

RACE, CLASS AND NATION IN WARTIME SAN LUIS POTOSÍ

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Introduction

Leopoldo Zea, one of the most preeminent historians of 19th-century Mexican political thought, once noted that the War against the United States (1846-48) brought the question of the racial character of the Mexican nation to the very forefront of national political discourse.¹ In this paper we will examine war-time political discourse on race and nation from a provincial perspective. San Luis Potosí, located in Mexico's north-central mining belt, formed a prominent part of what we have come to know as 'the liberal crescent' - those states ringing the outer limits of Mexico's central valley which produced the leaders of the mid-century Liberal Reform.² In San Luis Potosí, just as Zea suggested, the question of the racial character of the Mexican nation was central to the ways in which competing political groups positioned themselves *vis-a-vis* the U.S. War. At the same time, however, in political discourse concerning domestic policy, debates about citizenship and patriotism were largely framed in terms of class, not race.

What relation, if any, can we discern between these "external" and "internal" political discourses on the Mexican nation? Through an examination of the case of San Luis Potosí, we shall hopefully come closer to answering this question. And in the process, we shall hopefully also gain valuable insight into some of the regional historical processes involved in the making of the modern Mexican nation.

One of the most critical of these processes was the development of, broadly speaking, two kinds of Mexican Federalism - one embraced by propertied and privileged creole elites interested in preserving

¹Leopoldo Zea, "La ideología liberal y el liberalismo mexicano," in *El liberalismo y la Reforma en México* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Escuela Nacional de Economía, 1957), 467-522, esp. 491.

²The image of the 'liberal crescent' comes from David Brading, *Los orígenes del nacionalismo mexicano* (Mexico City: SepSetentas, 1973), 17. According to Richard N. Sinkin, *The Mexican Reform, 1855-1876: A Study in Liberal Nation-Building* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), most of the leadership of the mid-century Reform hailed from the states along this regional arc bordering Mexico's central valley.

and even enhancing their own regional *Senorío*; and another advocated by marginalized creole groups and by a variety of peoples of mestizo and Indian heritage all interested in gaining greater independence from the old and new hierarchies of creole rule. What divided the two Federalisms most clearly were conflicts over property - and by property here we mean not only land, but also public office or political property. In the case of San Luis Potosí, conflict raged over the issues of who should have property rights within the potosino domain. As the U.S. War erupted in late 1846, so too did demands by radical Federalists for "expropriation," prompting more conservative Federalists to condemn the "barbarism" threatening potosinos from all sides. In the context of wartime San Luis, the two Federalisms faced off on the question of property rights, generating a discursive arena in which issues of race, class, patriotism and nationhood were intricately interwoven.

Some Historical Background

The leaders of Mexican Independence legally abolished racial divisions in 1821, declaring that "the general union of Europeans and Americans, Indians and Castes, is the only solid base on which our common happiness can rest."³ Thus it was that legal distinctions based solely upon race gave way to a singular Mexican citizenship granted to all those born in Mexico, and even extended to those foreigners willing to take an oath of loyalty to the new nation. However, the principle of "Union," as envisioned in Iturbide's Plan of Iguala, really meant assimilation into the 'imagined political community' of creoles, or "American Spaniards." The bitter conflicts which characterized Mexico in the first three decades of its republican existence embodied struggles over the limits of this exclusive kind of creole patriotism and the particular propertied arrangements upon which it rested.

In San Luis Potosí, as in other newly-established states along 'the liberal crescent,' propertied creole elites inherited the reins of state governance in 1824. Passionate in their commitment to regional autonomy, these provincial elites wielded a republican and Federalist discourse which condemned the centralist nature of colonial, particularly Bourbon rule, which had attempted to make internal colonies of some of Mexico's 'noble provinces.' The first potosino state legislatures saw themselves as enlightened men 'of this century,' and as such, outlined projects for potosino 'progress' which would be based upon regional political autonomy and a thriving commercial economy. San Luis Potosí was to be the entrepot for all of north-central Mexico, serviced by a new port to be opened at Tampico, out of which would flow mineral and agricultural exports in exchange for foreign manufactures. This first Federalist project had very clear racial dimensions. On the one hand, Spaniards sympathetic to the potosino cause and willing to invest capital in potosino

³Agustín Iturbide, "Plan of Iguala," in Dirk W. Raat, ed., *Mexico: From Independence to Revolution, 1810-1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 1982, 47.

enterprises and the potosino state, were publically embraced as patriotic brethren and natural members of the Mexican family. At the same time, Indian and mestizo pueblos were ostracized as peoples of "scant patriotism" for their refusal to cooperate with state officials, particularly in terms of paying new state taxes.⁴ Because citizenship was not restricted by race, potosino elites, just like their Federalist counterparts elsewhere throughout Mexico, relied upon a discourse of civilization and barbarism to exclude darker-skinned peoples from full membership in their political communities. Three categories of people emerge from government documents of the 1820's - Indians, mestizos and 'los de razon,' and only the latter were considered capable of understanding, and thus enjoying, the blessings of Liberty.

By the late 1820's, this elitist brand of Federalism was under attack by a more radical alternative. As Reyes Heróles has noted, the supporters of Vicente Guerrero in the presidential election of 1828 presented themselves as the bearers of a more egalitarian social order.⁵ The radical Federalists of the 1828-1833 period are perhaps best remembered for their anti-clericalism, but their policies also had important racial implications. In San Luis Potosí, radical Federalists adamantly denied that Mexicans and Spaniards were one 'people,' and undertook some of the most extensive expulsions in all of Mexico, aimed at symbolically, if not literally, extirpating all Spanish blood from San Luis Potosí. At the same time, radical Federalists in the state government expanded the number of municipalities in the state, swelled the military and state bureaucracy and embraced a program of anti-clerical reforms, including state appropriations of church properties. Such reforms provided greater access to economic and political properties to a wide array of social actors, including poor creoles, mestizos and some Indian pueblos. It should be emphasized, though, that those Indian pueblos established on church properties and/or with substantial *cofradía* wealth were more threatened by neighboring radical Federalists than they had ever been by the more distant, more conservative Federalism of the early 1820's.

Radical Federalism was finally crushed in San Luis Potosí, as it was throughout 'the liberal crescent' by wealthy creole elites who decided to put aside their own internal rivalries in order to confront the greater threat to Creole Mexico. Foregoing some of their own Federalist principles, potosino elites agreed to cooperate in creating a restorative Centralist system and a national army. Exiled Spaniards were invited to return and reclaim their 'rightful' place in the Mexican nation. The establishment of Centralism in 1835 provoked a series of rebellions along Mexico's outer periphery, including an uprising of disgruntled creole hacendados, mestizo rancheros and Indian laborers in the eastern lowlands of San Luis

⁴For examples, see *La Epoca* (San Luis Potosí), Nov. 10, 1846; Archivo Histórico del Estado de San Luis Potosí (AHESLP), Fondo Secretaría General de Gobierno (SGG), Legajos 1847: April-1 and 1847: November-2, "Junto de Fierros y Ventas."

⁵Jesús Reyes Heróles, *El liberalismo mexicano*, 3 Vols. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988), 2:76.

Potosí. Of course, the most successful of these rebellions was the Texas uprising. Throughout Creole Mexico, this battle came to publically symbolize the struggle for the survival in the Americas of "the Spanish race."⁶ Government officials used this term most explicitly to distinguish themselves from "the Anglo-Saxon race", but the term clearly had racial implications within Mexico as well. Even as 'liberal' a creole as José Luis Mora would state in 1836 that "It is in [the white population] where the Mexican character is to be found, and in [that population] the entire world should formulate its understanding of the Republic."⁷ If potosino elites had helped created Centralism in the 1830's to save Mexico for "the Spanish race," by the 1840's they had come to see that Centralism as equally threatening, particularly its forced loans, its national army, and its powerful money-lending foreign merchant elite. Nonetheless, they continued to fear that a return to Federalism would encourage social revolution and racial upheaval. Even as late as 1845, potosino elites could not see beyond racial confrontation in a Federalist uprising in the lowlands of Guerrero headed by the mestizo General Juan Alvarez. Observed one highland editorial, "His attitude, or better said, his hatred for the white race is the cause he has dared to promote in this uprising, which could provoke only the most passionate indignation."⁸ Perhaps only the 'ignominious' threat of the establishment of a European monarch in Mexico City, espoused by General Paredes and his Mexico City cronies in 1846, could have finally convinced the potosino elites to risk supporting a return to Federalism. However, to distinguish themselves from Federalism's 'excesses,' as well of course from the monarchists of Mexico City, the potosino creole elite came to refer to themselves as "moderates."

"La Raza Mexicana" and the U.S. War

In the fall of 1846, Paredes had been ousted from the presidency, U.S. forces were occupying Monterrey and Tampico and radical Federalists swept congressional elections throughout the Mexican Republic. In fact, the political terrain of the Republic in late 1846 looked strikingly similar to 1833, with Santa Anna as president, Vicente Gómez Farías as vice-president, and radicals occupying governors' chairs and dominating both the federal and state congresses. The similarity was not lost upon Mexico's propertied elite, over whom the memory of 1833 hung ominously. Guillermo Prieto even noted the "rancor and alarm about the presence of Farías in power" which "spread through, swelled, infiltrated and penetrated every pore of the social body."⁹

⁶See for example the essays in Carlos Casteneda, ed., *The Mexican Side of the Texan Revolution: Essays by the Chief Mexican participants* (New York: Arno Press, 1976).

⁷Cited in Agustín Basave Benítez, *México Mestizo: Análisis del nacionalismo mexicano en torno a la mestizofilia de Andrés Molina Enríquez* (Mexico City: FCE, 1992), 22.

⁸*El Boletín Oficial* (San Luis Potosí), May 2, 1846.

⁹Guillermo Prieto, *Memorias de mis Tiempos* (Puebla: Editorial José M. Cajica, Jr., S.A., 1970), 401. Translations in this paper are my own unless otherwise indicated.

The propertied creoles of San Luis Potosí were also worried about the return of the radical Federalists, but at the moment they had more immediate concerns - namely General Santa Anna, who had arrived in the highland capital in October 1846 to established his wartime general headquarters. Governor Ramón Adame ordered all the city's churches, convents, schools and government buildings turned into barracks and hospitals for Santa Anna's army, which grew in a couple of months to somewhere between 15,000 and 30,000 soldiers. Propertied potosino families were made to contribute to forced loans, supply horses for the cavalry and provisions for the troops, and house army recruits in their homes, many of which were already crowded with refugee relatives and friends from Monterrey. Local artisans converted their shops into manufacturing centers for army uniforms, boots and weapons, and the laboring poor of the city and surrounding communities supplied food, services, and human fodder for Santa Anna's army. In preparation for a U.S. attack, Adame set the city's prisoners and day laborers to work building fortifications around the city. Living conditions deteriorated within the city as the population burgeoned and mounds of raw sewage piled up in the streets causing all social classes to fear the return of the dreaded *colerus morbus*.¹⁰

To foster the war effort and patriotic sentiments, the Adame administration generated a language which appealed to "todos los potosinos" without regard for race or class to unite together to defeat "the yankee savages." During its first months, the Adame administration received support, not only from the shopkeepers, artisans, fruit vendors and tobacco operators who had long formed the backbone of highland support for radical Federalism, but also from the state's wealthy merchant community and its landowning elite.¹¹ Much of this creole support was undoubtedly due to the presence of Santa Anna; failure to cooperate with the war effort under the circumstances of the General's arrival was likely to result in danger to one's life and properties. However, we should also recall that creole patriotism had been born in opposition to colonial domination, and wealthy potosino creoles may well have been initially caught up in the nationalist rhetoric of the Adame administration, especially with U.S. military officers casting public aspersions upon all Mexicans as members of "a cowardly and effeminate race."¹² Ever since the Texas rebellion of 1835, and even stretching back to the Poinsett scandal of the 1820's, the propertied creoles of San Luis Potosí had come to see "the Anglo-Saxon race" as a mortal threat to their own survival. With growing U.S. influence in the commercial life of Mexico's northeastern peripheries, particularly along the Matamoros-Monterrey axis, potosino elites had more reasons than ever to fear

¹⁰Descriptions of the city emerge from *La Epoca*, Dec. 17, 1846; Jan. 2, 1847; and Jan. 7, 1847. See also the descriptions in Primo Feliciano Velázquez, *Historia de San Luis Potosí*, 4 Vols. (San Luis Potosí: Archivo Histórico del Estado, Academia de Historia Potosina, 1982), 3: 228-239; and Rosa Helia Villa de Mebius, *San Luis Potosí: una historia compartida* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 1988), 104-114.

¹¹Velázquez, *Historia*, 3: 224-25.

¹²*La Epoca*, July 31, 1847.

U.S. domination.

While patriotic appeals to "todos los potosinos" originally received support from the wealthy and the propertied, neither Santa Anna nor the Adame administration felt they could fully count on those sectors of potosino society long seen as incapable of patriotism. For instance, when Indian and mestizo dependents on the central highland estate of Bocas began actively resisting the military draft and efforts of estate owners to shift the financial burdens of war to their laborers, the Adame administration sent in national guard troops to quell the incipient uprising. Adame labeled as treason any act that would force attention away from the U.S. War at the moment when "all good Mexicans should occupy themselves in the formal defense of our fatherland."¹³ Adame's actions offer evidence of the difficulties radical Federalists could have in granting political legitimacy to the demands of the Indian and mestizo poor.

The tendency of the radical Federalists to equate poor Indian and mestizo pueblos with "scant patriotism," is perhaps most clear in regard to the state's eastern lowland districts surrounding Tampico. When, in December 1846, U.S. troops entered the state of San Luis through the easternmost district of Tancahuitz, state officials championed the lowland pueblos for acts of patriotic resistance. However, such remarks soon showed themselves to be more prescriptive than descriptive; evidence from lowland officials seemed more often to confirm the Federalists' pessimism about lowland patriotism and fears of potential race war. The existence of bandit groups and their reported trading activities with U.S. troops, the spread of the illegal tobacco trade, attempts by lowland pueblos to escape both the military draft and the new array of wartime taxes, all were offered as evidence by state officials for "el poco amor patria" among the Indian and mestizo communities of the Tancahuitz district.¹⁴

Wartime confrontations between radical Federalist officials and Indian pueblos were particularly heated in the town of Tamazunchale, center of illegal tobacco growing in the Tancahuitz district. There a group of poor creole and mestizo smallholders took over the town militarily in August 1846 declaring their allegiance to the Federalist cause. Their first act was to kill a handful of Spanish merchants and expel a number of others, clearly identifying themselves with the anti-Spanish nativism typical of radical Federalism.¹⁵ Also in typical radical Federalist fashion, they descended upon neighboring Indian pueblos, confiscating land and *cofradía* wealth, and demanding that Indian pueblos accept *igualada* contracts and thus pay more alcabala taxes, presumably to contribute to the war effort.¹⁶ One lowland official happily reported to Governor

¹³Horacio Sánchez Unzueta, *Un motín de campesinos en la Hacienda de Bocas, S.L.P., 1847-1853* (San Luis Potosí: Academia de Historia Potosina, 1982).

¹⁴*La Epoca*, Nov. 10, 1846.

¹⁵AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1846: August-1, "Documentos relativos a los sucesos de Tamazunchale que tubieron lugar en Agosto del año que arriba se espresa."

¹⁶*Igualada* contracts stated that a specific quota of alcabalas be paid by a particular hacienda or pueblo based upon the estimated value of its commerce in a particular item. Such agreements with Indian pueblos were often the

Adame in May of 1847 that

despite the many obstacles which [the indigenous people] mounted and which I had to overcome in order to convince them and dissuade them of the thousand errors which informed their beliefs because of [their] stupidity and total ignorance; and even though the majority of them openly opposed coming under this system...I succeeded in setting up *igualada* agreements with the pueblos of Aquismón, Astla, Tamazunchale, San Martín y Tanlajarás.¹⁷

Throughout the last months of 1846 and into 1847, a number of *representaciones* arrived in Governor Adame's office from lowland pueblos accusing local officials of trying to "profit from the sweat of the unhappy and to further sacrifice the Indian peoples of these Pueblos."¹⁸ Most Federalist state officials, however, simply saw such complaints as further evidence of a lack of patriotic sentiments.

What made the confrontations in Tancanhuitz so heated was the escalation of military force brought to bear on lowland pueblos. National guard units, rural police squads, and private *resguardos* all operated in lowland districts, often undercutting the commercial independence of Indian pueblos in order to fortify hacendado and smallholder commercial activities with merchants in Tampico. One of the most egregious of such military groups operating in Tamazunchale were the rural guards of the national tobacco monopoly, whose official purpose was to root out the illegal tobacco economy which had reportedly increased significantly upon the arrival of U.S. troops in Tampico.¹⁹ Complaints from district villages chronicled the violent methods of the tobacco police - methods which included the arbitrary imposition of fines, confiscation of animals and crops, burning of houses and fields, imprisonment, beatings, mutilations and other tortures, rape and even murder.²⁰ Such violence against lowland communities resonates both with kind of "military and machista mentality" which Rodolfo Pastor observed in the Mixteca Oaxaqueña

state's way of attempting to get them to pay alcabalas; because Indian merchants often sold large amounts of goods in small quantities (*del viento*), they were not liable for alcabala fees. *Igualada* agreements attempted to undermine this practice and were generally resisted by Indian pueblos.

¹⁷AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1847: May-2. León's campaign was evidently successful as alcabala revenue increased under his administration from what it had been the year before. For comparative revenue statistics, see AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1847: March-2.

¹⁸AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1846: July-1.

¹⁹The state tobacco administrator put it this way: "haciendo sido necesario para poner un dique al contrabando aumentar el numero de cigarros en cada cajilla que se vende en Rioverde y Tancanhuitz para disminuir la utilidad que pueden tener los contrabandistas...ahora que ha progresado el contrabando por las consecuencias de la Guerra." AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1847: January-4, "Correspondencia del Admn. de Tabacos."

²⁰AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1846: Septiembre-1, "Info. sumario que del Juzgado 2ndo. Constitucional de Jilitla se remitan al Gefe de esta Municipalidad"; and AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1848: May-2.

during the same period, and with the "martial liberalism" observed in the Puebla sierra by Guy Thomson - both were largely the work of mestizo actors.²¹²² In lowland San Luis Potosí, just as in other peripheral regions through the "liberal crescent," the military units of radical Federalism which emerged during the U.S. War would become, according to Marcello Carmagnani, weapons of ethnic conquest by a mestizo-creole nation-building project.²³

To return now to the central highlands, the original support for the U.S. war and for the radical Federalists from among wealthy creoles began to evaporate in early 1847, both because of the radical Federalists' \$15 million forced loan on church properties and because the war effort was going so badly for the Mexicans. The January "Polkos rebellion" in Mexico City which removed the radical Gómez Farías in favor of a "Moderate" administration, the disastrous battle of Angostura in February 1847, the U.S. invasion and occupation of Veracruz in March, and rumors of the start of secret government peace negotiations, all stalled support for the war among potosino propertied elites. As elite support faded, the patriotic rhetoric of the radical Federalists became decidedly more fixed on Aztec images of "the Mexican race." One of the vehicles for the proliferation of these images was wartime poetry, very common in the newspapers of both Mexico City and highland San Luis Potosí. This poem from May 1847 is a typical example.

*Herederos de gloria inmarcesible,
Hijos de Guaticmoc y de Iturbide,
Aztecas, a la lid, patria lo pide,
El yankee aguarda ya, no es invencible.*²⁴

Of course, the appropriation of Aztec imagery had long been a part of creole patriotic discourse. However, as the war dragged on and the posture of the radical Federalists became more hawkish, the desecration of Spanish-ness became more pronounced. Radical Federalists increasingly relied upon images from the Spanish Conquest to drum up nativist sentiments against the "old" and "new" conquerors. In July, for instance, after legislating yet another forced loan upon the wealthy and the church, the government newspaper began to reprint sections of Bernal Diaz de Castillo's narrative of the siege of Mexico City.²⁵ Obviously the equation of "the Mexican race" with "the Spanish race," which had for so long characterized public discourse of the Texas conflict, had been exploded by the radical Federalists.

²¹Rodolfo Pastor, *Campesinos y reformas: La mixteca, 1700-1856* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1987), see esp. 514; and Guy P.C. Thomson, "Popular Aspects of Liberalism in Mexico, 1848-1888," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 10:3 (1991), 265-292.

²²Thomson, "Popular Aspects of Liberalism in Mexico," 276-277.

²³Marcello Carmagnani, *El regreso de los dioses: El proceso de reconstitución de la identidad étnica en Oaxaca, Siglos XVII y XVIII* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988), 227-238.

²⁴*La Epoca*, May 15, 1847.

²⁵*La Epoca*, July 10, 1847.

In the same vein, radical Federalists also began to step up their rhetoric on the U.S. War as a "caste war." From his seat in the federal congress, Vicente Romero - ex-Governor of San Luis Potosí and one of its most vocal radical Federalists - declared in late 1847 that the U.S. War was "a caste war, a war of extermination."²⁶ Almost simultaneously, an anonymous letter appeared in the state's government newspaper declaring that what the "new conquerors" sought was to have the Catholic religion destroyed, slavery introduced and "people of color exterminated."

It's time we stopped kidding ourselves. The Americans are not coming here to introduce this or that form of government; their objective is to conquer the country and destroy the Mexicans. They hate us, not because we are Federalists, Centralists or Monarchists, but because we are Mexicans.²⁷

Radical Federalists throughout Mexico used a language of national unity based on a non-white concept of "the Mexican race" to justify a continued struggle against the U.S. From Mexico City, the radical Federalist Manuel Crescencio Rejón would condemn the Treaty of Guadalupe because "almost all of us are descended from Indians" and what the U.S. really had in mind was to exterminate the Indian descendants of Mexico just as they had exterminated their own Indians.²⁸ Although the Treaty was finally approved, the radical Federalists defeated, and Conservative voices like Luis Cuevas and Lucas Alaman emerged once again to refer to Mexicans as members of "the Spanish race," the idea of racial and national unity based on something other than shared membership in "the Spanish race" had been articulated and championed in public discourse. As Leopoldo Zea noted, the U.S. War brought the question of Mexico's racial identity to the forefront of political discourse, and he also noted that it was a vision of a mestizo nation which fueled popular understandings of Mexican liberalism.²⁹ Such was certainly the case in San Luis Potosí, and for this the radical Federalists were largely responsible.

Class and Nation in War-Time San Luis Potosí

At the same time that public discourse on the U.S. War focussed its attention on connections between race and nation, political conflicts within the Mexican polity, and in our case specifically within San Luis Potosí, came to center on issues of class and citizenship. In many ways, the discourse of 'civilization vs. barbarism' continued to dominate the ways in which both radical Federalists and their more conservative critics talked about potosino

²⁶*La Epoca*, Nov. 13, 1847.

²⁷*La Epoca*, Sept. 28, 1847.

²⁸Manuel Crescencio Rejón, "Observations on the Treaty of Guadalupe," in Cecil Robinson, ed. And trans., *A View from Chaputltec: Mexican Writers on the Mexican-American War* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 103-112.

²⁹Zea, "La ideología liberal y el liberalismo mexicano," 489-503.

society and the social hierarchies which defined it. Within the context of foreign war (against the U.S.) and domestic turmoil (the Sierra Gorda rebellion in the eastern lowland districts of the state), radical Federalists and an emerging "moderate" coalition made of the state's wealthiest creoles battled over the distribution of property rights and limits of citizenship within the potosino domain. Just as had happened with the U.S. War, as radical Federalists lost elite support for their domestic policies, their discourse on citizenship became broader and more inclusive in class terms.

Because the potosino propertied elite defined barbarity by the refusal to recognize established authority, public debates about crime and criminality are especially revealing in terms of the contested borders of citizenship within the state. Here we will focus in particular on political discourse about what might be called "commercial crime" (theft, smuggling, tax evasion, etc.). Generally speaking, radical Federalists under the Adame administration represented commercial crimes as inchoate political acts against an unjust system of favor and patronage. The more conservative position of the "moderates" was that commercial crime was no different from capital crime and that both were sins against God and society. Michael Costeloe's recent work on *hombres de bien* in this period has shown how the issue of 'decaying public morality' became the rallying cry for propertied creole elites throughout Mexico.³⁰

Both the radical Federalist Adame administration (1846-48) and the subsequent "moderate" administration of Julian de los Reyes (1848-53) were very concerned with public morality and produced more legislation on crime and punishment than had earlier republican administrations. Although statistics from the early 19th-century are hardly exact, what seems to have increased in the 1840's was not so much the incidence of crime itself, but the concern - even *fascination* - of the propertied classes with issues of crime and criminality. Such fascination was reflected in the fact that *The Mysteries of Paris*, Eugene Sue's novel about the Parisian underworld, was one of the most widely read books in San Luis Potosí (and indeed in all of Mexico) in the late 1840's. It was as if Sue's romantic and repulsive representation of the lower classes provided Mexico's privileged elites with insights into their own lower classes.

Criminal reform was high on the agenda of the radical Federalist legislature of late 1846, led by its president Ponciano Arriaga. Arriaga introduced his program of reform to the state congress with the simple question: "Why is it that our jails, our punishments and even our injustices only touch a certain class of persons?" Arriaga went on to suggest that it were "as if one of the scales of justice were made of pure and weighty gold and the other of weak and broken clay."³¹ Through Arriaga's leadership, the state legislature passed

³⁰Michael P. Costeloe, *The Central Republic in Mexico, 1835-1846: Hombres de Bien in the Age of Santa Anna* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993, see esp. 25-26.

³¹Ponciano Arriaga, "Exposición de motivos, proyecto de ley e intervención ante el dictamen," in Enrique Márquez, ed., *San Luis Potosí: Textos de su historia* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 1986), 282-283.

an extensive criminal reform program. It began with a general amnesty for all 'common' criminals (including those accused of robbing livestock, an offense heretofore classified as 'capital') and the abolition of all jail fees. Arriaga then introduced a program of Public Defenders (*Procuradores de Pobres*), which entailed the appointment of three Public Defenders to investigate "any excess, offense, vexation, abuse, or outrage" committed against the poor, including those committed by public officials, military officers and judges, whom Arriaga referred to as "vultures in togas who feed on silver."³² Instead of being sentenced to forced labor on public works or private estates, prisoners were to be kept in prison and taught a "respectable" trade. Arriaga suggested that *private* citizens and ecclesiastical estates be made to donate money to a fund to establish state-owned factories "and in those places set [the prisoners] to work - not on fine works of art - but on precisely those articles that the common people consume, which could be sold at very reasonable prices."³³ Prisoners were also to be forced to attend classes in reading and writing at night. Embedded within this criminal reform program of the 1846 state legislature was a critique of the existing class structure in San Luis Potosí and the way in which the justice system worked to keep class hierarchies in place. Radical federalists argued that crimes involving theft and contrabanding were actually primitive expressions of the people's desire for equality before the law; in other words, commercial crime was political.

We cannot but be reminded here of Hobsbawn's model of 'social banditry.'³⁴ Even though historians have questioned the validity of Hobsbawn's model for 19th-century Latin America,³⁵ his principal insight remains useful: that is, that 'criminality' becomes the terrain for the confrontation of conflicting moral universes just at the moment when societies are undergoing the transition from pre-capitalism to capitalism. In E.P. Thompson's words, this is the moment when "customs" lose their authority and "[s]uccessive generations no longer stand in an apprentice relation to each other."³⁶ Throughout Mexico in the late 1840's, radical Federalists were challenging the traditional structures of deference and hierarchy, and the remnants of a colonial class structure, which were already being broken down by the increasing commercialization of the economy.

The radical Federalists' critique of the criminal justice system rested upon an underlying insistence upon the concept of equality

³²*Ibid.*, 284.

³³*Ibid.*, 289.

³⁴E.J. Hobsbawn, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1959).

³⁵See Gilbert M. Joseph, "On the Trail of Latin American Bandits: A Reexamination of Peasant Resistance," *Latin American Research Review* 25:3 (1990), 7-53; and Richard W. Slatta, ed., *Bandidos: The Varieties of Latin American Banditry* (New York: Greenwood, 1987). For the Mexican case in particular, see Paul J. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police and Mexican Development* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981).

³⁶E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New York: The New Press, 1991), 14.

before the law. Instead of casting criminals as *inherently* immoral owing to racial inferiority, radical Federalists described criminals as *socially* immoral, owing to their education, which had inculcated them with "bad habits." Arriaga directly blamed the church and the wealthy for abandoning their moral responsibilities to the poor, allowing for the proliferation of pool halls, saloons, gambling dens and houses of usury, "all those establishments of public charity condoned and tolerated by the local authorities."³⁷ He declared that a liberal public education system would solve the crime problem and bring about greater social equality. Difficult economic circumstances, he claimed, bred criminality, even among the best creole families, many of whom had also suffered economic setbacks. As Arriaga put it: "among us there is no aristocracy: we were all born into the middle class."³⁸

The rejection of the notion of aristocracy in favor of a broad and inclusive "middle class" formed part of the political language of the liberal generation of the 1840's, most eloquently articulated in Mariano Otero's *Ensayo sobre el verdadero estado de la cuestión social y política que se agita en la República Mexicana*. Otero had claimed that the middle class "constituted the true character of the people, represented the greatest source of wealth and included all those professions which stimulate intelligence."³⁹ Although historians often categorize *hombres de bien* as "middle class" on some objective scale, most of these people did not think of themselves in that way. In the case of the potosino *familias de bien*, they thought of themselves as local patriarchs, *la clase señorial*, a provincial aristocracy. Radical Federalists may have championed the idea of a middle class, but most creole propertied families refused to cede their more privileged status as a provincial aristocracy.

In January 1847, in the face of the \$15 million forced loan on the church and the radical criminal reform program, wealthy potosino creoles began to openly condemn the radical Federalists for their blatant disregard for property. As evidence grew that the U.S. War was being lost, radicals in the state legislature began to lose ground to "moderate" voices. Leading radical Federalists like Ponciano Arriaga and Mariano Avila then began to step up their rhetoric of class conflict, particularly in regard to wealthy creole merchants and the church. When Santa Anna announced the signing of an armistice with the U.S. in August 1847, Arriaga and other radical leaders by-passed the state legislature and held a night "mitin" to denounce the treaty, question the authority of the federal government and declare a new forced loan on the church and the wealthy.⁴⁰ They

³⁷Arriaga, "Exposición de motivos," 291.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 296-297.

³⁹Mariano Otero, *Ensayo sobre el verdadero estado de la cuestión social y política que se agita en la República Mexicana* (Mexico City: PRI, 1986), 86-87.

⁴⁰*La Epoca*, Aug. 31, 1847. These 'mitines' or popular assemblies had become a characteristic strategy for radical federalists throughout Mexico and were often condemned as 'demagoguery' by the elites. See José Fernando Ramírez, *Mexico During the War with the United States*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1950), 75. According to Ramírez, who was a member of the

announced that anyone refusing to cooperate in the war effort or caught trafficking with U.S. commercial agents would be exiled from the state. Creole merchants responded by accusing the radicals of "openly and irresponsibly incit[ing] the people against the merchants."⁴¹ Here, those under attack were not principally the Spanish silver merchants, but creole commercial establishments throughout the state. In response, Arriaga claimed that the merchants were not a legitimate social class, but a "parasite feeding off the potosino people." In early January of 1848, Governor Adame went so far as to advocate a constitutional expropriation of some private properties in order to create greater economic equality. Within two weeks of that speech, Adame would be ousted from office by a military coup led by "moderates" within the state legislature - ostensibly for disowning the Mexican government in response to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, but also very clearly for Adame's resort to "the ominous 'expropriation' word."⁴²

The subsequent "moderate" administration of Julian de los Reyes, supported by leading creole merchants and hacendados throughout the state, lost no time in overturning the radicals' criminal reform program - giving ample evidence of a very different conception of the ties between economic class, criminal behavior, and the borders of potosino citizenship. The Reyes administration showed little mercy to common criminals, "the most pernicious scourge in the country" and "the constant threat to the property and lives of the honorable and peaceful inhabitants of this place."⁴³ This tougher stance on crime translated into all-out legislative assault on 'vagrancy.' Reyes sounded the war cry himself, referring to vagrants as "gangrenized members of our Society," suggesting of course the need for amputation.⁴⁴ His more conservative legislature obliged: in the first place, all criminals received tougher sentences, including very commonly 6 months forced labor on public works or one year's exile on the northern border. Secondly, far from stemming the power of local judges to act against the poor, the new legislature granted greater discretion to judges in accusing anybody "who seems suspicious," especially anyone who lacked "honest means of subsistence."⁴⁵ Within the city itself, block captains were appointed to apprehend "vagrants" and "evildoers." To further augment the power of local judicial officials, the Reyes administration sanctioned the greater use of private police forces to enforce law and "to conserve public security and tranquillity."⁴⁶ Large hacendados whom Adame had authorized to raise private guerrillas to fight U.S. troops were now empowered to "use [these guerrillas] to apprehend deserters, robbers

federal congress at the time, "These ['meetings'] are no more than a farce and a parody of the 'meetings' held by the English and the people of the United States." Ramírez himself was critical of the fact that "anyone at all has the right to get up and express his opinions."

⁴¹*La Epoca*, Sept. 7, 1847.

⁴²Cited in Márquez, ed., *San Luis Potosí*, 471.

⁴³*La Epoca*, Apr. 15, 1848.

⁴⁴*La Epoca*, Aug. 13, 1851.

⁴⁵*La Epoca*, Apr. 15, 1848.

⁴⁶*La Epoca*, June 15, 1848.

or vagrants."⁴⁷ Local judges and courts were empowered to handle more kinds of crime and they were also given orders to expedite trials and carry out sentencing within 24 hours.⁴⁸

One of the obvious objectives of this more conservative crime legislation was to solve the state's labor shortage, particularly for its ambitious public works programs outlined by Reyes in his 1848 *Memoria*. Resurrecting the potosino utopia that had fueled the state's first experiment with Federalism in the early 1820's, Reyes attempted to create the commercial infrastructure that San Luis Potosí lacked, particularly the roads and canals leading to the Bajío and to Tampico. Of course, the ultimate success of such an endeavor depended upon securing a reliable and cheap labor force - something the early Federalists had failed at producing. This time, Reyes stipulated that the bulk of the labor force for the public works program would come from the state's prisons. Here we see one of the fundamental differences between the role of the prison as envisioned by the radical Federalists and by the "moderates." Both envisioned the prison as a source of laborers, but the "moderates" were interested in an uneducated, servile labor force while the radicals wanted an educated, wage labor force for local manufacture.

This difference on the question of labor points to a broader disjuncture between the Adame and Reyes administrations regarding attitudes towards the lower classes and their role within the nation. Prison labor gangs, after all, were not supposed to produce citizens; prison factories and schools were. Because of their views on the political nature of commercial crimes, radicals saw the "common" criminals as their natural constituency. To moderate liberals, however, prisoners were neither potential citizens nor political supporters, but those "dangerous classes" whose ambitions and aspirations had to be forcibly contained.⁴⁹ As the state legislature under Reyes declared, "the principal aim of any society is the security of its citizens."⁵⁰ Prison, then, became a very convenient political suppresser and an effective instrument of exclusion from the body politic. The government newspaper under Reyes regularly contained comments about the "spirit of robbery" which infested the countryside and threatened the nation. Rather than examining the structures of social inequality that contributed to crime, moderates chose simply to blame "that rabble of vagrants who live in the gambling dens, frequent the taverns, and whose way of life is firmly established in the disorder, vice and corruption of their habits."⁵¹ Even the established church, whose traditional role was to provide charity and support for the poor, were firm believers in Reyes' war on vagrancy. In a sermon pronounced from the pulpit of the church of San Francisco in the highland capital on the 41st anniversary of the Hidalgo uprising, Father Ignacio Sampayo declared that:

⁴⁷*La Epoca*, June 8, 1848.

⁴⁸*La Epoca*, July 25, 1848.

⁴⁹Torcuato di Tella, "The Dangerous Classes in Early Nineteenth-Century Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 5:1 (1973), 79-105.

⁵⁰*La Epoca*, Mar. 13, 1851.

⁵¹*La Epoca*, July 6, 1848.

The time has arrived, if I am not mistaken, wise legislators, watchful governors, honest judges, the time has come to skim the pot; purify the land of the people unworthy of living here.⁵²

The political discourses on crime, class differences and the potosino public, which had originally been sparked by the coming of the radical Federalists in 1846, reached a culmination of sorts during the Sierra Gorda rebellion. It is to the debates surrounding that uprising that we finally turn.

The Sierra Gorda rebellion is the name given to what was actually a series of rebellions taking place in the years from 1844 to 1857 in the Sierra Gorda mountain range in the states of Guanajuato, Querétaro and San Luis Potosí and extending into parts of the Huasteca Potosina. By far the most significant uprising was that led by Eleuterio Quiróz, which began in the *serrano* community of Xichú (Guanajuato) in August 1847 and only ended in December 1849 with Quiróz' capture and execution. In a document entitled the "Political and Eminently Social Plan of the Regenerating Army of the Sierra Gorda," the rebels pledged their allegiance to the Federalist system and in particular to the ousted Adame administration. They condemned Mexico's permanent army and privileged *fueros*, defended the existence of local militias, and demanded amnesty and special governing privileges for themselves. They also called for "moralization" of church officials. The "eminently social" aspects of the plan included the creation of independent towns on *hacienda* communities of over 1500 people and an agrarian reform with land "well distributed so as to improve the situation of the rural poor." The rebels demanded abolition of *alcabalas* and ecclesiastical fees, strict control on rental agreements, the abolition of sharecropping arrangements, free household use of products from forests, abolition of *faenas*, and better pay for day laborers.⁵³

Before turning to public discourse on the rebellion in San Luis Potosí, let us take just one more minute to profile the rebels themselves in terms of race and class. Although historians have described the rebels as indigenous, even categorizing the rebellion as a caste war "as important as that of Yucatan,"⁵⁴ my research has shown that Quiróz's followers were not primarily indigenous peasants,

⁵²"Sermón Patriótico Religioso" reprinted in its entirety in *La Epoca*, Oct. 27, 1851.

⁵³For a copy of document, see Leticia Reina, *Las rebeliones campesinas en México, 1819-1906* (Mexico City: Siglo XIX, 1980), 300-302; and see also Reyes Heróles, *El liberalismo mexicano*, 3: 574-576.

⁵⁴Moisés González Navarro, *Anatomía del poder en México, 1848-1853* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1983), 38-48; 38. Other historians, while emphasizing the indigenous character of the Sierra Gorda uprising, have seen more of a peasant rebellion than a caste war. See for example, Reyes Heróles, *El liberalismo mexicano*, 3:569; Thomas G. Powell, *El liberalismo y el campesinado en el centro de México, 1850-1876* (Mexico City: SepSetentas, 1974); and Leticia Reina, "The Sierra Gorda Peasant Rebellion, 1847-1850" in Friedrich Katz, ed., *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 267-294; 279.

but mestizo tenant farmers from San Luis Potosí's Rioverde district. There it seems that enterprising creole hacendados were attempting to erode tenants' traditional market independence by instituting hacienda stores and prohibiting other market activities on hacienda lands. The uprisings in the Tancanhuitz district which became part of the Sierra Gorda rebellion were led by the same creole and mestizo smallholders who had led the movement of radical Federalism in that district back in 1846. Some indigenous people were undoubtedly participants in the rebellion, but the Sierra Gorda was not primarily an uprising of Indian pueblos but of mestizo smallholders and tenants demanding greater access to property and privilege.

Turning now to political discourse generated by the rebellion, the rebels presented themselves as patriotic citizens with legitimate political grievances. In response to hacendado accusations which branded the uprising as "criminal," rebel leaders claimed that the real criminals were the "Moderates" who had agreed to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, "the most atrocious crime seen in the last centuries." Rebel leaders also pledged that their movement would protect all property rights "except those of the sons of Fernando the brute," for the Spanish conquest had been no more than the "criminal expropriation" of Mexican lands. Under such circumstances, the rebels declared that their reacquisition of those lands was justified on both political and moral grounds.⁵⁵ Manuel Verástegui, mediator between the rebels and the Reyes administration in 1848-49, countered hacendado condemnations of Quiróz as a criminal deserter from Santa Anna's army by arguing that, in the light of Santa Anna's ineptitude at the Battle of Angostura, Quiroz's desertion had actually been a supreme act of patriotism. According to Verástegui, only the pursuit of Quiróz by the Reyes administration had turned him into an "outlaw" and forced the rebels "to declare that the war from now on would be one of the poor against the rich."⁵⁶

The rebels were not the only ones granting political legitimacy to their uprising; radical Federalists under the Adame administration had also been sympathetic to rebel grievances. Back in June 1847, when conflict first erupted on the Albercas hacienda in the Rioverde district after the owner had tried to prohibit tenants from engaging in independent market activities, Alcabala Administrator Felix Mateos wrote to Governor Adame that "two kinds of rights" had come into conflict on the Albercas hacienda: the right of the property owner to dictate what happens on his property against "the right the public has to buy or sell on the hacienda." Independent market activities on hacienda lands, Mateos insisted, had "come to form a good and useful custom, and one which has all the legal force to not be abolished on personal authority alone."⁵⁷ Mateos here echoed the arguments of Public Defenders throughout San Luis Potosí in 1847, who under the auspices of Arriaga's criminal reform program, defended accused tobacco *contrabandistas* by insisting upon their rights as

⁵⁵AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1849: Abril-1, "Documentos relativos a la Sublevación en la Sierra Gorda."

⁵⁶AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1849: April-1, "Documentos relativos a la Sublevación en la Sierra Gorda."

⁵⁷AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1847: June-2.

citizens to engage in commerce. Arriaga himself would argue that "many of those who have been labeled bandits, robbers, and evil-doers of the Sierra Gorda were no more than citizens...tired of the despotism with which [Reyes'] agents exercised their authority throughout the state."⁵⁸

Radical Federalist governor Ramón Adame also gave political legitimacy to the grievances of the Sierra Gorda rebels. In his final speech to Congress in January 1848, faced with increasing opposition from wealthy creoles within the state, Adame went so far as to compare the Sierra Gorda rebels with the followers of Hidalgo and Morelos. Adame urged potosinos to understand the uprising - not as a criminal act - but as an "instinctive" reaction to the flagrant abuses of authority by lowland hacendados. Land hunger, Adame declared, was the underlying cause of the social upheavals of the Sierra Gorda. Adame then uttered "the ominous 'expropriation' word," calling for an agrarian reform, "to favor the legitimate acquisition of lands by the pueblos, even if through constitutional expropriation."⁵⁹ Although earlier in his administration, Adame had used the National Guard to squash a similar rebellion on a highland estate, by the time he made his last speech in January 1848, he had lost most creole support. The political rhetoric of the radical Federalists had become much more clearly directed at the smallholder elements of their society, particularly those of the eastern lowlands calling for a more equal distribution of property and greater access to the political system.

With the fall of Adame and the radical Federalists in late January 1848, the "moderate" administration of Julian de los Reyes came into power, publicly condemning the Sierra Gorda rebels as a pack of criminals and bandits. Reyes and his supporters in the highlands, also played on elite fears of race war in order to justify extensive military action against the rebels. In his *Memoria* of 1848, for example, Reyes stated that it was imperative that potosinos escape "the terrible effects of that sentence of death and extermination that is being carried out in Yucatan with such rigor."⁶⁰ And yet, the "moderates'" insistence on the criminal nature of the rebellion underscored the fact that no one in the Reyes administration actually believed that the rebellion was an indigenous uprising. One editorial admitted that Indian communities of the eastern lowlands

⁵⁸Ponciano Arriaga, "Alegato de bien probado en la causa que contra el Gobernador de San Luis Potosí, Don Julian de los Reyes, ha seguido ante la Sección del Jurado de la Cámara de Senadores," in Márquez, ed., *San Luis Potosí*, 163-164.

⁵⁹AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1848: February-2; and see also Ramón Adame, "Discurso que pronunció el Excmo. Gobernador el día 1 del presente, en la solemne apertura de las sesiones ordinarias de la H. Legislatura del Estado," in Márquez, ed., *San Luis Potosí*, 157-163.

⁶⁰*La Epoca*, Aug. 22, 1848. Reyes' government newspaper admonished potosinos "to keep in mind the fate of our compatriots in Yucatan." *La Epoca*, Mar. 13, 1849. In private correspondence, one highland merchant noted that "if God doesn't find the remedy, we will soon be in the same situation as Yucatan." Archive of the Cabrera Ipiná Family, Copiador de Cartas de Casimiro Toranzo, Mar. 16, 1849.

suffered abuses at the hands of greedy overlords, but emphasized that the serrano communities of the Sierra Gorda had no overlords at all and suffered no such abuses. The Sierra Gorda rebels, according to this article,

are not Indians...they are mostly criminals, assassins, and fatuous thieves: that whole group of people known as serranos are nothing more than criminals and escaped convicts.⁶¹

Although not explicitly racist, such vehemently anti-serrano rhetoric among wealthy creoles and their "moderate" political representatives, together with the widespread violence perpetrated on serrano communities by the Reyes administration, attests to a racial as well as class-based disdain for those lowland mestizo communities. In his *Memoria* of 1848, Reyes promised to explode "the exaggerated pretensions of robbery, usurpation, and communism which drive the projects of the serranos...It is necessary in all truth to repress the insurgents with force, and teach them a severe lesson."⁶² The "lesson" would have to be taught, not just to convicted rebels, but to all the people known as serranos. One Reyes supporter suggested that all inhabitants of the Sierra Gorda be forcibly relocated to the northern frontier.⁶³ Although some serrano families were exiled from the state, Reyes' principal means of dealing with the rebellion was have his Prefect in Rioverde set fire to houses and fields throughout the Sierra.⁶⁴

Whether or not the Sierra Gorda rebels were painted as criminals obviously had implications in terms of competing discourses on potosino citizenship. "Moderate" voices within the Reyes administration in April 1849, bemoaned the fact that President Arista had decided to initiate peace talks with the rebels, for in this way the rebels were being granted a kind of political status - "a measure which our public right only concede to those involved in a real civil war."⁶⁵

Can it be possible that the cloak of the *patria* will also cover these bandits as it has so many times in the past covered the ambitious and the revolutionary? Does the nation have the right to pardon and simply forget the assassinations, robberies and violence perpetrated on individual

⁶¹*La Epoca*, Apr. 13, 1849.

⁶²Julian de los Reyes, *Memoria con que el Gobierno del Estado Libre y Soberano de San Luis Potosí, en cumplimiento del artículo 113 de la Constitución, dió cuenta á la setima legislación constitucional en el primer periodo de sus sesiones ordinarios* (San Luis Potosí: Imprenta del Estado, 1849).

⁶³AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1847: September-2; see also O.L.A., "Origen y Progreso de la Revolución de Sierra Gorda, 1847-49" *Archivos de Historia Potosina*, IX:1 (33), 5-20.

⁶⁴*La Epoca*, Feb. 29, 1848.

⁶⁵*La Epoca*, May 11, 1849.

citizens?⁶⁶

What nation was being referred to the citation above? The answer emerges in an anonymous political pamphlet which appeared in the highland capital in June 1849 and which described the rebels as criminal outsiders to the nation:

Far from increasing their popularity and bolstering their moral position, [the rebels] have alienated the good will of all those who possess something, all the *hombres de bien*, all those who think with prudence, that is, the entire nation - except the rogues and the egotists."⁶⁷

This pamphlet underscored the importance of property ownership and "razón" in shaping the political boundaries of both the Mexican nation and the potosino citizenry as envisioned by the "moderate" supporters of the Reyes administration.

The centrality of the property question was made explicit by Secretary of the Interior Luis Cuevas in his own 1848 *Memoria*, in which he blamed the revolution in France for the current "anarchy" in the Mexican countryside. What was really at stake in the agrarian uprisings of the late 1840's, Cuevas declared, was "the social principle." By this he meant that the social order had broken down to such an extent that "even the very right of property is being debated."⁶⁸ Keeping in mind the *Memorias* of both Cuevas and Reyes in 1848, it is clear that creole elites throughout Mexico were feeling increasingly engulfed in class warfare, as popular demands grew for property expropriation.

It was this willingness to use expropriation as a means of transforming the class structure and achieving greater social equality which defined radical Federalism in the late 1840's. Adame's "moderate" opponents insisted that by uttering "the ominous 'expropriation' word" in 1848, he had effectively equated himself with the *serranos* "who glorify expropriation - the flag of that horde of savages."⁶⁹ According to those same opponents, "the bandits of the Sierra Gorda...have no political objective except robbery, which is called 'expropriation' in the language of those who have adopted subversive principles to the extent of changing the true meaning of words."⁷⁰ In Quiróz's "Plan Político y Eminentemente Social" of 1849, the rebels did demand some kind of agrarian reform, but they were much more specific about expropriating political power from the local landed elite by turning communities of 1500 people or more into

⁶⁶*La Epoca*, Apr. 24, 1849.

⁶⁷O.L.A., "Origen y Progreso," 16.

⁶⁸Luis Cuevas, "Memoria del Exmo. Sr. Ministro de Relaciones D. Luis Cuevas leida en la cámara de diputados el 5 y en la de senadores el 8 de enero de 1849," appearing in installments in *La Epoca*, from April 27, 1849 to May 11, 1849.

⁶⁹*La Epoca*, Oct. 18, 1848.

⁷⁰*La Epoca*, Feb. 29, 1848.

municipalities with their own rights to governance. While the rebels insisted upon the justice of their demands, critics in the highlands interpreted those same demands as follows:

[A]ll those who possess no capital, revenue, land nor the desire to earn their subsistence through legal and honorable means, will be able to freely take what they want from those who have it.⁷¹

It was the belief in the justice of property expropriation that united political ambitions among radical Federalists throughout San Luis Potosí and separated them politically from the majority of creole landed and merchant elites.

Included in understandings of 'property' in this period were not only land and capital, but also voting rights and access to public office. During the Centralist years from 1835 to 1846, access to political rights had been limited throughout Mexico by new laws which abolished many municipal *cabildos*, did away with local elections, and restricted voting rights to those with annual incomes of over 100, and then 200 pesos. Throughout those years, radical Federalists in San Luis Potosí had consistently demanded a broadening of the franchise to include, not just property owners, but all those with a "decent" job, including hacienda workers, as had been promised in the Constitutions of 1812 and 1824. With the restoration of the 1824 Constitution in 1846, voting rights had once again been extended to all citizens regardless of property or income qualifications. It was this access to public office and political power that seemed to worry creole elites most about the radicals' demands for expropriation:

[T]hey are fixed on the idea of controlling public offices, because they see it as a great honor to occupy [such offices] and because they hope to gain advantages for themselves by exercising state power, by stealing from the public coffers, like those of their class have always done when they've had the chance; and not only from [the public coffers], which don't contain enough to satisfy their needs, but also from the wealth of private individuals.⁷²

Ironically, Reyes officials were accusing the lower classes of aspiring to the same economic opportunities that members of their own social class had been privy to for generations.⁷³ To the established landed families of the state, this was simply the way things worked. In fact, supporters of the Reyes administration believed strongly

⁷¹*La Epoca*, Apr. 24, 1849.

⁷²*La Epoca*, May 13, 1848.

⁷³Juan Balbontin, state treasurer under the Adame administration, reported in 1847 that of all the rents due to the state coffers since the 1820's, only one-fourth to one-third had actually been collected; the rest had gone in to the pocket of tax collectors and their patrons. AHESLP, Fondo Supremo Tribunal de Justicia (STJ), Legajo 1847: September-1.

that only wealthy citizens should have access to public office because they would be least tempted to steal funds. "Even though people call us aristocrats," one supporter stated, "we are in favor of honorable people who have honest means of subsistence, because this is the only class capable of giving guarantees to society and inspiring the necessary confidence."⁷⁴ To these provincial aristocrats, politics was only for the patriarchs; the rest was sinful aspiration.

This kind of patrician discourse differed greatly from the ways in which radical Federalists talked about the political ambitions of the Sierra Gorda rebels. When rebel grievances were taken seriously, the rebels themselves were recognized and championed as citizens and even patriots. Like their "moderate" counterparts, radical Federalist leaders insisted that the duty of any government was to protect and assure the well-being of its citizenry; however, radical Federalists wielded a much more inclusive notion of citizenship. Within the context of his criminal reform program of 1847, Ponciano Arriaga argued that the duty of the potosino state was to offer citizenship to more people by providing them with "true freedom through the improvement of their economic circumstances and their habits."⁷⁵

In vane do governments proclaim the theories and principles of liberty, if only a very reduced fraction of those governed enjoy social guarantees, the pursuit of pleasure, and even opulence and luxury, while the rest of the people are submerged in the most horrible degradation and misery.⁷⁶

It is no coincidence that the rebels of the Sierra Gorda also insisted that the role of the state was to provide for the well-being of its citizens, and like the radical federalists of the highlands, they sought to extend suffrage rights to rural villagers and hacienda workers by creating more independent municipalities. Manuel Verástegui, mediator of the Sierra Gorda conflict, described the rebel motives this way:

[T]hey understood instinctively that they didn't have what they needed to improve their social well-being...Because of this realization, this war has become a struggle of proletarians who because they received no benefit from their legislators through legal means decided to make their demands using force; because in effect that this numerous and miserable class has never had a *patria*, because *la patria is social well-being (la patria es el bienestar social)*.⁷⁷

⁷⁴*La Epoca*, Aug. 8, 1848.

⁷⁵Arriaga, "Exposición de motivos," 296.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷AHESLP, SGG, Legajo 1849: April-1, "Documentos relativos a la Sublevación en la Sierra Gorda." The emphases are Verástegui's.

Even the rebels themselves, in drafting a political plan which identified itself as "eminently social" nature, shared a similar grammar with radical Federalist discourse throughout the state in as much as it advocated means by which to transform the social structure of class and privilege.

Conclusion

The repression of the Sierra Gorda rebellion in 1849, taken together with the military coup against the Adame administration the year before, spelled the defeat of radical Federalism in San Luis Potosí. By 1850, the "moderates" had emerged triumphant, and would remain dominant through the second half of the 19th century. These provincial oligarchs would back the 1854 Liberal Revolution of Ayutla in principle, anxious to rid themselves of the despotic dictatorship of Santa Anna's last presidency, but they showed their "moderate" colors by embracing the more conservative Plan of Acapulco for constitutional reform, drafted by Puebla industrialist Antonio Haro y Tamariz in 1855. So they came to call themselves "moderate Liberals," anxious to distinguish themselves both from the Conservatives of Mexico City and the remnants of the radical Federalists, who came to be known as the "puros." These "moderate Liberals" would oversee the Liberal Reform in San Luis Potosí and make sure that its "excesses" were avoided. This "moderate Liberalism" would share much in common with the early Federalism of San Luis Potosí, particularly the preoccupation with securing the regional *Senorío* of the potosino creole elite. However, these Liberals would be much more cynical, authoritarian, and openly racist towards the Indian and mestizo elements of potosino society than their Federalist forefathers had been. This cynicism would form the basis for the racial pessimism so characteristic of Porfirian Mexico and of its provincial Liberal oligarchs.

Nonetheless, the legacies of radical Federalism lived on. According to Jesús Reyes Heróles, the political demands of the radical Federalists and of the rural uprisings inspired by that radicalism - demands which included anti-clericalism, self-determination, and, most importantly, a social conception of property - all formed a political current in Mexican liberalism which Reyes Heróles referred to as "social liberalism."⁷⁸ From this subaltern current in Liberal discourse in late 19th-century Mexico would emerge many of the ideas embedded within the Constitution of 1857. Ponciano Arriaga, intellectual leader of the radical Federalists in San Luis Potosí, would serve as the president of the Constitutional Congress of 1856-57. That document and the radical Federalist spirit with which it was infused may not have dictated social policy during the authoritarian years of the Porfiriato, but it certainly influenced the coming and process of the Mexican Revolution. And central to this radical political current within Mexican liberalism was the belief in a more egalitarian, more unified Mexican nation, both in

⁷⁸Reyes Heróles, *El liberalismo mexicano*, 3: 568-76.

terms of class and race.

What then do we finally have to say about the relationship between the "external" and "internal" discourses on the Mexican nation within San Luis Potosí - one of which explicitly focused on the racial character of "the Mexican people," and one which centered more on questions of class? In the case of the radical Federalists, the relationship seems most clear. Both their discourse on the U.S. War and on social conflict within San Luis Potosí were part of the same political posture - one which was determined to overthrow the social hierarchies inherited from Independence, hierarchies in which the white or near-white creoles had most of the rights to property and privilege. By appealing to a Mexican nation in which mestizos figured prominently and by extending the privileges of citizenship to a broader array of smallholders and hacienda dependents, the radical Federalists were engaged in transforming the Mexico of the "Spanish Americans" who had monopolized the privileges of Liberty along with the nation's most lucrative properties. Likewise, the twin discourses of the "moderates" who emerged triumphant in San Luis Potosí were also part and parcel of a single political vision. By insisting that the core of the Mexican nation was "the Spanish race," and by clinging to their notions of aristocratic privilege, the "moderates" hoped to secure their own regional *Senorio* - not only *vis-a-vis* the subaltern groups within their jurisdiction, but also *vis-a-vis* the neo-colonial forces emanating both from Mexico City and from an expanding U.S. presence in northern Mexico.