, and that firings had become the “order of the day.” She admitted that Archbishop Mora y del Río had demanded all Catholic women “renounce their positions in order to not serve the Government that persecutes the Church.” But she had decided to remain at work and continue spreading propaganda because she felt convinced that she could serve the cause by leafleting. However, she could no longer continue her leafleting for fear of losing a salary that supported her small child and an old aunt.⁶³⁴

The government obliged its employees to join the National Revolutionary Party (*Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, or PNR), the government’s political party formed in 1929, the same year the government and the church signed accords closing the first chapter in their struggle. The government deducted not only party dues but

⁶³² Mrs. Lascuráin was likely from the Lascuráin family living in the neighborhood of Santa María la Ribera. See Chapter Two.

⁶³³ The file also includes a list of employees in the Department of Finance (*Secretaría de Hacienda*) who were accused of being clerics and working against the government. AGN, IPS, vol. 2022B, exp. 33, fs. n/a (September 23, 1927).

⁶³⁴ AGN, IPS, vol. 2022B, exp. 33, fs. n/a (September 23, 1927). Political events during the Reforma (1854-1876) had also forced Catholics to betray their religious convictions to save their careers. In his study of nineteenth-century Oaxaca, Overmyer-Velázquez describes how middle-class professionals, namely lawyers and government officials, recanted their behavior in letters to the bishop. Such repentance of oaths of allegiance to liberal doctrines exposed the challenges to the state’s secular modernizing agenda. See Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 77-78.

also subscription fees to the party newspaper from employees' paychecks. The move was likely a way to ensure loyalty in the wake of José Vasconcelos' 1929 anti-reelection campaign challenge to official politics: the campaign drew support from many middle-class Mexicans, particularly devout Catholics. The conservative press attacked the deductions. The *Omega* newspaper argued that "poor official servants can no longer support the deductions." Their salaries were already insufficient to maintain a family and dress "in decorous fashion" or pay for the monthly tram pass. *Omega* denounced the deductions as a bribe.⁶³⁵ In the same year, the officially-approved Association of Government Employees (*Asociación de Empleados de Gobierno*) spoke out against the mistreatment of employees by the PNR. The association complained it had been the "whip" of public employees. It criticized the unjustifiable firings of long-time employees who were replaced by "neophyte(s) recommended by the National Party."⁶³⁶

In September 1936, President Lázaro Cárdenas announced the formation of the National Federation of State Workers (*Federación Nacional de Trabajadores del Estado*, or FNTE). It would represent all government workers and defined itself as an organization of workers (*trabajadores* or *obreros*), rather than employees (*empleados*). FNTE members did not enjoy one of the most important rights given to organized labor. Under a newly-modified Constitution, Cárdenas denied state workers, including the military, the right to strike. The FNTE later became the

⁶³⁵ Los pobres servidores oficiales ya no soportan los descuentos," *Omega*, October 10, 1930, p. 1; "La campaña de las cien mil subscripciones y la hombría de los empleados públicos," *El Hombre libre*, June 4, 1931, p. 1, 4; "Otra mordida a los empleados públicos para sostenimiento del órgano oficial," *Omega*, March 28, 1935, p. 1.

⁶³⁶ The association's motto was "For the Dignity of the Employee" (*Por la dignificación del empleado*).

FSTSE, discussed in Chapter Six, that represented public employees in the PRM party.

Hostility to the new reforms came from various sectors across the political spectrum. The Confederation of the Middle Class (*Confederación de la Clase Media*, or CCM) fought for the right to strike. The FNTE itself called for this right with support from many employees. These employees felt comfortable as part of Mexico City's militant labor movement. Particularly the teachers and members of the rank-and-file military had a long history of radicalism. But not all public employees supported the right to strike. Some continued to abjure association with working-class movements and their methods of dealing with employers and the state.⁶³⁷ They instead supported the Civil Service Law that regulated hours, wages, pensions, and promotions.⁶³⁸

In 1937, Cárdenas compromised with these distinct approaches. He introduced a statute that divided public employees into two groups based on their salaries and placement in the decision-making hierarchy. "Base workers" (*trabajadores de base*) were those at the lower end of the pay scale who had less autonomy. "Workers of confidence" (*trabajadores de confianza*) were defined as those who received better pay and made decisions requiring greater skills and discretion. The *trabajadores de base* were given the right to strike, but not the *trabajadores de confianza*.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁷ Brian Owensby makes a similar argument for Brazilian middle-class employees. Brian Owensby, *Intimate Ironies: Modernity and the Making of Middle-Class Lives in Brazil* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 166-176.

⁶³⁸ Diane E. Davis, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), 89.

⁶³⁹ Diane E. Davis, *Discipline and Development: Middle Classes and Prosperity in East Asia and Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 298-299, ft. 103.

Despite their different juridical designations, both types of public workers were members of the FNTE. The organization was incorporated into and became one of the most vocal sectors of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (*Confederación de Trabajadores de México*, or CTM). In 1938, the FNTE members became organized under the Federation of State Workers' Union (*Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado*), or FSTSE, which became the bureaucratic sector, or popular sector, of the Party of the Mexican Revolution (*Partido Revolucionario Mexicano*, or PRM).⁶⁴⁰ The inclusion of state workers in the PRM gave public sector employees a strong voice in national politics, but the forced political allegiance continued to fire up critics in the right-wing press for whom it meant unjustifiable wage deductions, mandatory attendance at party rallies, and for Catholics, an interference with their religious practices.

Indeed, many PNR and later PRM events were mandatory for public employees. In 1938, the head of one personnel department warned of consequences for employees who did not show up “with proper punctuality.” Administrators often obliged employees to attend practice sessions for rallies three times a week.⁶⁴¹ Those who failed to attend faced penalties. Raquel Cárdenas Castoreña, a shorthand writer in the Political and Social Information Office, had her salary suspended for three days after three absences from practice. Her boss came to her defense. He asked for the

⁶⁴⁰ Davis, *Urban Leviathan*, 88, 90.

⁶⁴¹ AGN, IPS, vol. 81, exp. 10, fs. 1 (July 27, 1938).

penalty to be lifted, citing her “capability, competency and dedication at work,” as well as the “extra hours she put in at the office.”⁶⁴²

Mandatory rallies and parades held on Sundays meant that devout Catholics exposed their religious faith if they opted to attend Mass instead. They had to define their loyalties. Pedro Tinoco, who worked in the Labor Department, was accused of not attending a Sunday rally “because of his fanatical Catholic beliefs.” Tinoco apparently would “not miss a Sunday mass for anything” (*por nada de esta vida*).⁶⁴³ Other Catholics, fearful of being sanctioned or losing their jobs, chose to march under political banners.

For conservative critics, the participation of female employees in political rallies threatened their moral decency. The rightwing newspaper *El Hombre libre* printed women’s complaints about party practices that required them to show up at six o’clock in the morning for events far from the city center. They felt embarrassed by having to carry drums, trumpets and flags. The newspaper printed an exchange between three young women, one of whom complained of being forced to daily “exercise, prettily, with the *empleados*, shoulder to shoulder, playing drums and trumpets, and marching to the beat under the order of soldiers.”⁶⁴⁴ The party required sport uniforms, which consisted of shorts and an open-neck shirt. One of the women dared President Cárdenas to oblige his female family members to parade “in the shameful suits.”

⁶⁴² AGN, IPS, vol. 81, exp. 10, fs. 2 (November 6, 1940).

⁶⁴³ AGN, IPS, vol. 3, exp. 36, fs. 5-6 (December 3, 1934).

⁶⁴⁴ See “Insisten sobre lo del desfile de las empleadas del gobierno,” *El Hombre libre*, October 25, 1937, p. 1.

The uniforms caused much grief. *Omega* reported young women participated with tears in their eyes. Their cheeks flushed with embarrassment, they were forced to parade “semi-nude like circus ballerinas.”⁶⁴⁵ Another pitied *empleadas* who felt shame over their deformed legs, “knock-kneed” and looking like toothpicks. The uniforms, which “could not be more short,” were “composed of a blouse that exposes the neck and shoulders and of bloomers, leaving [much] nude.”⁶⁴⁶ According to critics, the clothing was against the dictates of decency and morality.

Female public employees were not only targets of defense but also objects of criticism in the 1930s. Susie Porter has noted that public bashing of women public employees surfaced during moments of economic duress and unusual unemployment, particularly in 1930 and 1937.⁶⁴⁷ Somewhat surprisingly, the attacks came from the political left, from former defenders of working women like the CGT, and from organizations identified with the government such as the Union of Revolutionary Youth (*Unión de Jovenes Revolucionarios*), who wanted women fired and replaced by young men who “feel the Revolution in their moral and physical being.”⁶⁴⁸ To get women removed from offices, the opponents relied on arguments made in the 1920s: women worked only for spending money, they spent it foolishly on frivolities, and were prone to immoral behavior. As in the 1920s, opponents questioned their class status.

⁶⁴⁵ “La decencia ha huide de México,” *Omega*, June 13, 1936, p. 1, 2.

⁶⁴⁶ “Es un grave atentado contra el pudor femenino obligar a las empleadas a desfilar semidesnudas,” *Omega*, September 5, 1936, p. 1, 3.

⁶⁴⁷ Porter, “Espacios burocráticos.”

⁶⁴⁸ AGN, LCR, vol. 896, exp. 545.3/274 (August 27, 1935).

But women workers expanded their presence in government administration from 16 percent to 33 percent between 1930 and 1940.⁶⁴⁹ Primarily employed in teaching in the 1920s, in the 1930s they branched out into many ministries, particularly in health and social work. As Susie Porter correctly points out, many played key roles in implementing social reforms.⁶⁵⁰ They had their champions to offset their detractors. The conservative CMM defended them negatively. Women were the “base of culture and morality in our Patria,” the group claimed, and it was wrong to criticize those obliged by economic necessity to “prostitute themselves,” i.e., to work.⁶⁵¹ More importantly, with the organization of a vigorous feminist movement supported by the Cárdenas government, women in high administrative positions, delegates to congresses of women workers and campesinas, and women journalists leapt to the defense of women office workers and made no distinction between white collar “señoritas” and “obreras” as they asserted women’s right to work and access to legal rights of protection. To the critics, they responded that 74 percent of female public employees were the sole supporters of their families. Similar to feminists elsewhere, they asserted that women were less corrupt, more punctual, reliable, and efficient workers than men.⁶⁵² In short, they defended the right of women whose behavior, consumer habits, dress, and social origins might not conform to traditional middle class values. These women and their defenders expanded the boundaries of middle-class identity.

⁶⁴⁹ México, Secretaría de Fomento, Oficina Tipográfica, *Censo de Población 1940*.

⁶⁵⁰ Porter, “Espacios burocráticos,” 192 195.

⁶⁵¹ Declaración de principios, programa de acción y estatutos de la “Confederación de la Clase Media,” México, DF: n.p, 1936.

⁶⁵² Porter, “Espacios burocráticos,” 192, 195.

Conclusion

By 1938, the union of public employees had become a central player in Mexico's corporate political system under the reformulated PRM party. Pro-Cárdenista employees supported their greater incorporation into the state party. Some eagerly denounced their fellow co-workers who maintained fervent Catholic beliefs, questioning their loyalty to the state. The mandatory party fees and parades irritated some, and outright incensed others, who resented the state's heavy hand. For male office workers, the cost also included their threatened emasculation as they became dependents of dishonorable bosses and a bankrupt state that could not always pay their salaries. Furthermore, women's increasing presence in the office feminized the workplace. Despite the reputable nature of the work, women faced the potential questioning of their honor. Fathers, like in the case of Candido Cordero, could no longer protect their daughters' or family's reputation. Zealot revolutionaries questioned the empleadas' middle-class status and claimed the workplace for men. By 1940, public white-collar workers represented a large sector of Mexico City's middle class. While other middle-class sectors felt marginalized by the political system, the state gave public employees a special designation. State workers had come a long way from their precarious position in the fledging post-revolutionary governments of the 1920s. They now occupied a prime spot in Mexico's political future.

Conclusion

In the Porfiriato, the middle class grew with economic growth, urbanization, and the expansion of state and private sector bureaucracies. Professionals, white-collar employees, small- to medium-sized merchants, and artisan proprietors claimed membership in the growing middle class. Statesmen, social scientists, and journalists considered them as the nation's future, although they criticized them for behaviors such as lack of thrift and entrepreneurship associated with a middle-class ideal. At the same time, economic crises and cultural changes blurred class boundaries. The middle class emphasized bodily control and gender norms to mark its distinction. But these signifiers also were subject to instability. Middle-class women increasingly entered public spaces to shop and to work. Their place in public associated them with working-class women or, worse, prostitutes. Male honor, based on their wives secured place in the home, faced questioning.

The Revolution of 1910 dealt the middle class a terrific blow. Although the revolution's leadership, its technical cadres, bureaucratic support, and its eventual beneficiaries came from the middle class, the movement's initial onslaught was terrifying and even devastating. Particularly in Mexico City, they initially faced food shortages, unemployment, and rising prices for basic goods and rents. The Revolution ended any middle-class ideal of autonomy from the state for self-identified members of this class turned in desperation and without shame to the government for support. They sought aid in accessing goods, affordable housing, jobs, and education. The nascent administration offered to help the middle class and the new revolutionary rhetoric validated citizens' claims for state assistance. But the post-revolutionary

government was a weak state in the making and boycotted by foreign powers. Administrations proved incapable or unwilling to respond. To make matters worse, the government favored the organization of blue-collar workers, whose militancy, tactics, and social conduct alienated the traditional middle class. The many artisans that identified with the worker movement split off an important sector of the beleaguered class. An exclusive identification of middle-class status with white-collar employment intensified with proletarianization as many artisans lost out to factory production.

After the Revolution, the middle class flocked to jobs in the public sector. They found employment as teachers, social workers, and technicians while a large number worked in administrative offices. But the economic volatility of the 1920s prolonged financial instability. Public employees faced delayed salary payments and cyclical waves of unemployment. They survived through pawning household goods and sending daughters out to work. A modicum of security to public sector employees became possible only after 1925, when a military rebellion against the government cleansed it of a significant level of dissidence and the United States recognized and financially supported the revolutionary regime. At that moment, the government hit the middle class with another divisive blow. The Calles administration declared war on the Catholic Church in hopes of building a more secular, modern nation. Those working in public employment came under scrutiny and had to declare their loyalties publicly. Many in the middle class mobilized against the anti-religious campaign. In 1929, others expressed their dissidence in support of the anti-reelectionist campaign of José Vasconcelos for the presidency, i.e. a campaign against the government's

manipulation of the vote in order to install an internal candidate. Many continued their protests during the period of socialist education and working-class militancy in the 1930s.

The government claimed the loyalty of their public employees through a policy of corporativization. Obligatory membership in the official political party, the PNR, and later the PRM, was required in return for job security, higher wages, access to credit, housing, and basic goods. As the corporate organization of the state advanced, these benefits, or even rights, became privileges and factors of dependency. While the largesse of the state benefited the middle class, the state's expanded reach in other areas caused divisions between sectors of the middle class. Some became militant supporters of the post-revolutionary state's projects and public sector employee unionization. Others rejected the state's anti-clericalism and resisted the attack on their religious liberties. Some public employees engaged the state in demands for greater labor rights, resentful of the attention paid to industrial workers and campesinos. Other public employees protested their cooperation by the state party and joined organizations such as the Confederación de la Clase Media. They openly challenged the Cárdenas government, which they believed represented a communist threat that attacked civil liberties and Mexican customs. Still others, fearing loss of employment, kept their heads low and complied with that state's corporativization.

Two further factors challenged the traditional, Porfirian middle class in the 1920s and 1930s. The first came from the wave of transnational consumerism that swept Mexico City in the 1920s. The *chica moderna* shocked society with her exposed body, short hair, and wild dancing legs, who sharply contrasted with the

rigidly corseted Porfirian lady clothed from head to foot. The maintenance of honor in the eyes of others proved tricky for the *chicas modernas*, whose behavior and dress mirrored those of working-class girls and prostitutes. Ready-to-wear clothes and cheap paper patterns made ubiquitous copies of fashionable dresses available to a broader segment of society. Popular culture introduced a new masculinity as well, concerned with bodybuilding, sports, and new forms of bodily display in clothing, lotions, haircuts, and dancing. The Porfirian *pollo*, or *flâneur*, became the shallow *fifi*, often characterized as a modern office worker. Different classes mixed at proliferating movie theaters, dance halls, and nightclubs. Romance once so private and proper for the middle class and shamefully bald-faced among the lower orders, became openly public. Sexual longing came across the airwaves through phonographs and the radio, upsetting respectable notions of propriety. Private sentiment escaped household parlors and exposed itself in public dance halls with big bands and the middle-class workplace, the office. While we do not have the data for the 1930s, greater access to the radio and the movies likely occurred which increased sources for modeling middle-class behavior while at the same time expanding the boundaries and diversity of these models.

The expansion of education, the second challenging factor to the Porfirian middle class, had in large part brought women into the office. Women had begun to enter the once male domain at the end of the Porfiriato, and in the 1920s and 1930s they entered en masse. Women's presence threatened masculine privileges and middle-class notions of proper behavior. Their respectability faced questioning: were these women members of the middle class or contaminating interlopers? Vocational

schools provided training in secretarial work for single young women. These same institutions offered middle-class women the opportunity to upgrade their domestic skills and learn a trade they could practice from their homes. Vocational education offered men opportunities for learning industrial and technical skills deemed necessary for national development. But many young men adjured manual and technical training in favor of preparation for white-collar work in administration and commerce. Meanwhile, male office employees had to contend with a feminized work environment and dependent relationship to the state. At the same time, greater opportunity opened for men and women alike to enter preparatory and higher education. Thus, educational expansion drove a deeper wedge between white-collar work and manual labor, increasingly associated with the organizing working class. At the same time, it increased segmentation within the middle class.

In the 1930s, these divisions intensified in a struggle between the national university, interested in maintaining academic freedom and liberal careers, and the government, which sought more technicians and skilled workers for national development. The latter also desired to open more opportunities for the advancement to the working class and the children of the *campesinos*. In order to further these goals, the Cárdenas government created the National Polytechnic Institute (ENP) to unite, upgrade, and expand industrial and medical training and research. Affordable education for new technical careers increased employment opportunities for the middle class or those aspiring to middle-class status.

Between 1890 and 1940, the middle class showed lively interest in civic life and public organizing. Sociologists and politicians repeatedly attacked Mexico's

middle class for its apathy. Yet evidence shows the contrary. An in-depth look at the colonia of Santa María la Ribera reveals extensive community participation. In the Porfiriato, middle-class residents supported Catholic workers' circles established by neighborhood resident Father Troncoso. Efforts aimed at the cultural uplift of workers engaged the middle class in local issues girded by the Catholic Church's call for social activism. Calls for material improvements, such as paved roads, sanitary markets, and better lighting, came from middle-class residents who formed committees and wrote public officials.

In response to anti-clerical state policies of the 1920s and 1930s, Santa María residents organized a well-orchestrated resistance. Parents defied the ban on religious teaching by sending their children to underground schools. Families held masses in secret and harbored priests in their homes. Many participated in boycotts and in public protests that included singing hymns while being marched to prison. These actions formed part of a wide engagement with changes taking part in society. Lay-led religious associations spoke out publicly against new fads in dress, music and dance. These actions placed middle-class Catholics in the center of debates on politics, religion, education, and social life.

Mexico City's middle-class residents represented a wide spectrum of political positions. In the early 1920s, some middle-class members made alliances with the working class and poor over rent strikes. Others were reluctant to identify with the lower classes whose behavior they despised. In the 1924 elections men and women formed middle-class parties to campaign for Plutarco Elías Calles. In 1929, many supported the Anti-reelectionist campaign of José Vasconcelos who they considered

the best hope for restoring ideals of the Revolution and defense of individual liberties. The same contradictions prevailed into the 1930s. Some abstained from working-class tactics and organization, but others, like many members of the state-controlled public employees union, eagerly took part in such strategies. The middle class split between loyalty to the PNR (later PRM) and participants in extreme right-wing, even fascist, organizations like the CCM. The CCM supported public employees who resented the heavy hand of the administration that forced them to take up party membership and join party events. Catholic public employees angered over state secularism became silenced by heavy scrutiny and fear of losing their jobs. After 1929, organizations aided unemployed members of the middle class. Middle-class men and women held rallies in movie theaters and sought means to find solutions to the desperate economic times. They attempted to circumscribe their behavior, claiming its apolitical nature, because they feared an association with militant working-class movements.

The diversity of political attitudes reflected a growing, varied middle class, the boundaries of which had been blurred by an expansion of economic activity, of the state, and of education, as well as domestic and foreign immigration to the city. Foreign immigrants—Lebanese, Jewish, and Spanish—augmented the ranks of the entrepreneurial middle class. Gender changes, particularly the entry of women into the labor force, also confused class lines. Likely, the emergence of youth as a social and cultural category by virtue of being a category shared by social classes, generated changes and greater tolerance in middle-class youth that came of age in the 1930s.

Greater stratification of the middle class also had implications for diverse middle-class politics. Students divided between those who attended the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria versus the vocational schools, and between those attending the university and the Instituto Nacional Politecnico. Post-revolutionary nationalism and popular culture further stratified the middle class along cultural lines. The Revolution brought the indigenous, *campesinos*, and the industrial working class into the national pantheon. For members of the middle class who worked so hard to distinguish themselves from the lower classes, the new heroic figures threatened middle-class superiority. Some sectors of the middle class expressed their embrace of this revolutionary nationalism by painting, writing, and buying folk art. Other more conservative sectors turned to Hispanism, the valorization of Hispanic culture. Women dressed in elaborately embroidered dresses of the *china poblana*. Men mounted horses and donned *charro* costumes to represent refined, mestizo cowboys from a mythical benevolent past. Some members of Mexico's literary circle pushed for a cosmopolitan Mexican culture tied to the transnational trends of modernism, but came under attack for their lack of nationalism and masculinity. Their detractors argued for a virile literature that glorified Mexico's revolutionary past. Middle-class Roman Catholics asserted the centrality of Catholicism to Mexican identity in terms of national customs and traditions, including norms of middle-class respectability.

The history of Mexico's middle class from 1890-1940 demonstrates structural similarities to the middle class across Latin America. By the 1910s a middle class had arisen in most major Latin American cities. In the 1920s, the growing middle class in Peru, Brazil, and Chile came not from autonomous workers like shopkeepers and

professionals, but from salaried employees, many who worked in expanding state bureaucracies. These employees identified as middle class despite an income that was significantly less than that of merchants or professionals. At the same time, leaders with reform programs emerged and received support from the urban middle and working classes in Argentina, Peru, and Chile. The middle-class leadership promised government employees and professionals greater political decision making. Students and employees organized unions and affiliated with middle-class political parties like Argentina's Radical Civic Union Party, Chile's Radical Party and Peru's APRA party. Union organizing was fraught with tension over the problem of class alliance. In Brazil and Chile, salaried employees worried about allying with working-class unions, some increasingly dominated by communists.

Unlike elsewhere in Latin America, Mexican politics consolidated around the formation of an official state party, the PNR, and later the PRM. The integration of public employees into the official party brought them job security, social assistance, and other benefits. Their official representation in some ways helped contain middle-class discontent, particularly after 1938 when the state employees' union represented the popular sector of the party. In Mexico, by 1940, the state had contributed to a transformation of the middle class. Sectors of the middle class, namely public employees, were both larger and more dependent on the state while educational opportunities continued to assist its expansion.

Despite the expansion of state-dependent public employees, the run-up to the 1940 election revealed the increasing clout of the disgruntled middle class. Cárdenas moved further to the center as he accepted the role of private schools and pulled back

on anti-clerical policies. Still, in 1940 large portions of the middle class supported opposition candidate, Juan Andreu Almazán for the presidency. The moderate right-wing presidential candidate ran under the National Unification Revolutionary Party (PRUN) and received the support of the Labor Party and National Action party (PAN). He likely would have won the election were it not for the repressive arm of the state. Lázaro Cárdenas had wisely selected a moderate candidate, Manuel Ávila Camacho, to succeed him. Ávila Camacho became a conciliating president. He distanced himself ideologically from the radical nationalism of the Cárdenas presidency. Roman Catholics and anti-Communists found relief when Ávila Camacho declared himself neither a Communist nor a socialist, and a religious believer. In 1943, Ávila Camacho created the National Confederation of Popular Organizations (*Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares*, or CNOP). The CNOP specifically addressed the needs of the middle class and provided them official representation as the popular sector of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, or PRI, the reformed PRM). Ávila Camacho used the Allied war effort in World War II to unify the country around nationalist sentiment already garnered in support of the oil expropriation in 1938.

In the decades following Cárdenas, the middle class expanded greatly. While primarily due to rapid economic growth beginning in the 1950s, this expansion also benefited from state programs, particularly in the areas of secondary and higher education, subsidized housing projects, and controls that kept food prices in check. Between 1940 and 1970 Mexico underwent a period of rapid demographic growth, urbanization, and industrialization. Mass media played a critical role in broadening

the middle class. Both radio and cinema, accessible to ever larger numbers of citizens, put forward middle-class models for aspirants to imitate while at the same time broadening notions of middle-class behavior. The media were unifying factors and catalysts for social mobility. Mass media helped to blur class distinctions even though the Golden Age cinema projected class-based stereotypes. While the traditional, Catholic-oriented middle class that was the most vociferous in the period between 1920 and 1940 found a political voice in the conservative PAN, by 1960 they were a minority of the middle class, albeit a powerful and organized one. In 1968, when the children of the middle class, students of the Autonomous University and Polytechnic Institute, mobilized in massive protests against government repression and authoritarianism, they were a much larger and more diverse group than the Confederation of the Middle Class of the 1930s. These students were also far more sympathetic to the working class and peasantry.

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